

Leadership and Communication Strategies: A Case Study During the Covid-19 Transition on Public: Facing Communications within the Department of Education

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ABSTRACT

This study examine public school teachers' satisfaction levels with Department of Education official issuances and their perceptions of the agency through a comprehensive online survey and interview analysis. These official communications serve as the cornerstone for teachers' public-facing interactions. Findings indicate a satisfactory performance in the established communication flow concerning educational initiatives and community-linked projects. However, a notable gap exists in teacher support initiatives. Consequently, the study proposes enhancements to the communication strategy, emphasizing the need for an improved feedback mechanism tailored to teacher perspectives.

Keywords: Leadership, Communications, Education, Philippines, Covid -19

INTRODUCTION

In the educational landscape of the Philippines, same to frontline healthcare workers in the public health domain, teachers hold a pivotal role as frontline agents. As stipulated in Department of Education (DepEd) Order No. 52 issued in 2015, teachers form the bedrock of the organizational structure, tasked with continuous engagement with various stakeholders. They serve as linchpins in the operational dynamics, particularly in the dissemination of crucial information and announcements, such as official DepEd Issuances. These communications encompass a spectrum of documents including memoranda, advisories, and orders, which emanate from different echelons of departmental offices, spanning central, regional, and divisional levels. As delineated in DepEd Order No. 13, promulgated in the same year, 'orders' encapsulate regulatory frameworks and procedural guidelines for departmental execution, 'memoranda' serve as conduits for instructions and informational dissemination, while 'advisories' herald the initiation of programs, activities, or projects, often solicited by external entities such as partnering institutions. With issuances in place, there is a need for DepEd to coordinate with its stakeholders in order to effectively disseminate the information and implement the policies that are expected to be done. The Department of Education employs diverse strategies and channels to disseminate the aforementioned issuances. Consequently, teachers' engagement with these materials varies, reflecting the department's ongoing

efforts to enhance operational coordination. Proficiency in handling such communication materials correlates with teachers' career stages, as delineated in Department Order No. 42, issued in 2017, which outlines the National Adoption and Implementation of Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers. These career stages encompass distinct criteria that gauge teachers' progression across different domains. This complexity intertwines with factors influencing teachers' public service ethos, their perceptions of the government agency, and the agency's efficacy in cascading communications to frontline educator.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study this study is to assess the public-facing communication practices of the Department of Education (DepEd) during the Covid-19 as perceived by public school teachers through an online survey. Specifically, this research aims to scrutinize DepEd’s internal communication mechanisms and their impact on teachers’ perceptions of the agency. By delving into the internal communication framework devised by DepEd, this study seeks to elucidate how it shapes public school teachers’ interactions with the broader community.

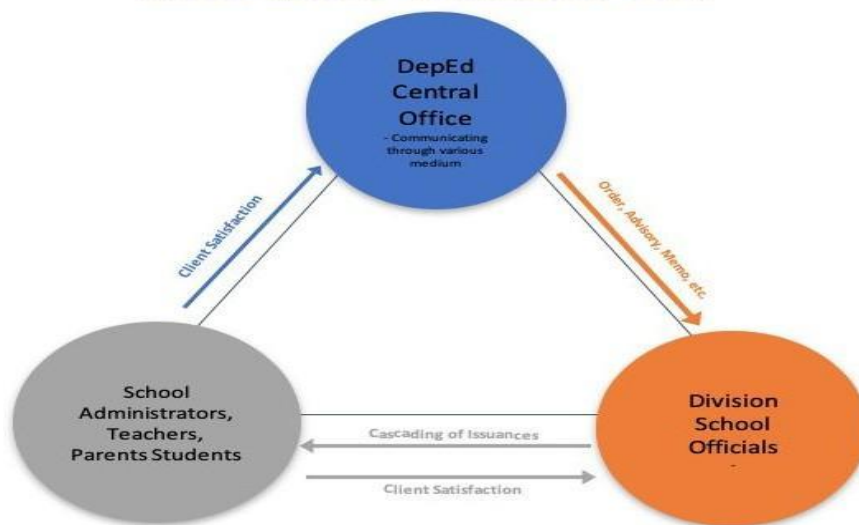
RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

A. Research Framework

The researchers studied the links in DepEd’s dissemination of internal communications from the Central Office to the Division School Officials and from the Division School Officials to the wider audience down to the school administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

This research analyses the satisfaction of public school teachers being the middle ground in DepEd’s information dissemination communication line. Further, the research profiled the respondents through their career stage and length of their teaching experience.

Figure 1 Research Framework
Research Framework



B. Locale of the Study

There are twelve (36) respondents to the survey who are from different public schools from three (3) different regions (NCR, IV-A and V) and are handling preschool, grade school, highschool and ALS learners respectively. Fifty percent (50%) of them had more than ten (10) years of teaching experience

and likewise belongs to different career stages based on the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers.

C. Data Collection

The twelve (36) public school teachers took part in the online survey that was sent via Facebook messenger and emails. The questionnaire contains questions for profiling and rating scales wherein on a scale of 0 to 4, 0 being “unaware” and 4 being “extremely satisfied”, respondents were asked to rate their recent experience on various DepEd internal issuances. Similarly, on a scale of 1 to 4, 1 being “needs improvement” and 4 being “excellent”, respondents were asked to rate their perception of DepEd’s relationship with its internal and external stakeholders.(see annex 1).

D. Data Analysis

The researchers provided four (4) questions in the survey with justifications. Part of the survey determines the length of teaching in public school and their career stages in the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers to determine their familiarity with DepEd’s policies and procedures on handling information, memorandums, advisories, and orders that are disseminated through various platforms such as electronic means (DepEd Official website, emails, and social media apps), bulletin board postings, actual correspondence, and internal practices within the institutions/organizations. It also evaluates the teachers’ satisfaction with the DepEd issuances and services.

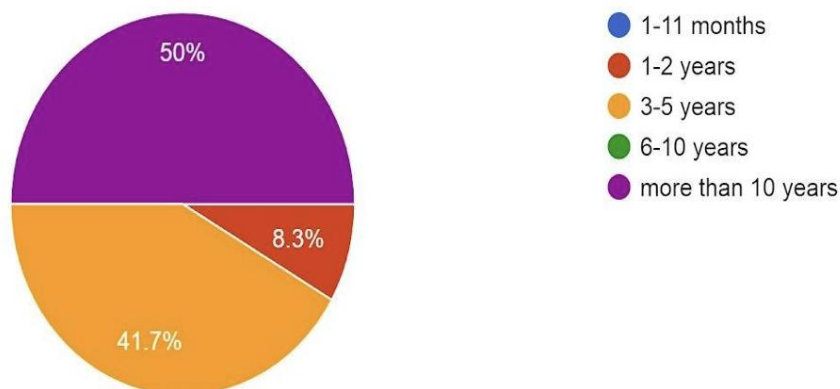
The data gathered on how DepEd issuances of a memorandum, advisories and orders for policies, activities, projects, and other information from central to regional and to divisional level are perceived by the respondents will be reconciled on how it shaped their impression of the agency and furthermore the respondents’ professional development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers used an online platform to survey and interview public school teachers, mostly from Metro Manila and Region IV-A, for their feedback on the communication channels of DepEd. This subject matter will be reconciled with their years of service, career stages, level of satisfaction and perception of their agency to assess their public-facing communications activity.

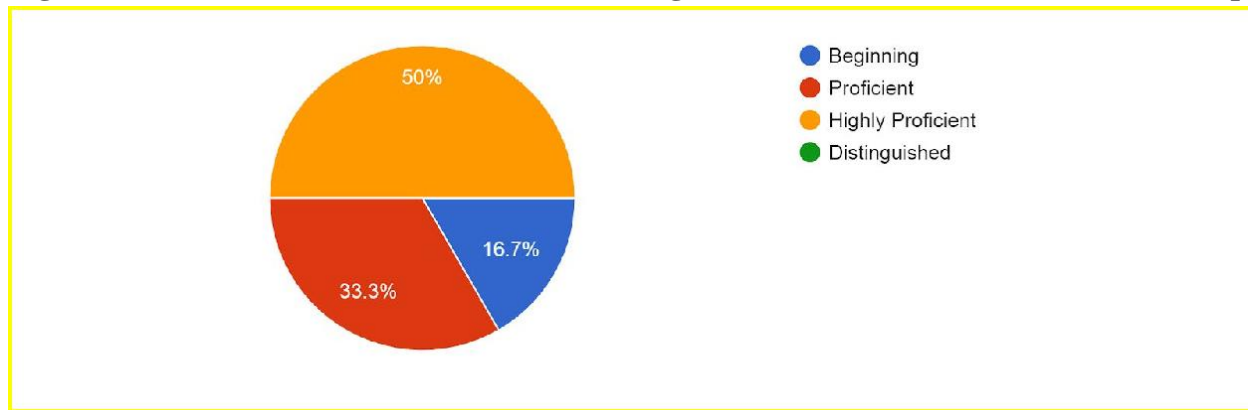
This study involves twelve (36) respondents that are mostly elementary public-school teachers. Fifty (50%) percent of the respondents have more than ten (10) years of teaching experience and next to it have three (3) to five (5) years of length of teaching.

Figure 2 Length of Teaching in Public Schools



The mandate of the agency to provide quality education for the public is coupled, with a rise in the standards of qualifications for public school teachers. One of the highest factors for their consideration is the years of teaching experience thus Figure 2 shows that it is an objective communicated and executed well by the human resources and personnel office of each division offices for no teacher is presently connected who has no or little teaching experience. Ninety-one point seven (91.7) percent do have more than three years of teaching experiences. This data on the length of years in teaching also provides insight on how consistent DepEd is in their communication flow and strategy for getting key messages delivered to teachers and stakeholders.

Figure 3 Career Stage of the Respondents



Given the vast teaching experiences of the respondents, this also foretells that a large number among them are currently ranked as highly proficient in their career stage as presented in Figure 3. This would aptly indicate the familiarity of a respondent on the communication orders from the central office and how it is used as a guide for public-facing communication provided that the career stage is an indicator of the teacher’s merit characterized by various domains.

A. Department of Education issuances.

The Department of Education employs a diverse array of platforms for its internal communication releases. These releases predominantly take the form of orders, memoranda, and advisories, disseminated either directly from division offices or originating from the central office and cascading through regional channels. Traditional dissemination methods such as meetings, bulletin board postings, and printed reproductions have been complemented by contemporary digital avenues including official websites, Facebook pages, and virtual teleconferences. These official issuances fulfill various functions ranging from reminders and invitations to providing directives and guidelines for programs and projects at the school, regional, or national levels.

Furthermore, based on the Department of Education (2020) national communication framework, it notably highlights the following.

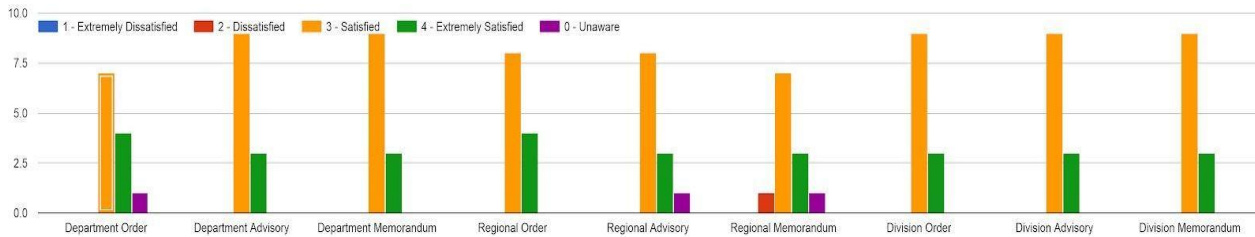
1. Heightened public awareness and appreciation of the institutional values, programs, and campaigns of the department.
2. Identification of priority areas of department’s communication initiatives
3. Maximized stakeholders support on department-led initiatives through different channels of communication.

Essentially number one aims to effectively communicate the department’s programs and initiatives at the grassroots level. The next point is to identify vulnerable areas, primarily remote areas because these places

have no access to the programs and projects of the department. Lastly, the department is seeking collaboration with stakeholders to make not only policymaking but also policy implementation more participative for the benefit of the learners.

Based on the available data and intensive review of relevant literature, the researchers conceptualize that the official issuances and the guidelines from the national communication framework are timely and effective in terms of public-facing communication. This is reinforced by the respondents as they indicate ‘satisfied’ with their recent experience in receiving issuances as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Type of issuances by DepEd

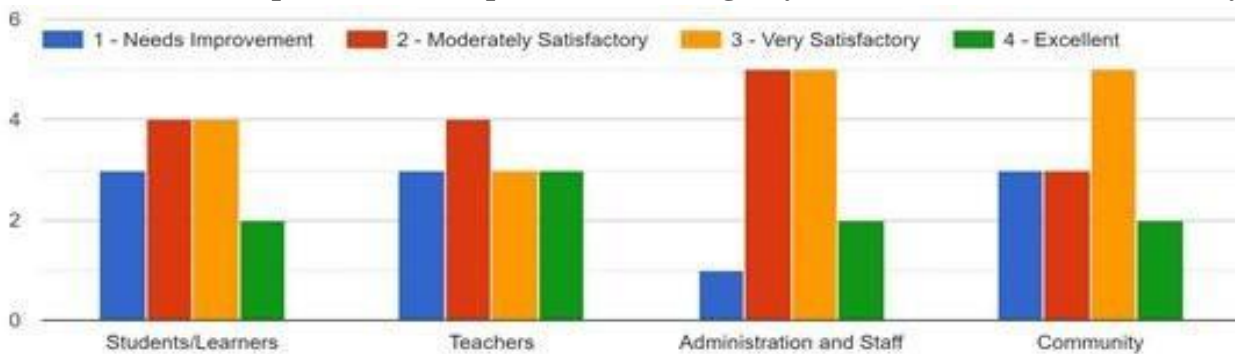


The reverberating satisfaction of the respondents is mostly prominent in the division-level issuances as well as the department’s (central office) advisories and memorandum. Furthermore, though it only presents a very minimal fraction of the respondents, it is also noteworthy to state that regional-level memorandum, advisory and central office’s order seem to be not well-received by all of the respondents.

B. Respondent’s perception on the Agency

The researchers observed that despite the department’s extensive communication plan focused on the learners and the community, however its relationship with the teachers remain significantly unexplored. Indeed, closer inspection on the survey data tells that the respondents’ perception with its relationship with the department is notably low as shown in the table below:

Table 2 Perception of the Respondent on the Agency and its Communication Activity



Most feedback mainly presents that the department lacks the ability to check the actual situation on the ground. For example the large classroom population but fewer resources and compensation for the teachers. Also, the department gives more attention to the learners and to community-link projects, but administratively overburdens the teachers.

This could be attributable by looking at the lenses of the following leadership communication theories and concepts.

According to Weber’s bureaucratic approach (as cited in Barrett, 2011) most government organizations have a well-defined hierarchy that power and decision making is centralized. There are formal rules and regulations, and the division of labor is based on functional specialties or technical competence. DepEd has a rigid structure that its communication flow is centrally controlled. In short, it is difficult for the

information from the ground to reach the leadership level. Moreover, Barrett (2011) postulates that in large and complex organization communication and action are closely related, as such communication needs to complement and be compatible with the organizational culture, structure, and operations. Clearly, in this section, the study presented that an organized and systematic communication place that is well practiced and implemented through channels and offices can contribute significantly to one's professional development as well as service as manifested by the career stages of the respondents and their level of familiarity and awareness with the issuance. Moreover, the gaps that are also recognized can be addressed and improved with new technologies, the internet, government organizational structure and its communication flow change. This change in communication flow seems to gravitate towards an open-flow type. This type of communication still flows from the top down but could flow up and across. The digitalization in the government could allow the open-flow type. Hence, DepEd may need to shift its communication flow to address these perceptions of the teachers. In this way, the department could achieve high productivity and optimize its key personnel.

RECOMMENDATION FOR IMPROVEMENT Engage with audience

The speeding up in the rise of the digital age was put into test now, given the current situation that the whole world is suffering the effects and aftermath caused by the pandemic: COVID-19. Given the situation, it was not an excuse for the educational processes inside the Philippines to continue and deliver its services to the different stakeholders, most especially to the students.

The 21st century as a call for change in terms of the academe both as a discipline and profession might be challenging, yet it is too far for it not to be delivered. For the public schools institutions delivering an online way of teaching is needed until a vaccine is developed for the market to expedite.

Given these realities the group recommends a traditional and digital approach revamp in the issuances involving communications activity of DepEd

Traditional Approach:

1. **Academic Calendar** – The view for the different academic activities already incorporated into the academic calendar: Enrollment Dates, Admission Guidelines, Posting of Grades, Releasing and Submitting of Documents and alike. This one would be given to the teachers and parents in a paper tray to serve as a hard copy of to do list spearheaded by the regional offices since the gap of communications is pertained to this structure as presented by the data in this study..

Digital Approach:

1. **Division School Setup of Social Media Awareness using Facebook:** Currently, one DepEd school processes and instructions would be different from another. As to lessen the confusion not only for the teachers, as well to other stakeholders: Teachers, Students and Parents. They need to set up a Facebook Page where Division School would be the one to post it. As to cover and applicable to all the DepEd schools that it is under the division.
2. **Infographics Approach:** Official memorandums should be given to the audience not just a mere scanned paper, but make it more pleasing and creative for the people to easily get the message of the content. Usually, public school postings are official's papers that are scanned one.

Flow of communication :

Top Down Approach to Bottom Up Approach

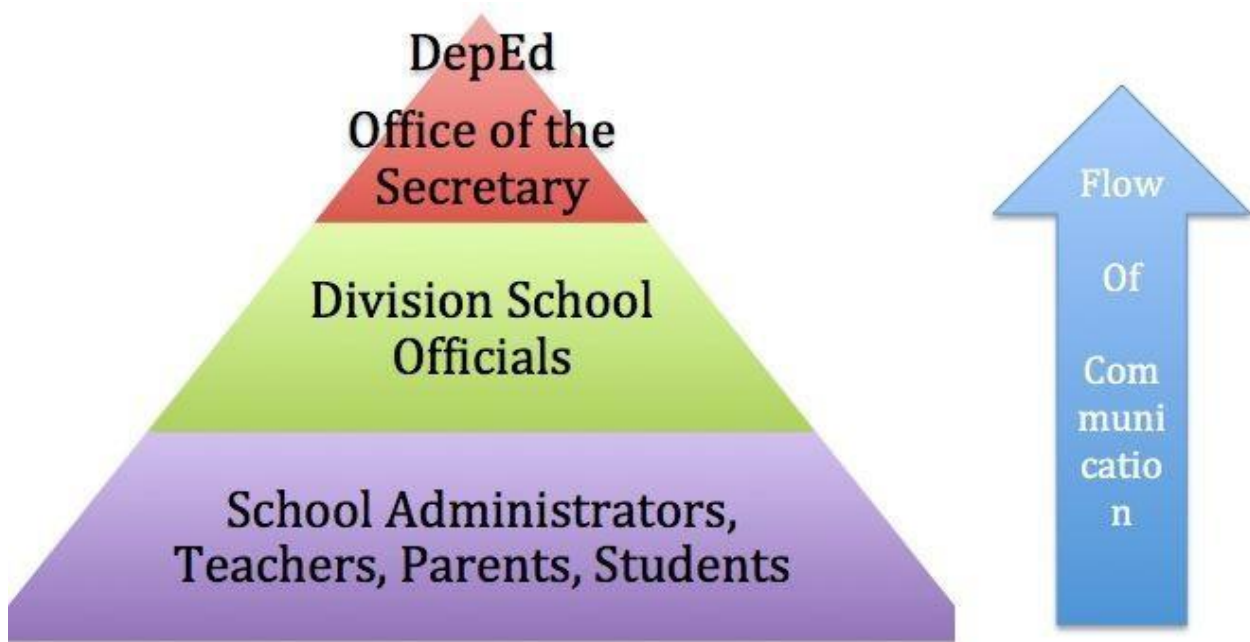
Currently, the flow of communication is Top Down Approach: starting from the Head which is from the Office of the Secretary of DepEd down to the different Division Offices then the different stakeholders of

the Public Schools in the Philippines: School Administrators, Teachers, Parents and Students.

The group recommends the Bottom Up Approach

Given the communication process is being delivered and even the different policies are formulated, the people who are the frontliners like the teachers would be given the big bulk of responsibility to contemplate and decide for they know the current situation of the school. It won't just provide the emotional confidence to the teachers for them to have a sense of trust, but it would be an important key player of empowerment.

Figure 4: Bottom-Up Communications Approach in DepEd



Ultimately, the researchers believe that easing out the toll of teaching, as some of the respondents vented, through innovative means will help the communications become more smooth and fluid since the tasks at hand are way too congested and overloaded already. Thus, the group further recommends the following for DepEd Schools to consider for the delivery of Online Classes coming this August:

1. **Flexible Learning** – As opposed to the normal online learning, where everyone should have an Internet connection, laptop, tablets or smartphones for them to participate in the online discussions. They could lessen the burden both for the students and teachers by providing both synchronous and asynchronous mode of learning (Flexible Learning). Synchronous means sometimes online for further solidifying instructions and needed content if not yet clear for some students. Asynchronous means providing the learners with modules for content and activity that are aligned to the specific objectives to the lesson and the final requirement of the subject. It is called flexible, since the learners are being graded by the teachers based on the outputs from the modules.
2. **Partnership with Publishing House** – In connection with the first answer, currently different publishing houses are developing modules to be given to different schools to order and dispose of, by partnering with different publishing houses it would be centered towards one goal and direction for the subject matter and less burden for the teachers to make one.
3. **Innovating Skill Sets and Pedagogy Knowledge** – DepEd schools can also consider training their teachers with different organizations offering online training for improvements of their online skill

sets and online pedagogy knowledge. Example: Google – Google is offering certifications: Google Certified Educator Level 1 and 2, as to familiarize and check the teachers about their knowledge using: Gmail, Google Suites, Google Meet, Google Hangouts, and Google Classroom, this is the educational arm of Google.

4. ***Collaboration with organizations offering Learning Management System (LMS)*** – A stable online Learning Management System would be helpful for the teachers to lessen the burden of the Work from Home (WFH) duties that they have. Company like : Quipper Philippines – is already providing an online Learning Management System that is complete, from the Content, test, needed assessments and videos.

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