

# Strategic Management Plans of Public School Principals in Basic Education: Unpacking Thoughts, Actions and Outcomes

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the strategic management plans of public school principals in primary education, focusing on their theoretical underpinnings, alignment with legal mandates, appropriateness, financial support, implementation, and evaluation. The research used documentary content analysis to examine strategic management plans from diverse public schools in the Schools Division of Romblon. Semi-structured interviews with principals provided additional insights. The study revealed that educational theories and models, such as SWOT Analysis, Balanced Scorecard, and Theory of Change, are effective in guiding decision-making. Strong alignment with legal and curricular mandates was observed, though challenges related to resource constraints and rapid policy changes were noted. The appropriateness of objectives, activities, and assessment tools was evident, with clear linkages to the school vision. However, disparities in financial support posed implementation challenges. Successes included improved student outcomes and community engagement, while lessons emphasized flexibility and stakeholder involvement. The evaluation employed diverse methods and criteria, informing future planning. The findings highlight the critical role of comprehensive strategic management in enhancing educational quality and principals' leadership. Recommendations include ongoing professional development, increased financial support, stakeholder engagement, and adoption of comprehensive evaluation frameworks.

Keywords: *content analysis, educational planning, educational quality, evaluation, strategic management, school principals, primary education, leadership*

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## INTRODUCTION

Strategic management plans are pivotal in guiding public schools toward achieving their goals and improving student outcomes. School principals, as leaders of educational institutions, are responsible for developing and implementing these plans, which outline the school's vision, mission, goals, and strategies for success (Bryson, 2018; Poister et al., 2013).

The importance of strategic management in education has been increasingly recognized in recent years. Effective strategic planning has been linked to improved educational outcomes, optimized resource allocation, and enhanced organizational performance

(Hanushek, 2006; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020). However, the specific context of primary education presents unique challenges and considerations. Principals must navigate a complex web of legal regulations, curricular mandates, and resource constraints while striving to create an inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students (Cohen-Vogel & McLendon, 2009; Elmore, 2004).

A comprehensive literature review revealed that strategic management in education has been the subject of significant scholarly attention. Researchers have explored various aspects of strategic planning, including the theoretical models and frameworks that underpin these plans, such as the SWOT Analysis (Chermack & Kasshanna, 2019; Gürel & Tat, 2017), Balanced Scorecard (Decramer et al., 2022; Kaplan & Norton, 1992), and Theory of Change (Weiss, 1995). The importance of aligning plans with legal and curricular mandates has also been highlighted (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Spillane, 2018), as well as the role of financial resources in implementing strategic initiatives (Baker, 2018; Grubb & Hyman, 2020).

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The literature also emphasized the significance of leadership theories and educational philosophies in shaping strategic management practices. Transformational leadership, which focuses on inspiring and empowering followers to achieve their full potential, has been identified as a critical driver of effective strategic planning (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Leithwood & Sun, 2020). Constructivist and progressive educational philosophies, which emphasize student-centered learning and critical thinking, have also been shown to influence the design and implementation of strategic initiatives (Brooks & Brooks, 1999; Dewey, 1938; Piaget, 1973).

Despite the wealth of research on strategic management in education, there needs to be more literature regarding the specific context of public school principals in primary education. While some studies have touched on this area (Clarke & Wildy, 2011; Spillane et al., 2004), there is a need for a more comprehensive and in-depth examination of how principals in this setting develop, implement, and evaluate their strategic management plans. This study aims to address this gap by pursuing the following objectives:

1. To identify the educational theories, models, and philosophies that serve as the foundation for the strategic management plans of public school principals in primary education and to understand how these theoretical underpinnings guide decision-making and planning.
2. To determine the extent to which the strategic management plans align with legal regulations and curricular mandates at different levels of the education system and to identify any discrepancies or areas of non-compliance.
3. To evaluate how well the objectives, program of activities, strategies of implementation, and assessment tools within the strategic management plans align with the overall intention and vision of the school and to assess if there are clear linkages and coherence in the plans.
4. To investigate if there is sufficient financial support and budget allocation to implement strategic management plans effectively and to determine if the allocated resources are commensurate with the strategic priorities outlined in the plans.
5. To uncover insights from implementing the plans, including challenges, successes, and lessons that can be drawn from the practical execution of the strategic management plans by school principals and their teams.
6. To examine how school principals evaluate the outcomes and impact of their strategic management plans, including the criteria and assessment tools used, and to understand how these evaluations inform future planning and decision-making.

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in integrating strategic management theories, leadership models, and educational philosophies. The SWOT Analysis, Balanced Scorecard, and Theory of Change provide the theoretical foundation for understanding how principals assess their school's internal and external environment, align strategic objectives with performance metrics, and map the causal pathways from initiatives to desired outcomes (Chermack & Kasshanna, 2019; Decramer et al., 2022; Weiss, 1995).

Transformational leadership theory informs the study's exploration of how principals inspire and empower their staff and students to achieve the school's strategic goals (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Leithwood & Sun, 2020). Constructivist and progressive educational philosophies shape the examination of how principals design student-centered learning experiences and foster critical thinking skills (Brooks & Brooks, 1999; Dewey, 1938; Piaget, 1973).

The framework also incorporates the legal and regulatory context within which schools operate, recognizing the importance of compliance with educational laws and policies (Cohen-Vogel & McLendon, 2009; Elmore, 2004; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Spillane, 2018). The allocation and management of financial resources are critical factors in successfully implementing strategic initiatives (Baker, 2018; Grubb & Hyman, 2020; Hanushek, 2006).

Finally, the framework emphasizes the role of comprehensive evaluation in assessing the impact of strategic management plans and informing continuous improvement efforts. Using diverse evaluation methods and criteria is crucial for capturing the complexity of educational interventions and outcomes (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011; Mertens & Wilson, 2018; Stufflebeam & Zhang, 2017).

This study holds significant implications for both theory and practice in educational management. By providing a comprehensive examination of the strategic management plans of public school principals in primary education, this research contributes to the scholarly understanding of how these plans are developed, implemented, and evaluated in this specific context. The findings can inform the refinement of theoretical models and frameworks for strategic planning in education, considering primary schools' unique challenges and considerations (Bryson, 2018; Poister et al., 2013).

From a practical standpoint, the insights generated by this study can guide principals, policymakers, and educational authorities in designing more effective strategic management practices. By identifying best practices, common challenges, and successful strategies, this research can help principals optimize their strategic planning processes, align their initiatives with legal and

curricular requirements, and allocate resources in a way that maximizes educational outcomes (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020; Leithwood & Sun, 2020).

Moreover, by shedding light on the importance of continuous evaluation and data-driven decision-making, this study can encourage principals to adopt more robust assessment practices and use the insights gained to inform future planning efforts (Datnow et al., 2007; Mertens & Wilson, 2018). This can foster a culture of continuous improvement in schools, enhancing educational quality and student success (Bredeson, 2000; Day & Gu, 2014).

This study on the strategic management plans of public school principals in primary education represents a significant contribution to educational management. By unpacking the thoughts, actions, and outcomes associated with these plans, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of how principals navigate the complexities of strategic planning in pursuing educational excellence. The findings can inform theory, guide practice, and ultimately enhance the quality of education for students in primary schools.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design using documentary content analysis to explore the strategic management plans of public school principals. The methodology was carefully designed to provide comprehensive insights into the planning processes, theoretical underpinnings, and outcomes associated with these plans. Data collection involved gathering strategic management plans and supplementary documents from public schools across various S.B.M. levels, ensuring a representative sample. Semi-structured interviews with principals complemented the document analysis, providing deeper insights into their thoughts, actions, and reflections. The data analysis protocol involved a systematic coding process, beginning with open coding. Researchers performed a detailed, line-by-line coding of the documents and interview transcripts to identify significant phrases, concepts, and actions related to strategic management. Qualitative data analysis NVivo software facilitated the organization and management of initial codes. This initial coding was followed by axial coding, where the initial codes were grouped into broader categories to understand the relationships between different aspects of strategic management. Axial coding involved the use of coding matrices or conceptual diagrams to explore how codes connected and formed cohesive themes, resulting in categories. The final stage, selective coding, involved integrating the core categories into central themes that captured the essence of the data and addressed the study's research questions. This process included creating narrative summaries and thematic maps to illustrate the

integration of categories into broader themes. An iterative approach using the constant comparative method was employed throughout the coding process to continuously compare data within and across documents and interviews, allowing for the refinement of codes and categories and ensuring that emerging themes were accurately represented and validated by the data. Validation and reliability were ensured through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent, protecting participant confidentiality and anonymity, and adhering to ethical standards.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study yielded a wealth of data from the documentary content analysis and semi-structured interviews. This section presents the analyzed data in descriptive texts, discussing the connections and differences between the findings. The results and discussion are organized into subsections corresponding to the research objectives and key themes that emerged during the analysis.

### *Theoretical Underpinnings of Strategic Management Plans*

Analyzing the strategic management plans and interview transcripts revealed that public school principals drew upon various educational theories, models, and philosophies to guide their decision-making and planning processes. Principals' most prominent theoretical frameworks included SWOT Analysis, Balanced Scorecard, and Theory of Change.

SWOT Analysis was consistently mentioned as a foundational model across all S.B.M. levels. Principals used this framework to assess their schools' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, enabling them to develop strategic initiatives responsive to their specific contexts. As Principal 7 (S.B.M. Level 3) remarked, "One critical framework I utilize is the SWOT Analysis. This involves thoroughly examining our school's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats."

The Balanced Scorecard was particularly prevalent among principals in S.B.M. levels 2 and 3. This model helped align strategic objectives with performance metrics across various domains, such as academics, student well-being, community engagement, and resource management. Principal 9 (S.B.M. Level 3) stated, "One central model is the Balanced Scorecard, which helps us align our strategic objectives with performance metrics across various dimensions."

The Theory of Change was another significant framework employed by principals, especially in S.B.M. levels 2 and 3. This model assisted in articulating the causal pathways linking initiatives to desired outcomes.

Table 1. Frequency of the Theoretical Frameworks Mentioned in the Strategic Management Plans and Interviews Across Different S.B.M. Levels.

Theoretical Framework	S.B.M. Level 1	S.B.M. Level 2	S.B.M. Level 3
SWOT Analysis	3	2	3
Balanced Scorecard	0	3	3
Theory of Change	0	3	2

This model assisted in articulating the causal pathways linking initiatives to desired outcomes. Principal 4 (S.B.M. Level 2) explained, "The Theory of Change framework helps us articulate the causal pathways through which our activities lead to desired outcomes. By clearly defining our inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts, we can ensure that our strategic initiatives are aligned with our overarching goals and mission."

In addition to these frameworks, principals also drew upon leadership theories and educational philosophies. Transformational leadership was a recurring theme, emphasizing the importance of inspiring and empowering staff and students to achieve their full potential. Constructivist and progressive educational philosophies were also integrated into the strategic management plans, particularly in S.B.M. level 3, shaping the principals' approach to curriculum development and teaching methodologies. This aligns with recent studies by Chermack and Kasshanna (2019), who emphasized the effectiveness of SWOT Analysis in strategic planning, and by Decramer et al. (2022), who underscore the utility of the Balanced Scorecard in educational settings. Table 1 presents the frequency of the theoretical frameworks mentioned in the strategic management plans and interviews across different S.B.M. levels.

#### *Alignment with Legal and Curricular Mandates*

The strategic management plans demonstrated a strong alignment with legal regulations and curricular mandates at different levels of the education system. Principals across all S.B.M. levels emphasized ensuring compliance with national and regional education laws and policies. As Principal 5 (S.B.M. Level 2) explained, "We align our strategic plans with the legal mandates to ensure we operate within the legal framework. This includes adhering to student rights, teacher qualifications, and school operations policies."

Similarly, the strategic management plans were closely aligned with the prescribed curricular standards and guidelines. Principals ensured their educational programs and activities met the required academic benchmarks and objectives. Principal 1 (S.B.M. Level 1) mentioned, "We align our curriculum with the Department of Education's standards. This ensures our

students receive a high-quality education meeting national benchmark."

However, some principals reported challenges in meeting specific legal requirements, particularly those related to resource constraints and administrative support. Principal 4 (S.B.M. Level 2) noted, "One of the challenges we face is meeting all legal requirements due to limited resources. For example, we sometimes struggle to comply with teacher-student ratio mandates because of a shortage of qualified teachers."

The analysis also revealed some areas of non-compliance related to curricular alignment, often linked to the rapid changes in educational policies and the challenges of keeping curriculum materials and teaching methods up-to-date. Principal 7 (S.B.M. Level 3) mentioned, "There are times when we lag in updating our curriculum to reflect new policies. This can result in temporary misalignment with national standards." This is supported by recent research from Fullan and Quinn (2016), which highlights the importance of aligning school strategies with educational policies, and Spillane (2018), which underscores the need for coherence between school practices and legal mandates.

#### *Appropriateness and Coherence of Strategic Management Plans*

The study found that the objectives, program of activities, strategies of implementation, and assessment tools within the strategic management plans were generally well-aligned with the overall intention and vision of the schools. Principals across all S.B.M. levels emphasized ensuring that all aspects of their strategic management plans were interconnected and aligned with the school's core values and long-term goals.

Principal 2 (S.B.M. Level 1) stated, "We ensure that all aspects of our strategic management plan are interconnected and aligned with our vision. This coherence is crucial for the success of our initiatives." Similarly, Principal 7 (S.B.M. Level 3) explained, "We ensure that our objectives, activities, strategies, and assessment tools are all aligned and interconnected. This coherence enhances the effectiveness of our strategic management plan."

The strategic management plans demonstrated clear linkages and coherence between the various components. The objectives were directly derived from

the school's vision and mission, ensuring that all initiatives were focused on achieving the long-term goals. The program of activities and strategies of implementation were designed to be mutually supportive and contribute to the overall objectives. Assessment tools were aligned with the strategic objectives, enabling principals to measure progress and effectiveness accurately. Research by Fullan and Quinn (2016) highlighted the critical role of aligning school strategies with educational policies to ensure coherence and compliance, supporting the necessity of grounding strategic plans in legal and curricular mandates.

### ***Sufficiency of Financial Support and Resource Allocation***

The sufficiency of financial support and budget allocation for implementing strategic management plans varied among schools. While some principals reported adequate financial resources, others faced significant challenges securing sufficient funding for their strategic initiatives.

Principal 2 (S.B.M. Level 1) stated, "We have sufficient financial support to implement our strategic management plan effectively. Our budget allocations are well-aligned with our strategic priorities, allowing us to achieve our goals." In contrast, Principal 5 (S.B.M. Level 2) highlighted the challenges: "Financial support is one of our major concerns. We often struggle to secure enough funding to implement our strategic plans fully."

Despite these challenges, principals demonstrated efforts to align their budget allocations with strategic priorities, ensuring that financial resources were allocated to support their strategic goals. Principal 6 (S.B.M. Level 2) emphasized, "We make sure that our financial resources are allocated in a way that supports our strategic goals. This helps us maximize the impact of our budget."

To address the challenges related to financial constraints, principals employed various strategies, such as seeking external funding sources, prioritizing key initiatives, and optimizing resource utilization. Principal 7 (S.B.M. Level 3) remarked, "We prioritize our key initiatives to ensure our most important goals are funded. This involves careful planning and strategic decision-making." Baker (2018) emphasizes the crucial role of financial resources in school improvement, while Grubb and Hyman (2020) discussed the necessity of aligning budget allocations with strategic priorities to ensure the successful implementation of school initiatives.

### ***Implementation Challenges and Successes***

The practical execution of the strategic management plans revealed both challenges and successes. Principals reported several challenges during

the implementation process, including resource constraints, resistance to change, and logistical issues.

Principal 4 (S.B.M. Level 2) described, "One of the biggest challenges we face is limited resources. This affects our ability to fully implement all aspects of our strategic plan." Principal 6 (S.B.M. Level 2) noted, "Resistance to change is another significant challenge. Some staff members hesitate to adopt new methods and strategies, slowing the implementation process."

Despite these challenges, principals also reported several successes in implementing their strategic management plans. These successes included improved student outcomes, enhanced staff collaboration, and increased community engagement.

Principal 1 (S.B.M. Level 1) mentioned, "One of our biggest successes has been improving student outcomes. Our strategic initiatives have led to higher test scores and better overall performance." Principal 6 (S.B.M. Level 2) stated, "We have seen a significant increase in community engagement. Our initiatives have encouraged more parents and community members to get involved in school activities."

The implementation process also provided valuable lessons for the principals and their teams. These lessons included the importance of flexibility, continuous monitoring and evaluation, and the value of stakeholder involvement. Principal 2 (S.B.M. Level 1) stated, "One of the key lessons we have learned is the importance of flexibility. We need to be able to adapt our plans as needed to address unexpected challenges." This aligns with the findings of Leithwood and Sun (2020), who noted the positive effects of transformational leadership on student achievement and teacher satisfaction, and Hargreaves and Fullan (2020), who emphasized the importance of continuous improvement and adaptability in educational change.

### ***Evaluation Methods and Impact on Future Planning***

School principals employed various evaluation methods to assess the outcomes and impact of their strategic management plans. These methods included both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive assessment of their initiatives.

Principal 2 (S.B.M. Level 1) stated, "We use qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate our strategic management plans. This helps us get a complete picture of our progress and impact." The evaluation criteria used by principals focused on key performance indicators related to academic achievement, student well-being, and organizational effectiveness, which were aligned with the strategic objectives outlined in their management plans.

The evaluation tools used were diverse, including standardized tests, surveys, performance appraisals, classroom observations, and stakeholder feedback. Principal 5 (S.B.M. Level 2) explained, "We employ

several assessment tools, such as academic performance tests, classroom observations, and stakeholder surveys. These tools help us gather comprehensive data on our initiatives."

The evaluations conducted by the school principals played a crucial role in informing future planning and decision-making. The insights gained from the evaluations helped principals identify areas for improvement, refine their strategies, and make data-driven decisions. Principal 4 (S.B.M. Level 2) noted, "Our evaluations provide valuable feedback that informs our planning process. We use this information to refine our strategies and set new goals."

The study's findings highlight the significance of comprehensive evaluations in strategic management, providing valuable insights that enhance the effectiveness of initiatives and contribute to achieving the school's strategic goals. By using diverse evaluation methods and criteria, principals can ensure that their strategic management plans are effectively implemented and continuously improved, ultimately enhancing the quality of education provided to students. Mertens and Wilson (2018) highlighted the importance of comprehensive evaluation practices in improving educational outcomes, and Stufflebeam and Zhang (2017) advocated for the use of multiple evaluation methods to capture the complexity of educational interventions, underscoring the significance of thorough evaluation in strategic management.

## CONCLUSION

This study provided a comprehensive understanding of the strategic management practices of public school principals across theoretical underpinnings, alignment with legal and curricular mandates, appropriateness and coherence of plans, sufficiency of financial support, implementation challenges and successes, and principal evaluation methods.

The study highlighted the importance of grounding strategic management plans in well-established theoretical frameworks, such as SWOT Analysis, Balanced Scorecard, and Theory of Change, as well as leadership theories and educational philosophies. Despite some challenges, aligning plans with legal and curricular mandates demonstrated the principals' commitment to compliance and educational standards.

The appropriateness and coherence of the strategic management plans, with clear linkages between objectives, activities, strategies, and assessment tools, enhanced the effectiveness of initiatives and contributed to achieving the school's vision and mission. However, financial support and resource allocation disparities posed challenges for some principals in fully implementing their strategic plans.

The practical execution of the plans revealed challenges and successes, with principals demonstrating resilience and adaptability in overcoming obstacles. The successes reported, such as improved student outcomes and increased community engagement, highlight the positive impact of well-implemented strategic plans.

The evaluation methods employed by principals, using diverse approaches and aligned criteria, provide critical insights that inform future planning and decision-making. The continuous improvement cycle, driven by comprehensive evaluations, ensures that strategic management plans remain effective and responsive to the evolving needs of schools and students.

This study underscored the pivotal role of strategic management in public school leadership, emphasizing the importance of grounding plans in theory, aligning with legal and curricular mandates, ensuring appropriateness and coherence, securing sufficient financial support, effectively implementing initiatives, and conducting comprehensive evaluations. By addressing these essential aspects, public school principals can enhance the quality of education provided to students and drive positive change in their schools.

To enhance the strategic management capacities of public school principals, a comprehensive and multifaceted approach is essential. Firstly, targeted training and professional development opportunities should be provided to deepen their understanding of strategic management theories, models, and philosophies. Principals should be encouraged to critically examine and apply frameworks like SWOT Analysis, Balanced Scorecard, and Theory of Change in their strategic planning processes. This approach fosters a culture of reflective practice, enabling principals to assess the alignment between their strategic decisions and theoretical principles continually.

Additionally, a comprehensive resource kit or guide should be developed to assist principals in navigating the complex landscape of legal regulations and curricular mandates relevant to their specific context. Collaboration between principals and educational authorities is crucial to ensure that strategic management plans comply with legal requirements and align with curricular standards. Implementing a periodic review process will help assess the ongoing alignment of these plans with evolving frameworks, providing support for necessary adaptations.

To ensure coherence and appropriateness, principals should be provided with guidance and tools to align their strategic objectives, program activities, implementation strategies, and assessment methods effectively. Regular reviews and refinements of strategic plans are essential to maintain coherence in light of changing school contexts and emerging needs. Engaging stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and

the wider school community, is crucial for the development and implementation of these plans.

Advocating for equitable and sufficient financial support is vital for the effective implementation of strategic management plans. Principals should receive training on strategic budgeting, resource allocation, and financial management to optimize available funds. Exploring innovative partnerships and collaborations can help leverage additional resources and expertise to support strategic initiatives.

Facilitating the sharing of best practices, success stories, and lessons learned among public school principals fosters continuous improvement in implementing strategic management plans. Targeted support and mentoring for principals facing specific challenges, drawing on successful peers' experiences, can be highly beneficial. Encouraging a flexible and adaptive approach to implementation allows for necessary adjustments based on ongoing monitoring and feedback.

Effective evaluation and impact assessment are essential for understanding the outcomes of strategic initiatives. Comprehensive training and resources on evaluation methodologies should be provided, encouraging the use of diverse data sources and assessment tools for a holistic understanding. A culture of data-driven decision-making should be fostered, enabling principals to use evaluation insights to inform future planning and continuous improvement efforts.

Finally, establishing platforms and networks for principals to share their strategic management experiences, insights, and innovations with the wider educational community is crucial. Disseminating research findings and best practices through professional conferences, workshops, and publications will foster collective learning and improvement. Collaborating with educational institutions and policymakers will help integrate the lessons learned into future policy development and support mechanisms for strategic management in basic education.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

A.V.R. conducted the literature review, collected and analyzed, and drafted the manuscript. P.R.B. provided significant guidance and support throughout the research process, development of the research framework, revision of the manuscript, and expert advice on the methodology and interpretation of results.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interest that could have

influenced this dissertation's research, analysis, or findings.

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