

Leadership Roles and Service Quality Provision in Public Preschool Education in Regional Centers in Mindanao

DR. IBRAHIM H. ALIPONTO*

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to ascertain the views of school administrators, teachers and parents on leadership roles and service quality provision in public preschool education. It also aimed to study the relationship between the leadership roles and that of service quality as perceived by the participants. The 30 school administrators, 270 preschool teachers, and 389 preschool parents who participated in this study were purposively selected from thirty (30) different public preschools in regional centers in Mindanao.

A descriptive survey method was employed. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, ranks, means, and standard deviations) were computed to determine the perspectives of the administrator-respondents on the importance of leadership and service quality. Factor analysis was used on teacher- and parent-respondents' responses to identify the key factors contributing to service quality in public preschool education.

The participants identified leadership roles in managing the teaching and learning process as the most important leadership role contributing to quality of service in public preschool education. However, the three groups of participants differed in their views about service quality provision. For administrators, they identified the quality of health and wellbeing and quality of curriculum on topping other service quality provisions. For teachers, quality of school values comes first while parents chose quality of school atmosphere as the most important one. Finally, based on the result of the hypothesis testing, there proved to be a positive link between leadership roles and service quality provision. This indicates that leadership roles could explain to some extent the provision of service quality in public preschool education.

In light of the findings, some recommendations are offered. Among the suggestions are: to effectively enforce the implementation of the minimum standards and operational guidelines for preschool education; to allocate more financial resources to ensure that structural and process features of public preschools are improved; to improve the coordination of key players in preschool education, with emphasis on involving the parents; to improve leadership effectiveness in administrators; and to improve the skills of teachers through professional development.

Keywords: Public Preschool, Leadership Roles, Service Quality Provision

I. INTRODUCTION

The leadership component of educational institutions at all levels is always considered as an important aspect in any attempt to provide quality service. The role of a leader is undeniably very crucial in the delivery of quality services, especially in the lower level of education such as preschool. In fact, with the current focus on mandatory preschool education and with the expanding enrolment in public preschools as backdrop, the issues of leadership in the early years and service quality provisions in public preschools gain prominence and force themselves upon public attention.

As observed in many instances in several reports and researches, the status of education in the country is declining in terms of quality and it seems that the prospect is not good compared with Asian neighbors. Besides, the final decade of the twentieth century and the first of the Third Millennium may well be the "worst of times" for public education in the

country as the system reeled under relentless reports that were rife with criticism about the deterioration of the quality of public education.

A glaring observation is that, apparently, 'the provisions of service quality was often attributed to the leadership role of education manager'. However, in the Philippines, discussions on leadership in public preschool education are limited. The specific focus on the impact of leadership in public preschools is rarely discussed. This is probably due to the introduction, only recently, of mandatory preschool education, especially in public schools. Besides, the manner by which K-12, including preschool education, was implemented seemed rather abrupt (Sacar, 2015).

The explanation proffered by Place (2011) for the paucity of studies on the impact of leadership on basic education in general seems quite plausible. According to him, the effect or influence of the school administrator or principal on student achievement is perceived as indirect and less evident compared to that of teachers. However, Waters and Kingston (2005),

*Office of the President, Mindanao State University—Main Campus, Marawi City
9700, Philippines
E-mail Address: ebs.aliponto@gmail.com; ibrahim.aliponto@msumain.edu.ph

in summarizing research reviewed by them, note that “Principal leadership is positively correlated with student achievement and has an average effect size of .25.” The effect size of .25 would be read as *moderate*, which is good enough considering that most researchers acknowledge that the impact of the school administrator is, as already said, indirect, operating through others who have a more direct and extensive influence on students. Such a finding as cited above should compel or force recognition of the importance of principal leadership, and of the need to take a more lingering and critical look at it.

Hasan and Kerr (2003) stated that leadership has a significant impact on the service quality of one organization. Following the same line of thought, Ribbins and Marland (1994) hold that leadership is significant in determining the quality of a school and the achievement of its pupils. In addition, sound management practices significantly influence the quality of service delivery (Hayden, 1997). Therefore, it can be assumed that leadership roles also determine quality of service in preschool education. This is a vital topic that must be discussed since service quality is a very important aspect in assessing the advantages and disadvantages of one preschool.

On the other side, despite also the difficulty in explicitly defining the components of quality in preschool, the idea of ‘quality’ is widely regarded as a critical element of a young child’s first experiences in education. Sylva et al. (2006) showed that children enrolled in high quality preschools tended to be more successful in later stages, were more competent socially and emotionally, and showed higher intellectual development during early childhood period.

Following the implementation of K to 12 in June 2013, almost 2 million (1,737,313 to be precise) preschool children were reportedly enrolled in the Philippines’ Public Kindergarten Program, and of this sum almost 28% of the total enrollment were from Mindanao, as of September 2015 (DepEd, 2016). The number continues to rise. “As the stepping stone into the world of education that will be responsible for preparing those students for their lives as public citizens, the preschool arena serves an important purpose” (Hofer, 2008). To quote Robert Fulgham, “All I really need to learn I learned in kindergarten... how to live, what to do, how to be...” The importance of the early foundation provided by kindergarten can hardly be over-emphasized.

As stated in Republic Act No. 10157, also known as the ‘Kindergarten Education Act,’ the government, particularly the DepEd as the leading agency in the implementation of the law, believes that kindergarten education is “vital to the development of the Filipino child for it is the period when the young mind’s absorptive capacity is at its sharpest” (Sec. 2, R.A. 10157). This implies that the best place for nurturing children and teaching them the basics is the school. However, simply putting the children into schools is not the only requirement to support children to succeed in school and life (Stoney et al., 2006). Of greater importance is providing schools that offer quality experiences for the children enrolled in them.

It would thus seem that the Philippine education system has much catching up to do; it has lagged behind in terms of quality for over two decades. Also, assailed by the winds of change and the problem these churn up, such as those mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, the “worst of times” may be far from over and the “best of times” promised by the shift to the K to 12 may still be far off. What is certain is, the quality of basic education, specifically, kindergarten and the first grade levels which are foundational, need constant looking into, monitoring, and evaluation.

Thus, it is equally important to juxtapose the two concepts, the leadership in early years and service quality provisions which are believed to have influence on preschool education, to get a comprehensive understanding on how preschool operates.

Meanwhile, Katz (1994) determined that there are five perspectives of quality. The first, top-down perspective, assessed the program based on the perspective of the administrators and licensing agencies. This traditional view examined observable indicators such as the setting, staff, and materials. The second, bottom-up perspective, examined the program from the children’s point of view in terms of how they experience the program. This approach requires assessors to make inferences on how the children are experiencing the program.

The third, inside/outside perspective, assessed the program from the families’ experiences of the program. The author stated that ideally the quality of an ECE program should be in part based on the parents’ perspectives on services provided to them and

their children. The fourth, inside perspectives, examined how staff members experience the program. Staff members judge the program based on organizational climate and relationships with colleagues and parents. The fifth, ultimate perspective, considers how program quality serves the community and society. Quality ECE programs impact the community and society as children who attend quality ECE programs gain positive long-term outcomes. The author recommends the use of all perspectives in quality early childhood programs.

For the purpose of this study, three quality perspectives are considered: the top-down perspective (administrators), inside/outside perspective (parents), and inside perspective (teachers). It is said that all parents are concerned about quality, and often consider quality issues in choosing a preschool for their children. In addition, school administrators and teachers in preschools play an essential role in delivering high quality child education. Understanding the way in which these key stakeholders perceive leadership roles and service quality provisions, within their own context, may help explain success and challenges in the implementation of reform policies and help to identify points of intervention to improve the effectiveness and success of new policies.

Also, understanding how stakeholders appreciate the key factors contributing to service quality may provide valuable information as a reference for planning and program design process, for managing preschools, teaching, and choosing preschool.

This study, therefore, aims to identify the priority factors or indicators influencing service quality provisions in public preschool education in the regional centers in Mindanao based on the perspectives of school administrators, teachers, and parents with focus on the leadership role.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on theories concerning the relationships between perceived service quality, consumer expectations, and perceptions. It is anchored on theories, specifically *Assimilation-contrast theory*, *Disconfirmation theory*, *Adaptation-level theory*, *Perceived service quality model*, and *Ecological systems theory*.

Firstly, the study took as reference the *Assimilation-contrast theory*, which was introduced by Anderson (1973) in the context of

post-exposure product performance based on Sherif and Hovland's (1961) discussion of assimilation and contrast effect. Assimilation-contrast theory suggests that if performance is within a customer's latitude (range) of acceptance, even though it may fall short of expectation, the discrepancy will be disregarded – assimilation will operate and the performance will be deemed as acceptable. If performance falls within the latitude of rejection, contrast will prevail and the difference will be exaggerated, and the produce/service deemed unacceptable.

The assimilation-contrast theory has been proposed as yet another way to explain the relationships among the variables in the disconfirmation model. This theory is a combination of both the assimilation and the contrast theories. This paradigm posits that satisfaction is a function of the magnitude of the discrepancy between expected and perceived performance. As with assimilation theory, the consumers will tend to assimilate or adjust differences in perceptions about product performance to bring it in line with prior expectations but only if the discrepancy is relatively small.

In addition, *Disconfirmation theory* was also considered relevant for this study. This theory argues that "satisfaction is related to the size and direction of the disconfirmation experience that occurs as a result of comparing service performance against expectations". Ekinci et al. (2004) cites Oliver's updated definition on the disconfirmation theory, which states "Satisfaction is the guest's fulfillment response. It is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under- or over-fulfillment." Mattila, A and O'Neill, J.W. (2003) discuss that amongst the most popular satisfaction theories is the disconfirmation theory, which argues that satisfaction is related to the size and direction of the disconfirmation experience that occurs as a result of comparing service performance against expectations. Basically, satisfaction is the result of direct experiences with products or services, and it occurs by comparing perceptions against a standard (e.g. expectations). Research also indicates that how the service was delivered is more important than the outcome of the service process, and dissatisfaction towards the service often simply occurs when guest's perceptions do not meet their expectations.

Another theory which supported this study is the *Adaptation-level theory*. This theory is consistent with expectation and disconfirmation effects on satisfaction. It was originated by Helson in 1964 and applied to customer satisfaction by Oliver. Helson (1964) simply put his theory as follows: “it posits that one perceives stimuli only in relation to an adapted standard. The standard is a function of perceptions of the stimulus itself, the context, and psychological and physiological characteristics of the organism. Once created, the ‘adaptation level’ serves to sustain subsequent evaluations in that positive and negative deviations will remain in the general vicinity of one’s original position. Only large impacts on the adaptation level will change the final tone of the subject’s evaluation”. This theory is gaining acceptance, as it is able to explain some counter-intuitive predictions made by assimilation-contrast theories (Oliver 1977).

Moreover, this study found support in Gronroos’ (1984) *perceived service quality model*. The model, as shown in **Figure 1**, is based on the disconfirmation paradigm, where the consumer compares their expectations with their perceptions, and the quality of the service is determined by the outcome of this evaluation process.

As depicted in Figure 1, Gronroos (1984) claims that two types of service quality exist, namely, technical quality and functional quality. Technical quality relates to what is provided during the service process (e.g. knowledge, tangibles and technical solutions). These are the relatively quantifiable aspects of the service, which the customer and supplier can easily measure (Gronroos, 1984). On the other hand, functional quality refers to how the service is provided and the interpersonal behaviors contributed by the service employee during the service encounter. It is more difficult to measure than technical quality (Gronroos, 1984). Gronroos (2007) proposes that the gap between the expected service and perceived service is of utmost importance and that it is vital for a service organization to keep this gap as small as possible. In addition, it is important for managers to understand how the technical quality and functional quality of a service is influenced, and how customers perceive these quality dimensions (Gronroos, 2007) to ensure perceived service quality is maximized.

Examination of the theories above suggests that service quality perceptions result from a comparison of consumer expectations with

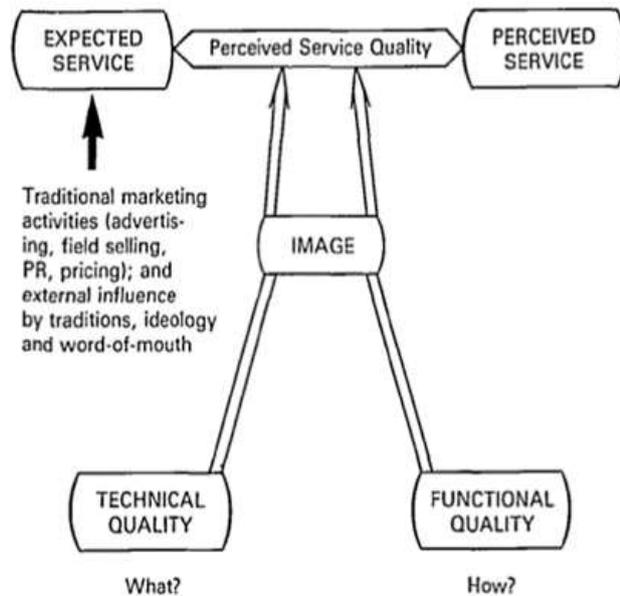


Figure 1. The Perceived Service Quality Model

actual service performance. The basic premise is that service quality is produced in the interaction between a customer and elements in the service organization (Lehtinen and Lehtinen, 1982). In this study, the perspectives of school administrators, teachers and parents are based on their expectations of what service quality provisions in public preschool education should be to achieve quality education. Their perspectives may be socially constructed. Thus, this study was also guided by the ecological systems theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979).

As the present study assumes that respondents’ perspectives are socially constructed, the epistemological underpinning of this study recognizes the importance of the influence of personal characteristics, experiences and the environment as a process placed in the ecological systems in which respondents’ perspectives occur. The study therefore adopted the ecological systems epistemology as presented in **Figure 2**.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory recognizes that individuals do not live in isolation but influence and are influenced by the immediate and broader environment in time and space. The theory states that individual development occurs within a complex set of nested interconnected systems. The levels of nested systems are microsystems, mesosystems, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystems. The microsystems are the individual’s immediate surroundings which have direct influence to an individual through activities and interactions with others (Berk, 2005).

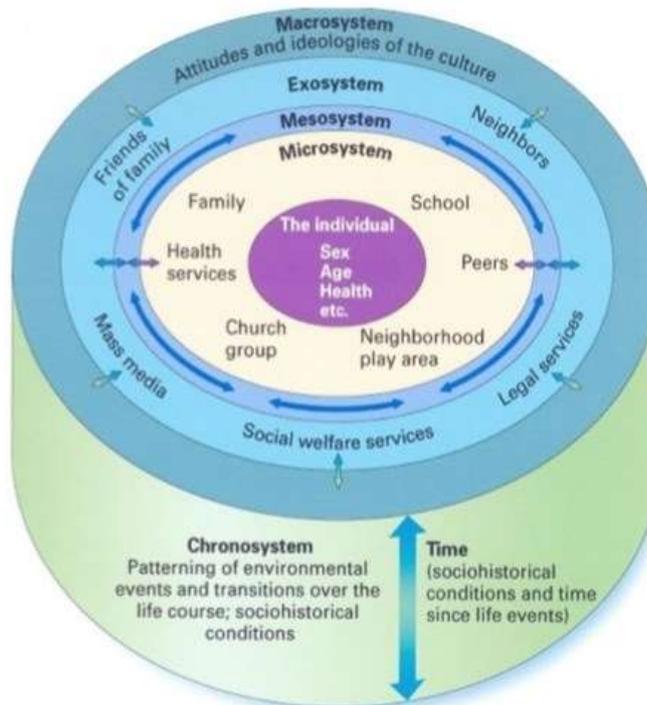


Figure 2. Ecological Systems Theory
Source: Santrock (2007)

Bronfenbrenner emphasizes that experience is the key element of the microsystem. Respondents' microsystems might include children, spouses, siblings, co-workers and friends. Therefore, respondents' perspectives with quality of public preschool education might be affected by their family, peer group and work place.

The mesosystem comprises links between microsystems, such as home, school, and neighborhood. The mesosystem is shaped by the various connections between and among individuals, objects, and circumstances (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner further distinguishes four forms of these connections. The first is multi-setting participation; this type of connections takes place when the same individual participates in more than one setting, such as home, church and work place. Second connection is an indirect linkage which occurs when the same person does not actively participate in both settings, but nonetheless influenced through an intermediate link that facilitates this connection. The third connection is inter-setting communication whereby persons in two or more settings directly interact with each other for the purpose of sharing information. The fourth connection is inter-setting knowledge whereby information about a setting exists in a separate setting. In the context of this study the mesosystem is particularly important in determining respondents'

perspectives with quality in preschool education; whereby respondents' views and thoughts may be influenced by interaction with different settings such as home, school environment and work place.

The exosystem is another level of the ecological systems theory. These are social settings that do not contain the focal person, but indirectly influence person through microsystem and mesosystems. For example respondents' perspectives with quality may be influenced by their experience, support from administration, as well as the neighborhood where the home is located.

The macrosystem consists of the societal conditions, laws, cultural values, customs and economic patterns surrounding the respondents. The macrosystem level is likely to influence how respondents perceive and being satisfied with the quality of public preschool education. For example, the cultural belief that children rearing and education are the responsibility of females may hamper males' involvement in their young children's education; as a result this may affect their perception and satisfaction with public preschool education.

The chronosystem is the largest of all and encompasses the changes or similarities over the course of time not only in the characteristics of the person but also in the environment of an individual. These might include changes in family structure, socio economic status, education and employment.

The application of this theory suggests that respondents' perspectives of quality may be influenced by all systems whether day to day influence or over the course of time influence. These influences include immediate environment (family, home and peer group), experiences, culture, existing laws, policies and guidelines. Thus, the study acknowledges that the phenomena of respondents' perspectives with the quality of preschool education are not objective but are actively constructed and constantly evolving as a result of social interaction in a particular environment or culture.

II. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The descriptive survey research design was used in this study. Descriptive survey research approach was used because of its capability to gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing

conditions or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Descriptive research design was also used because it relies on individuals' reports on their knowledge, attitudes, opinions, demographic information, conditions and procedures (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002).

In light of the foregoing considerations, the study employed descriptive survey research design in order to get a holistic picture of school administrators', teachers' and parents' perspectives on leadership roles and service quality provisions in public preschool education. The study's intent entailed the gathering of both quantitative and qualitative, in tandem, hence, the appropriateness of the expression mixed design.

This study was conducted in the six (6) school divisions of the Regional Centers in Mindanao represented by the cities of Pagadian (Region IX), Cagayan de Oro (Region X), Davao (Region XI), Koronadal (Region XII), Butuan (Region XIII), and Marawi (ARMM). The cities were purposively selected for the study because they are referred to as the hearts of the respective regions.

The respondents of the this study consisted of administrators, teachers, and parents of pupils in public preschools in regional centers of Mindanao for school year 2015-2016. A total of six hundred eighty-nine (689) respondents comprised the sample for this study: 30 administrators, 270 teachers and 389 parents of children in public preschools.

The researcher adopted multi-stage sampling techniques to select the sample. First, in selecting the public preschools (target population), purposive sampling method was used to select the thirty-three public preschools in the regional centers in Mindanao. The target public preschools were purposively selected because of their strategic location, being at the heart of the cities with so many enrolled preschool children. According to Fogelman and Comber (2009), in purposive sampling, the researchers apply the experience to select cases which fit the researcher's judgment.

Second, in the selection of public preschools as sample, quota sampling was used, i.e. five public preschools were selected from each of the six regional centers in Mindanao. In quota sampling, the population is first segmented into mutually exclusive sub-groups, just as in stratified sampling, and then judgment used to select subjects or units from each segment based on a specified proportion (Chaturvedi, 2010). Hence, this study involved a total of 30 public schools.

For the selection of school administrators, all

of the principals in the 30 public preschools were included in the study. For the selection of teachers from each school, the researcher used a purposive sampling technique that involved snowballing methods to recruit more teachers. Teachers were purposively sampled from the list provided by principals. In purposive sampling, the researchers chooses the sample based on who they think would be appropriate for the study (Babbie, 2007). On the other hand, snowball sampling is a technique, where existing study subjects are used to recruit more subjects into the sample (Creswell, 2012). For example, a researcher might send surveys to a principal and ask that the principal forward copies to the teachers of schools in that school district. These teachers then become members of the sample.

For the selection of parents, the sampling technique used for teacher-respondents was adopted. From each public preschool, children were purposively selected from the list provided by teachers. Then, parents of sampled children were selected to participate in the study.

According to Creswell (2012), "When selecting technique participants for a study, it is important to determine the size of the sample you will need. A general rule of thumb is to select as large a sample as possible from the population. The larger the sample, the less the potential error is that the sample will be different from the population." Taking this cue from Creswell (2012), the researcher was able to determine sample sizes of 186 teachers and 387 parents based on Sloven's formula. However, as the researcher was able to distribute a larger number of questionnaires and retrieved most of them, 270-teacher and 389-parent samples were realized.

Finally, to get the actual sample of respondents, the sample random sampling was used after the stratified sample of teachers and parents from each regional center.

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was considered most appropriate because of its capability to collect a large amount of information from a big number of people in a short period of time (Orodho, 2009).

The questionnaire was structured based on literature review of leadership roles, mainly on the Theory of Leadership Forces by Sergiovanni (1984) in which five forces of leadership in school were aligned. In addition, the questionnaire on service quality was also based on service quality in preschool education' literature. Many of the items were adopted from

the standardized instrument, the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) by Harms, Clifford and Cryer (1998). The ECERS-R was designed for observation of the early childhood environment by trained observers. Therefore, modification of the scale was imperative in order to make it appropriate for collecting respondents' views on quality in public preschool education.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On the demographic profile of the respondents, these are the findings of the study: Firstly, majority (70%) of the administrator-respondents were forty years old and above, and the teacher-respondents were clustered in greater number in the age groups between 20 – 29 and 30 – 39 years old, with percentages 47.04% and 38.87%, respectively, while most parent-respondents belonged to the 30 – 39 years old (40.36%) age group. Secondly, the numerical dominance of female respondents is clear: administrator respondents (73.33%), teacher respondents (97.04%), and parent respondents (89.20%). Thirdly, majority of the administrators and parents were married, with percentages 79.99% and 88.69%, respectively. In contrast, majority (88.69%) of the teachers were single. Fourthly, many (36.67%) of the administrators were holders of a master's degree, followed by those (23.33%) with master's degree units, while most (45.19%) teachers were bachelor's degree holders, followed by those (36.67%) with MA units. For parent respondents, most (42.67%) were bachelor's degree graduates, while many (31.36%) had gone as far as college level. In addition, the dominant field of specialization of the administrator and teacher respondents in their undergraduate degrees was 'general education,' with percentages 70% and 48.14%, respectively. Only 3.33% of the administrators and 38.52% of the teachers had Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) as field of specialization. Moreover, half (50%) of the administrator respondents had more than 10 years of experience in teaching, while majority (64.44%) of the teacher-respondents had 1 to 3 years of teaching experience. Next, all of the administrator respondents and majority (73.70%) of the teacher respondents had permanent employment status. Evidently, administrator and teacher respondents were all government employees while most parents

(46.27) were housekeepers or unemployed. Lastly, all of the administrator-respondents had a monthly income of more than P20,000, while majority (88.89%) of the teacher-respondents had a monthly income ranging from P15,000 to P19,999; majority (73.52%) of the parent respondents were earning a monthly income of below P10,000.

The results of the descriptive analysis yielded the information that the administrator respondents viewed the following as the most important leadership roles: In terms of planning the preschool operation, the list included *observing pupil's development and adaptability in class, observing classroom instruction, and incorporating pupil's records in planning school curriculum*; in terms of connecting with stakeholders, they pointed out *developing good relationship with parents, encouraging parents' involvement, providing teachers with professional development program, emphasizing teacher appearance, and offering good salary and support to teachers*; and in terms of managing the teaching and learning process, they considered most important *encouraging the practice of prayer, providing blocks and building materials, and encouraging group activities and/or teamwork*. The administrator respondents identified *leadership in managing the teaching and learning process* as most important.

Furthermore, in terms of service quality provision, the results of the descriptive analysis revealed that the administrator respondents recognized the following as the most important components: 1) Quality of atmosphere (consisting of elements such as facilities for personal hygiene, having first aid kit, space of classroom, facilities for playing and learning, and the premises of the gates); 2) Quality of teachers (referring to skills and knowledge of teacher's roles, trained, and interest in Early Childhood Education); 3) Quality of Curriculum (embracing Language, Literacy and Communication, Values Education/Socio-Emotional Development and Social Studies, and Mathematics); 4) Quality of Health and Wellbeing (covering discipline, communication between pupils and teacher, health practices, and safety practices); 5) Quality of Educational Experience (pointing to daily timetable / schedule, group size, and provision for children with disabilities); 6) Quality of Interaction (emphasizing parents' involvement in school activities, and report on development and achievement of pupils); and 7) Quality of School Values (highlighting the surroundings of the school, school reputation, number of

students enrolled in the school, relationship between school and community, objectives of the school, and proposition number of students per one teacher).

As regards the result of factor analysis, from the standpoint of the teacher respondents the following were the most important leadership roles: In terms of planning the preschool operation, the list included *checking teaching record periodically, observing classroom instruction, incorporating pupil's records in planning school curriculum, and preparing annual planning*; in terms of connecting with stakeholders, they pointed out *engaging with local community, encouraging parent's involvement, offering good salary and support to teachers, and employing teacher with high academic qualification*; and, in terms of managing the teaching and learning process, they recognized *providing blocks and building materials, encouraging group activities and/or teamwork, providing adequate learning resources, encouraging the practice of prayer and providing challenging science and mathematics activities*. The teacher respondents identified leadership in managing the teaching and learning process as most important. Similarly, from the factor analysis result, teacher respondents underscored six important components of service quality: 1) Quality of School Values (objectives of the school, relationship between school and community, number of students enrolled in the school, surroundings of the school, and cultural values brought into the school); 2) Quality of School Atmosphere (clean and attractive space for refreshments, cheerful premise and landscape, outdoor playing facilities, and clean and safe kitchen); 3) Quality of Health and Wellbeing (use of toilet and sink, observing safety practices, health practices and prepared meals); 4) Quality of Educational Experience (group time, group size, free play, and provision for children with disabilities); 5) Quality of Curriculum (Language, Literacy and Communication, Mathematics and Science); and 6) Quality of Interaction (frequency of parents getting information from school, explanation on goals and objectives of preschool to parents and community, and interest in Early Childhood Education).

Moreover, from the results of factor analysis, the parent respondents viewed the following as most important leadership roles: In terms of planning the preschool operation, the list included *incorporating pupil's records in setting educational goals, observing pupil's*

development and adaptability in class and observing classroom instruction; in terms of connecting with stakeholders, they pointed out *engaging with local community, providing teachers with professional development program, offering good salary and support to teachers, and incorporating pupil's records in planning school curriculum*; and, in terms of managing the teaching and learning process, they placed a premium on *encouraging the practice of prayer, providing blocks and building materials, encouraging gross motor activities, providing challenging science and mathematics activities, and providing adequate learning resources, and encouraging group activities and/or teamwork*. The parent respondents identified leadership in managing the teaching and learning process as most important.

Also, as revealed by the factor analysis results, parent respondents emphasized four essential service quality components: 1) Quality of Health and Safety (facilities for personal hygiene, having first aid kit, premises of the gates, clean and safe kitchen, clean and attractive space for refreshments, space of classroom, health practices, and facilities for playing and learning); 2) Quality of School Values and Interaction (number of students enrolled in the school, proposition number of students per teacher, parents' involvement in school activities, religious/moral values brought into the school, explanation of goals and objectives of preschool to parents and community, and report on development and achievement of pupils); and 3) Quality of Curriculum and Teachers (Science, Mathematics and Language, Literacy and Communication, teacher's personal appearance, skills and knowledge of teacher's roles, academic qualification and teaching experience). Regarding the association between the leadership roles and service quality, the hypotheses testing revealed a significant relationship between leadership roles and service quality. This indicates that leadership roles could explain to a certain extent the provision of service quality in public preschool education.

Concerning the perceived problems in the implementation of public preschool education, the respondents achieved consensus on their selection of the top five responses: *limited visual aids material due to lack of budget, scarce or limited books for preschoolers, and lack of school facilities that determine how preschool teachers handle their classes*. In addition to these

leading problems, the administrator respondents indicated *lack of items for qualified teachers*; from teacher respondents' standpoint, they listed *lack of training, orientation, and seminar for preschool teachers is a major problem*. Lastly, both the administrator and parent respondents specified *lack of resources such as financial centralization*.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Leadership roles and service quality are related, if not inextricably linked. This suggests that leadership role influences or affects service quality provision in public preschool education, affirming studies which assert that in order to provide quality services, leadership roles in preschool education are pivotal (Talan and Bloom, 2011; Bloom, 2003; Rodd, 1997); these can be used to advantage to leverage the quality of service and education provided by public preschool entities.

As the findings explicitly show, leadership roles in managing the teaching and learning process is the most important element. The teaching-learning process is, after all, pre-eminently the element affecting students most directly. If education is to be reduced to the bare essentials, only the teacher and students would remain; these two are *sine qua non*, meaning the truly indispensable elements. All else may be relegated to the background, or even dispensed with. At the outset, the thought that pervades this study is, schools cannot rise above the quality of its living agents, especially the teachers. This is captured in Stronge's equation: Effective Teachers = Student Achievement. The view is reiterated in numerous studies, including those commissioned by the government. For example, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003, "No Dreams Denied," underscores the need for states and school districts to ensure that every teacher in every classroom has met teaching standards aligned with K to 12 learning standards. All children must be protected from unqualified and incompetent teachers.

It is oversimplifying the complex teaching-learning process to reduce it to teachers and students, but as stressed emphatically enough, these are the "bare essentials". Singling out or isolating the bare essentials does not necessarily amount to a

negation of other elements that make up what Frank (2005) calls the "spokes of the wheel" or "bricks in a foundation wall": safety of the physical plant; shared leadership practices; structured personalized learning communities; student centered learning practices; caring relationships and sense of community; schoolwide positive discipline and self-management practices; and active student, staff, family, and community involvement. It is easy to see the overlapping or correspondence of these components with what the factor analysis identified as the six elements of service quality, namely: quality of school values (objectives of the school, relationship between school and community, number of students enrolled in the school, surroundings of the school, and cultural values brought into the school); quality of teachers (referring to skills and knowledge of teacher's roles, trainings, and interest in Early Childhood Education); quality of school atmosphere (clean and attractive space for refreshment, cheerful premise and landscape, outdoor playing facilities and, clean and safe kitchen); quality of health and wellbeing (use of toilet and sink, observing safety practices, health practices and prepared meals); quality of educational experience (group time, group size, free play, and provision for children with disabilities); quality of curriculum (Language, Literacy and Communication, Mathematics and Science); and quality of interaction (frequency of parents getting information from school, explanation on goals and objectives of preschool to parents and community, and interest in Early Childhood Education). The importance assigned to the components varied, depending on the group of respondents. For example, the administrator respondents identified all seven, while the teacher respondents named only six, and the parents singled out from the list only four. It can be concluded that administrators, given the nature of their work and the breadth or scope of their purview, tend to have a more holistic or broader perspective than the other two groups of respondents. Parents, on the other hand, tend to focus on what to them are immediate concerns: quality of health and safety, quality of interaction and school values; and quality of curriculum and teachers.

So, as should be clear from Frank's model and as revealed in the factor analysis conducted, there are other elements, specifically the context in which learning happens – a challenging, relevant supportive learning environment built on a safe, adequate physical

plant, positive or healthy surroundings, linkages/partnerships with parents and the community, and more. In fact, as stressed by Frank, the seven elements listed by him should be viewed as a whole – a system – “synergistically working together to create a total environment”. And although schools are not expected to satisfactorily meet all these requirements or components that make for a supportive learning environment, they have strengths, assets, and existing elements that can be reinforced to create a more supportive learning environment. Through self-survey or self-evaluation pre-schools can discover what elements are currently in place, which elements need strengthening, and where critical gaps exist. Any serious school improvement endeavor must be based on such determinations.

This view may be socially constructed. Looking into the respondents’ socioeconomic status (mostly poor families), many, if not all, still subscribe to the idea that national development is related with students’ educational achievement, i.e. level of economic development of a country had an effect on the degree to which school and student factors influence educational achievement (Heyneman, 1983). Conversely, the quality of education received by a country’s people impacts economic development. Economic development and educational achievement are inextricably bound up. According to the human capital theory (Meinardus, 2003), the economic development of a nation depends to a considerable extent on the quality of its education. The more educated the people, the greater the chances of economic development. There is also this view that a better-educated workforce is more likely to enjoy higher earnings (Bernstein, 2007). If this is the case, the perspectives of the respondents indicate that schools *do* certainly make a difference and there is a need for the education providers to improve or raise their service quality. At this juncture, the centrality of effective leadership in regard quality provision suggests itself.

Again, the standpoint or angle from which the situation is viewed – the administrators’ standpoint, the teachers’ standpoint, and the parents’ standpoint – matters. It determines each group’s focal concern. For example, administrators, in planning the preschool operation, considered *observing pupil’s development and adaptability in class, observing classroom instruction, and incorporating pupil’s records in planning school*

curriculum as their most important role; in connecting with stakeholders, *developing good relationship with parents, encouraging parents’ involvement, providing teachers with professional development program, emphasizing teacher appearance, and offering good salary and support to teachers* topped the list; and in terms of managing the teaching and learning process, the most important of their roles are *encouraging the practice of prayer, providing blocks and building materials, and encouraging group activities and/or teamwork*. The administrator respondents identified leadership in managing the teaching and learning process as most important.

So did the teacher and parent respondents. The result is more or less the same for all three categories or areas, but for one concern that teachers understandably put much store by – i.e. *employing teachers with high academic qualifications*. One discerns in this particular response some misgivings or doubts about the screening and recruitment of teachers. This could be a subtle comment on existing or observed hiring practices.

Moreover, as the findings would imply, there is a need to give strong emphasis on coordination between different stakeholders in preschool education—the school, the family, and the community—to help the children succeed in school and in life. Leaders need to focus on improving the quality of children’s learning and the skills of staff in promoting it. Staff’s personal and professional development are of crucial importance to improving the quality of the service they provide. Bloom and Sheerer (1992) in discussing the director’s role claimed, “The causal link to program quality, however, is usually an indirect one. The director shapes the work environment for the teaching staff who in turn provide the critical link to the children”.

This paper began, in part, with an examination of why research indicates that quality is important. As presented, effective leaders are likely to be more responsive to providing the process and structural quality needs in the public preschool. (Process quality refers to actual experiences and structural quality refers to the ratios of children to staff, teacher’s formal education, and training related to children.) Moreover, there are several focal areas and many elements that contribute to program quality, including the organization of physical space, appropriate and adequate supply of materials, teacher qualifications,

programming variables, instructional strategies, collaboration among team members and families, as well as individualization and adaptations within daily routines. Identifying quality ECE programs is essential for both professionals and parents. Equally important is creating the infrastructures that are required to maintain high quality ECE programs.

As a whole, without an appropriate management and systems, high quality interactions and learning environments, quality is less likely to be achieved or sustained. As emphasized by Beare, Caldwell, and Milikan (1989):

“Outstanding leadership has invariably emerged as a key characteristic of outstanding schools. There can no longer be doubt that those seeking quality in education must ensure its presence and that the development of potential leaders must be given high priority”.

However, role definition is reported in the literature to be problematic in terms of leadership in the early years. The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project found a strong relationship between the ‘qualifications of the center manager and quality of service provision in early childhood settings’ (Muijs et al, 2004). The diversity of this workforce makes a particularly complex arena for leadership (Osgood, 2004; Rodd, 2005). Additionally, there is a serious lack of leadership training for early childhood managers: it is likely that many are significantly under-prepared for this role. Researches based on and drawing from the work of early childhood practitioners suggest that too often, positions of leadership in early childhood settings tend to be held by ‘accidental leaders’ with minimal training to carry out their responsibilities (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003; Rodd, 2005). Their findings match the result of this study, which revealed that school administrators’ training, education, background and leadership experience are in the primary grades. Ebbeck and Waniganayake call for clear definitions of roles and lines of responsibility, and in turn explore ways in which obstacles to effective leadership and management can be identified and overcome.

In addition, where primary personnel of public preschool in the regional centers in Mindanao have traditionally been trained to

work with elementary aged children, there is much more left to be desired and more work to do when it comes to achieving quality service in the public preschool education. As can be noted, the results of this study underscore the need for systematic, intensive, and relevant training focused on the unique needs of early childhood school administrators and teachers, as well as providing not only process features but also structural features in public preschool education. This researcher posits that lack of leadership experience in early years and lack of teachers’ qualifications on early childhood education could be exacerbated by lack of needed facilities, materials and other resources to achieve service quality. It is suggested then that the DepEd should effectively enforce the implementation of the minimum standards and operational guidelines for preschool education in order to promote the quality of public preschools. It is also recommended that the government through the DepEd should allocate more financial resources to ensure that structural and process features of public preschools are improved. There are as many challenges as there are opportunities for improvement. Another way of putting it is, the challenges should be seen as opportunities for improvement.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the implications drawn from them, the following recommendations are advanced for consideration:

The importance the government attaches to early childhood education and development (ECED) is reflected in the Omnibus Policy on Kindergarten Education. The policy sets out compulsory kindergarten education, requires early childhood education qualifications for preschool teachers, and points out leadership competence in the early years (DepEd Order No. 47, s. 2016). This policy makes the link between competence in ECED and pupils’ school success. It is then imperative to build up the capacities of school administrators and teachers by assisting them in their work to enable them more to develop pupils’ capacities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society. Thus, it is recommended that a scholarship or study grant in the ECED must be established for administrators and teachers to improve their educational qualifications. The government and

the education sector must respond to this need through provision of postgraduate early childhood degrees.

Moreover, a continuing professional education in ECED must be required of the school's workforce. Likewise, the regional/division DepEd officials, specifically those with adequate preparation and right skills in preschool or kindergarten education, should provide technical assistance to school administrators and teachers. They should conduct regular monitoring and share best practices and feedback. The intention will be to assist schools in their work, not adding to their workload. In addition, with technical assistance from DepEd, schools can provide high-quality preschool programs.

Furthermore, it has been stressed that infrastructures are essential to preschool education. Hence, the DepEd should provide the equipment, the facilities and the resources required by the schools and should also closely monitor the quality of the learning environment. Also, it is necessary that a regular budgetary allocation for these service quality provisions becomes part in any policy recommendation to achieve high-quality outcomes in early childhood education.

Equally important is the involvement of other stakeholders in child's education. The community, its resources and leaders as well as the parents, must be tapped to address inadequacies and problems in public preschool education. A really useful change in the present scenario can be made by holding workshops, seminars, and short courses. Workshops can promote the interest of the parents in the early childhood education, which has not been taken as a serious activity. By evoking and engaging interest of parents and other stakeholders, a better understanding of one another's perspectives and to promote cooperative efforts in educating children could be created. It is only through such concerted efforts that the task of early childhood education can be given its due importance. Meanwhile, general ways to include families (Epstein, 2002) are: a) Communicating: Communication between home and school is regular and two-way; b) Parenting: Parenting skills are promoted and supported; c) Student Learning: Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning; d) Volunteering: Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought; e) School Decision-Making and Advocacy: Parents are involved in the decisions

that affect children and families; and f) Collaborating with Community: Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

Accreditation of preschool education providers, whether public or private, should be worked at, and held up to accepted standards.

It is also recommended that this study be extended by conducting a study on private preschools in the various regions of Mindanao. The findings on service quality provision and leadership in the private sector are worth comparing to see the gaps between the two preschool sectors. This will be a beneficial study by focusing on quality practices and roles of leadership in providing quality education. The study can also be extended in other areas, like Luzon or Visayas. This recommended study may be interesting in those areas as they are believed to be more developed.

Another similar study may be conducted, but including pupil variables, particularly academic achievement or performance.

Finally, this study's research problem or phenomenon of interest can also be further investigated by looking at the effectiveness and applicability of current preschool education policy, like the 2016 Omnibus Code for Kindergarten Education, which is applied to all types of preschool education. The study could identify clearly the needs of one preschool concerning its objectives of development, its providers and its ability to offer quality educational service.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study would not have been possible without the support and encouragement from a great number of individuals. The researcher is sincerely grateful to Dr. Arlene A. Botones, for the guidance and compassion she has shown him throughout this study.

The researcher is also indebted to his former master's thesis adviser and now his immediate superior, and President of the Mindanao State University (MSU) System, Dr. Habib W. Macaayong, for the opportunity accorded to him to pursue this education.

REFERENCES

Anderson, R. E. (1973). *Consumer dissatisfaction:*

- The effects of disconfirmed expectancy on perceived product performance.* Journal of Marketing Research, 10, 38-44. 3. Alpert, M.I. (1971). Identification of determinant attributes: A comparison of methods. Journal of Marketing Research, VIII, 184-91.
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., & Razavieh, A. (2002). *Introduction to research in education (6th ed.)*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
- Babbie, E. (2005). *The basics of social research (3rd ed.)*. London: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Beare H, Caldwell BJ and Milikan RH. (1989). *Creating an excellent school*: London: Routledge.
- Bernstein, B. (1996). *Open schools, open society?* New Society 10: 259.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research Methods in Education*. London: Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (3rd ed.)*. London: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Ebbeck, M, and Waniganayake, M. (2003). *Early childhood professionals: Leading today and tomorrow*. Sydney: MacLennan and Petty.
- Ekinci Y. & Sirakaya E. (2004). *An Examination of the Antecedents and Consequences of Customer Satisfaction*. In: Crouch G.I., Perdue R.R., Timmermans H.J.P., & Uysal M. Consumer Psychology of Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure. Cambridge, MA: CABI Publishing, p.190.
- Ekinci, Y. (2002). *A Review of Theoretical Debates on the Measurement of Service Quality: Implications for Hospitality Research*. Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research, Volume 26(3), P. 199-216.
- Epstein, A. (1999). *Pathways to Quality in Head Start, Public School, and Private Nonprofit Early Childhood Programs (Statistical Data Included)*. Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 13(2), 101.
- Fogelman, K., & Comber, C. (2009). *Surveys and Sampling*. In A. R. J. Briggs & M. Coleman (Eds.), Research methods in educational leadership and management (pp. 125-141). London: Sage Publications.
- Gronroos C. (1984). *A service quality model and its marketing implications*. European Journal of Marketing 8: 36-44.
- Grönroos, C., (2007). *Service Management and Marketing: Customer Management in Service Competition*. 3rd Edition, John Wiley & Sons Ltd., England.
- Harms, T., & Clifford, R. (1986). *Rationale underlying the ECERS*. Paper presented at the ECERS international workshop in Lisbon, September, 1986.
- Harms, T., Clifford, R. M., & Cryer, D. (1998). *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (Rev. ed.)*. Williston, VT: Teachers College Press.
- Harms, T., Clifford, R. M., & Cryer, D. (2005). *Early childhood environment rating scale revised edition*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hasan M and Kerr RM. (2003). *The relationship between total quality management practices and organizational performance in service organizations*. The TQM Magazine 15: 286-291.
- Hofer, K. (2008). *Measuring Quality In Pre-Kindergarten Classrooms: Assessing The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale*. Unpublished Dissertation. Vanderbilt University. Nashville, Tennessee.
- Katz, L. (1984). *More Talk with Teachers*. Urbana, Illinois: ERIC Clearing House on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.
- Katz, L. G. (1994). *Perspectives on the quality of early childhood programs*. Phi Delta Kappan, 76(3), 200-205.
- Katz, L. G. (1999). *Curriculum disputes in early childhood education*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.
- Mattila A. & O'Neill J.W. (2003). *Relationships between Hotel Room Pricing, Occupancy, and Guest Satisfaction: A Longitudinal Case of a Midscale Hotel in the United States*. Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research, 27 (3), pp. 328-341, Sage Publications.
- Muijs, D, Aubrey, C, Harris, A, and Briggs, M (2004). *How do they manage? A review of the research on leadership in early childhood*. Journal of Early Childhood Research, 2(2), pp 157-160.
- Orodho, J. A. (2009). *Elements of education and social science research methods*. (2nd ed.). Maseno-Kenya: Kanezja Publisher.
- Osgood, J. (2004). *Time to get down to business? The Responses of Early Years Practitioners to Entrepreneurial Approaches to Professionalism*. Journal of Early Childhood Research, 2(1), pp 5-24
- Ribbins, P. & Marland, M. 1994. *Leadership Matters*. London: Longman.
- Sacar, A. (2015). *Implementation of MTB-MLE*

- Program: Its Challenges and Strategies of Teachers and Experiences of Pupils in the School Divisions of Marawi City, Lanao del Sur I and Lanao del Sur II.* Unpublished dissertation. Mindanao State University, Marawi City.
- Santrock, J. W. (2007). *Child Development. Eleventh edition.* NY: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
- Stoney L, Mitchell A and Warner ME. (2006). *Smarter reform: Moving beyond single-program solutions to an early care and education system.* Journal of the Community Development Society 37: 101115.
- Sylva, K. Melhuishi, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., & Elliot, K. (2003). *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from the Pre-school Period.* London: Institute of Education, University of London.
- Sylva, K., & Wiltshire, J. (1993). *The Impact of Early Learning on Children's Later Development. A review prepared for the RSA Inquiry "Start Right".* The European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 1., No. 1., 1740.
- Sylva, K., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., Sammons, P., Melhuish, E., Elliot, K., & Totsika, V. (2006). *Capturing quality in early childhood through environmental rating scales.* Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 21, 76–92.
- Talan, T.N. and Bloom, P.J. (2004). *Program Administration Scale, New York: Teachers College Press.*
- Talan, T.N. and Bloom, P.J. (2011). *Program Administration Scale: Measuring Early Childhood Leadership and Management.* Teacher College Press.