



Research in Management and Humanities

DWIJMH VOL. 5 NO. 2 (2026) ISSN: 2980-4817

Available online at www.dwijmh.org

Journal homepage: <http://www.dwijmh.org>

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Challenges, strategies, and recommendations for implementing Quality Management System (QMS) in the schools division of the City of Batac: A phenomenological study

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: March 15, 2026

Received in rev. form. April 25, 2026

Accepted: May 25, 2026

Published: June 10, 2026

Keywords: *Quality management system, school leadership, elementary education, continuous improvement, capacity building*

ABSTRACT

This study examined the challenges encountered by elementary school heads in implementing the Quality Management System (QMS) in the Schools Division of the City of Batac. It aimed to identify the difficulties they faced, the strategies they employed to sustain implementation, and their recommendations for improving its effectiveness. A qualitative research design was utilized, with data collected through semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires from fifteen (15) elementary school heads. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes.

Findings revealed that school heads encountered challenges such as limited knowledge of QMS, workload and time constraints, resource limitations, and insufficient technical support. To address these, they implemented strategies including strong leadership and accountability, strategic planning, staff engagement, effective resource management, data-driven decision-making, and continuous professional development. Participants also recommended ongoing training, systematic auditing and monitoring, integration of QMS into school operations, strengthened leadership, and enhanced stakeholder collaboration.

Overall, the study concludes that effective QMS implementation requires continuous capacity building, adequate resources, and strong institutional support to sustain quality management practices in schools.

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JEL Classification: I21

Introduction

Quality education extends beyond classroom instruction; it is significantly shaped by how schools are managed and led. For schools to operate efficiently, deliver consistent services, and sustain continuous improvement, a Quality Management System (QMS) is essential. In the Philippine context, QMS

provides a structured framework for planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating school processes, ensuring alignment with national and international quality standards while strengthening organizational performance and accountability (Galon & Callo, 2015; DepEd, 2021).

In response to this, the Schools Division of the City of Batac has initiated the implementation of QMS in public elementary schools to streamline operations and enhance instructional quality. Despite these efforts, several challenges continue to hinder its consistent and effective implementation. These include limited resources, increasing administrative demands, and varying levels of staff competence. Moreover, the extent to which school leaders understand and apply frameworks such as the Integrated School Effectiveness Model (ISEM), along with the level of leadership support and stakeholder engagement, significantly influences the depth and sustainability of QMS practices (Montenegro & Andal, 2018; Zakuan et al., 2019; Psomas & Antony, 2019).

Effective QMS implementation relies on interconnected components, including strategic planning, process monitoring, performance evaluation, stakeholder feedback, and continuous improvement (Goetsch & Davis, 2016). For school leaders, this translates into making informed decisions, optimizing resource utilization, supervising instruction, and establishing feedback mechanisms that promote accountability and quality learning outcomes. However, the practical application of these components varies depending on contextual factors such as school size, staffing, and the level of institutional support available.

Despite existing studies on QMS implementation in educational settings, there remains a limited body of research that captures the lived experiences of elementary school heads at the division level, particularly in the Philippine context. Much of the current literature focuses on institutional frameworks and outcomes, with less attention given to how school leaders navigate challenges, adapt strategies, and sustain quality practices in resource-constrained environments. This gap highlights the need for context-specific, experience-based insights that can inform more responsive and practical approaches to QMS implementation.

This study, therefore, examines the perspectives of school leaders in the Schools Division of the City of Batac in implementing QMS. It aims to explore their experiences, identify the challenges they encounter, and analyze the strategies they employ to sustain quality practices. The findings are expected to provide evidence-based insights for policymakers, school leaders, and other education stakeholders, contributing to strengthening QMS implementation, enhancing leadership capacity, and improving overall educational quality.

Review of related literature

This literature review lays a solid foundation for the current study, which delves into three themes of the challenges faced and the strategies adopted by school heads in the Schools Division of the City of Batac regarding the implementation of the Quality Management System.

A Quality Management System (QMS) is a structured set of policies, procedures, and practices that enables an organization to achieve its goals effectively and consistently while fostering continuous improvement. In educational institutions, QMS frameworks aim to enhance instructional quality, streamline administrative processes, and improve satisfaction among key stakeholders, including students, teachers, and parents. On a global scale, ISO 21001:2018, updated in 2025, provides a comprehensive standard for educational organizations. It highlights learner-centered processes, systematic feedback mechanisms, stakeholder engagement, and evidence-based decision-making as essential drivers of quality improvement (Abu Bakar, Ismail, & Darwi, 2024). These standards encourage schools to integrate quality management principles into their daily operations rather than treating them as isolated or compliance-driven activities.

The theoretical backbone of QMS is grounded in Total Quality Management (TQM) and Systems Theory. TQM posits that achieving quality outcomes hinges on a commitment from the entire organization, active involvement from all stakeholders, and a focus on continuous improvement (Deming, 1986; Tari, 2019). Meanwhile, Systems Theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of organizational processes, suggesting that effective quality management relies on feedback loops and coordination among teaching, administrative, and support functions. When we apply these theories to schools, it becomes clear that enhancing quality isn't just the job of the administration; it involves teachers, students, and even the broader school community, fostering a comprehensive approach to educational excellence.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has implemented the National Quality Management System (NQMS), which aligns with ISO 9001:2015 standards. This system helps schools implement standardized procedures, keep proper documentation, track their performance, and involve stakeholders in quality processes (DepEd, 2021). As noted by Hernandez and Rallos (2022), the NQMS fosters a culture of quality by promoting systematic planning, thorough documentation, and regular process reviews. However, most research on Quality Management Systems (QMS) tends to focus on urban schools or higher education institutions, leaving rural areas and broader divisions largely overlooked. This creates a significant research gap, as we don't fully understand how QMS operates and affects rural school divisions, such as the City of Batac. It's essential to explore these settings to identify unique challenges, resource limitations, and localized strategies that can enhance effective quality management.

Additionally, recent studies show that while QMS frameworks such as ISO 21001 are recognized worldwide, there's a lack of empirical evidence on how these frameworks lead to real improvements in school outcomes in rural areas. Gupta and Jha (2020) point out that quality systems can drive systemic change, but without localized research, it's hard to determine how these frameworks function in schools that face resource constraints or geographic isolation. This study aims to fill that gap by investigating the implementation of QMS in the Schools Division of the City of Batac, offering insights into its relevance, adaptability, and effectiveness in a rural Philippine context.

Implementation of quality management system (QMS)

Implementing a Quality Management System (QMS) means turning policies and frameworks into real, actionable processes in schools. Research from around the globe shows that successful implementation hinges on a few key factors: strong leadership commitment, ongoing professional development, a supportive organizational culture, and the availability of resources (Al-Fawaz, Al-Amiri, & Nour, 2021; Manton & English, 2023). It's up to leaders to create an environment that prioritizes quality, inspires staff, allocates resources wisely, and weaves quality practices into the fabric of everyday operations. Rao and Gupta (2021) point out that schools with clear operating procedures, regular monitoring, and organized documentation tend to perform better and meet quality standards more consistently.

Several challenges persist in implementing QMS. Common barriers such as resistance to change, limited resources, insufficient training, and lack of stakeholder engagement are evident in both developed and developing contexts (Wibisono, 2019). In the Philippines, Santos and Cruz (2023) found that many school administrators receive limited training in QMS, resulting in superficial documentation and inconsistent quality processes. Similarly, Lopez, Santos, and Cruz (2024) observed that although many public schools implement QMS practices, internal audits are often irregular, and data-driven decision-making remains weak, thereby undermining the sustainability of quality initiatives. These findings suggest that the practical application of QMS frameworks varies significantly and is largely influenced by leadership capacity and resource availability.

Many of the earlier studies on Quality Management System (QMS) implementation have relied on cross-sectional or qualitative approaches with small sample sizes, often zooming in on individual schools or small groups. While these studies do a great job of providing detailed insights into specific situations, they fall short of generalizing findings or capturing broader dynamics and changes over time (Manton & English, 2023; Rao & Gupta, 2021). This leaves a notable gap in research regarding how QMS is rolled out across an entire school division, especially in rural areas where schools encounter distinct challenges. By focusing on the Schools Division of the City of Batac, this research aims to fill that gap, shedding light on the hurdles, strategies, and differences in implementation across various schools.

Moreover, grasping how QMS is implemented at the division level can help shape strategies to bolster leadership practices, enhance staff training, and optimize resource distribution. By examining both the successes and obstacles in the local context, this study offers valuable insights to help policymakers and school leaders tailor QMS practices for rural school divisions, ensuring that quality initiatives are not only effective but also sustainable.

Strengthening the quality management system (QMS) in schools

Strengthening a Quality Management System (QMS) is all about keeping quality practices alive and kicking long after the initial rollout. It's about nurturing a culture of continuous improvement within schools. Research from around the globe highlights the importance of professional development, stakeholder engagement, regular monitoring, and management reviews in boosting the effectiveness of QMS (Al-Fawaz et al., 2021; Manton & English, 2023). Ongoing training is key, ensuring that school leaders, teachers, and staff not only grasp quality standards but also weave them into their everyday

routines. Plus, regular feedback and internal audits create opportunities to evaluate performance, identify shortcomings, and take corrective action.

The foundation for strengthening QMS draws from Total Quality Management (TQM), systems theory, and institutional theory. TQM emphasizes continuous improvement and the involvement of all members of an organization, while systems theory highlights the interconnection of school processes. Institutional theory provides insight into why schools adopt and maintain QMS practices to comply with policy requirements, meet accreditation standards, and preserve institutional credibility (Gorostidi & Rubio-Arostegui, 2025). Together, these theoretical perspectives indicate that effective QMS implementation involves not only technical procedures but also organizational commitment and a culture that embraces quality principles.

The Philippines' Department of Education (DepEd) has implemented various mechanisms, such as annual management reviews, technical assistance programs, and surveillance audits, to help schools enhance their Quality Management System (QMS) implementation (DepEd NCR, 2023; DepEd, 2024). However, most studies focus on urban schools or specific institutions, leaving a noticeable gap in rural school divisions. This gap underscores the importance of exploring how QMS strengthening strategies function in areas like the City of Batac, where challenges such as limited resources, geographic isolation, and unique local issues can impact the sustainability of quality practices.

Additionally, improving QMS in rural schools necessitates a deep understanding of how leadership support, capacity building, and structured monitoring interact with the local context. By delving into these dynamics, this study aims to fill the research void, offering real-world evidence on effective strategies to bolster the resilience of quality management systems in schools. These insights are vital for shaping policies and interventions that foster ongoing improvement, ensuring that rural schools can meet the same quality standards as their urban peers.

Statement of the problem

This study aims to explore the experiences, challenges, and strategies of school heads in implementing the Quality Management System (QMS) in the Schools Division of the City of Batac. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What challenges do school heads encounter in the implementation of the Quality Management System (QMS) in the Schools Division of the City of Batac?
2. What strategies do school heads employ to strengthen and sustain the implementation of the QMS in their schools?
3. What recommendations do school heads propose to further enhance the effectiveness of QMS in the Schools Division of the City of Batac?

Methodology

This chapter presents the research design, sources of data, which include the locale of the study,

Research design

This study employed a descriptive phenomenological research design, which is appropriate for exploring and understanding the lived experiences of school heads in implementing the Quality Management System (Creswell, 2013; Van Manen, 2016). Phenomenology enables an in-depth examination of participants' perceptions, insights, and meanings arising from their direct involvement in QMS implementation. Through this approach, common themes related to organizational challenges, leadership practices, compliance requirements, and strategic responses were identified. This design is particularly suited to capturing the managerial, operational, and leadership realities encountered by school heads in public elementary schools.

Locale of the study

The study was conducted in the Schools Division of the City of Batac, located in Ilocos Norte. The division comprises public elementary schools that operate under the policies and standards of the Department of Education (DepEd, 2021), including the adoption of the Quality Management System. This locale provided a relevant setting for examining how QMS policies are translated into practice at the school level, considering the division's administrative structure, available resources, and contextual conditions.

Population and sampling

A total of 15 elementary school heads from the Schools Division of the City of Batac were purposively selected for this study. This sample size is consistent with phenomenological research, which seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of lived experiences rather than generalize findings (Van Manen, 2016). The participants were chosen based on their direct experience implementing QMS, enabling a comprehensive exploration of both individual and collective challenges and strategies.

Data-gathering instrument

Data were collected via an online interview questionnaire comprising open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses regarding the struggles and strategies of elementary school heads. The questionnaire was developed in alignment with the study's objectives and validated through expert review to ensure clarity, relevance, and the ability to capture rich qualitative data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The questions covered key areas such as leadership and management processes, documentation and compliance requirements, monitoring and evaluation, stakeholder involvement, and continuous improvement practices.

Data gathering procedure

Data were gathered using the online interview questionnaire. The instrument underwent expert validation to ensure clarity, relevance, and content validity, following the recommendations of Kvale and Brinkmann (2015). Revisions were made based on expert feedback to enhance the depth and clarity of the questions.

Data analysis tool

The responses were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, a rigorous and systematic approach to qualitative data analysis. This process began with familiarization, where the researcher reviewed the dataset multiple times to gain an overall understanding. In the second phase, initial codes were generated by identifying significant statements and key phrases related to the challenges and strategies of the school heads. These codes were then grouped into potential themes in the third phase, focusing on patterns that emerged across the dataset.

In the fourth phase, themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they captured the full complexity of the participants' lived experiences. The researcher revisited the data several times throughout the process to refine coding and ensure all relevant data were accounted for. During the fifth phase, the themes were clearly defined and named, capturing the essence of participants' struggles and coping strategies. Finally, in the sixth phase, a detailed narrative was constructed that linked the identified themes to the broader research questions, providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The coding process was supported by NVivo software (QSR International, 2020), which allowed for efficient data management and deeper analytical insights. To ensure the credibility of the findings, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary themes with participants to verify the accuracy of the interpretations. Inter-coder reliability was established through collaboration with a second researcher, ensuring that themes were consistently interpreted and agreed upon.

Ethical considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained electronically from all participants, who were informed of the purpose of the study, that participation was voluntary, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence (Creswell, 2013; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by assigning codes to participants and securely storing all data in password-protected and encrypted digital files.

The study adhered to the ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and justice, ensuring that participants were not harmed and that their responses were used solely for academic and research purposes (DepEd, 2021).

Data presentation and analysis

This part presents findings from structured interviews conducted with fifteen (15) elementary school heads in the Schools Division of the City of Batac, organized according to key themes identified during the interviews.

Problem 1: What challenges do school heads encounter in the implementation of the Quality Management System (QMS) in the Schools Division of the City of Batac?

Table 1. Challenges encountered by school heads in implementing the Quality Management System (QMS)

Theme	Particulars	Frequency (f)
Limited knowledge and understanding of QMS	Difficulty understanding QMS principles, processes, and documentation. Confusion in aligning standards with actual school practices.	12
Workload and time constraints	Heavy administrative and instructional responsibilities leave little time for QMS tasks.	11
Resource limitations	Insufficient financial support, lack of materials, and limited access to technology for QMS implementation.	10
Inadequate technical support and guidance	Inconsistent coaching and unclear operational instructions from higher offices.	10

Note: Data were gathered from open-ended questionnaire responses and follow-up informal interviews with fifteen elementary teachers from the Schools Division of the City of Batac.

The findings indicate that school heads in the Schools Division of the City of Batac experience the implementation of the Quality Management System (QMS) as a structured framework that, while beneficial, presents several challenges in practice. Central to their experience is the limited knowledge and understanding of QMS principles, processes, and documentation requirements ($f = 12$). Many school heads reported difficulties in interpreting QMS standards and aligning them with actual school practices. One participant noted,

“We were introduced to QMS, but many of the terms and procedures were still unfamiliar to us, so it was difficult to implement them correctly.” (SH13)

This highlights the need for structured professional development and ongoing training to enhance leadership competence in managing QMS processes (Martin et al., 2019; Miciano & Miciano, 2024). The lack of familiarity with the system underscores the importance of clear guidelines and capacity-building initiatives to ensure consistent and accurate implementation across schools.

Beyond knowledge gaps, school heads emphasized constraints related to workload and time management ($f = 11$). Administrative duties, instructional supervision, and other school management responsibilities often limited the time available for QMS-related tasks. One participant explained,

“Aside from managing the daily operations of the school, we are also required to complete several QMS documents, which adds to our workload.” (SH3)

This finding suggests the need for stronger institutional support and more effective workload distribution to enable school leaders to integrate QMS activities more efficiently into their daily routines (Karakose et al., 2024).

Resource limitations also emerged as a significant barrier ($f = 10$). Participants reported insufficient

financial support, limited access to necessary materials, and inadequate technology to facilitate QMS implementation. One school head shared,

“Implementing QMS requires proper documentation and systems, but sometimes we lack the necessary resources and equipment to support these processes.” (SH4)

These challenges indicate that effective implementation requires not only clear processes but also adequate material and technological resources to support compliance and continuous improvement (Camañero & Paglinawan, 2024; Karakose et al., 2024).

Finally, school heads highlighted inadequate technical support and guidance from higher offices as a major obstacle ($f = 10$). While QMS policies and guidelines exist, participants often struggle with unclear instructions for operationalizing them. One respondent stated,

“There are guidelines for QMS, but sometimes we need more clarification and assistance to properly implement the required processes.” (SH1)

This finding underscores the importance of regular coaching, monitoring, and feedback from division-level offices to ensure proper implementation and adherence to QMS standards (Ariani et al., 2026; Aquino, 2025).

Taken together, these findings indicate that while school heads recognize QMS as a system with clear objectives and potential benefits, its effective implementation requires structured support, adequate resources, and targeted capacity building. Successful integration depends on clear guidance, continuous professional development, sufficient resource allocation, and sustained technical support, enabling school leaders to manage administrative demands while ensuring compliance with quality management standards.

Problem 2: What strategies do school heads employ to strengthen and sustain the implementation of the Quality Management System (QMS) in their schools?

Table 2. Strategies employed by school heads to sustain Quality Management System (QMS) implementation

Theme	Particulars	Frequency (f)
Leadership and accountability	Strong leadership and personal responsibility, including regular monitoring and guidance to ensure QMS processes are consistently followed.	12
Strategic planning and prioritization	Organizing tasks, setting timelines, and planning contingencies to ensure QMS activities are executed efficiently.	11

Communication and staff engagement	Engaging staff through meetings, training, and collaborative activities to promote ownership of QMS processes.	10
Resource management	Efficient use of school resources and leveraging community or government support to maintain QMS activities.	11
Data-driven decision making	Using data from monitoring, documentation, and audits to identify gaps and implement corrective actions.	11
Continuous professional development	Providing orientation, training, and coaching for staff to improve understanding and implementation of QMS standards.	12

Note: Data were gathered from open-ended questionnaire responses and follow-up informal interviews with fifteen elementary teachers from the Schools Division of the City of Batac.

The findings reveal that school heads in the Schools Division of the City of Batac view the Quality Management System (QMS) as a useful framework for improving school processes, but they also face challenges in ensuring its consistent implementation. A key strategy that emerged is strong leadership and accountability (f = 12). Many school heads shared that taking personal responsibility and regularly checking on staff ensures that QMS procedures are followed properly. One participant said,

“I regularly check and guide the teachers and other staff to make sure all QMS procedures are properly documented and implemented in our school.” (SH1)

This shows that leadership is more than giving instructions; it’s about being actively involved and guiding the team to uphold quality standards (Ariani et al., 2026; Aquino, 2025).

Another strategy that stood out is strategic planning and prioritization (f = 11). School heads explained that breaking down tasks, setting deadlines, and planning for potential challenges helps them ensure nothing gets delayed. One shared,

“We developed a clear schedule for audits, documentation, and monitoring activities to make sure nothing is delayed or overlooked.” (SH9)

This illustrates that careful planning is essential for balancing QMS tasks alongside everyday school responsibilities (Martin et al., 2019; Miciano & Miciano, 2024).

Engaging staff and maintaining open communication were also emphasized (f = 10). School heads involved teachers in decision-making and monitoring activities, which made staff feel more responsible for QMS processes. A participant noted,

“We hold regular meetings and training sessions to make sure everyone understands their role in QMS implementation.” (SH3)

This highlights that collaboration and teamwork are vital for sustaining quality practices, as staff participation strengthens both understanding and commitment (Camañero & Paglinawan, 2024; Karakose et al., 2024).

Effective resource management was another important strategy (f = 11). School heads described using what was available in the school wisely and seeking support from the community or government when necessary. This shows that sustaining QMS isn’t just about following rules—it’s also about making the most of resources to ensure continuous operation.

Data-driven decision-making also played a big role (f = 11). School heads used monitoring results, documentation, and audit findings to identify areas needing improvement and guide corrective actions. One participant shared,

“We track all QMS activities and use the data to identify gaps and improve our processes continuously.” (SH1)

This demonstrates that having clear, evidence-based information helps schools make informed decisions and improve over time (Ariani et al., 2026; Aquino, 2025).

Finally, continuous professional development was highlighted as essential (f = 12). School heads emphasized that training, coaching, and orientation for staff help ensure everyone understands the QMS process and applies it correctly. This ongoing learning keeps the system alive and effective.

Overall, these findings suggest that implementing QMS is more than just following a set of procedures. It requires committed leadership, careful planning, staff involvement, efficient use of resources, attention to data, and ongoing learning. School heads see QMS as a practical tool that can improve their schools, but one that works best when leaders are actively engaged, staff are involved, and support is available at every step.

Problem 3: What recommendations do school heads propose to further enhance the effectiveness of the Quality Management System (QMS) in the Schools Division of the City of Batac?

Table 3. Recommended strategies to sustain QMS implementation

Theme	Particulars	Frequency (f)
Continuous staff training and capacity building	Conducting regular workshops, refresher courses, and targeted training sessions for teachers and administrative staff to ensure consistent understanding and compliance with QMS standards.	13

Systematic auditing and data-driven monitoring	Implementing periodic audits, performance tracking, and monitoring of compliance to identify gaps and support continuous improvement.	12
Integration of QMS into school operations and digital documentation	Incorporating QMS procedures into daily administrative routines and using digital platforms for records, reports, and monitoring activities.	12
Strengthened leadership and stakeholder collaboration	Enhancing leadership practices and fostering collaboration with teachers, parents, and the Schools Division Office to ensure accountability and sustained compliance.	11
Strategic planning and prioritization	Organizing tasks, setting timelines, and planning contingencies to ensure efficient execution of QMS activities.	11
Resource management	Efficiently using available school resources and leveraging community or government support to maintain QMS activities.	11

Note: Data were gathered from open-ended questionnaire responses and follow-up informal interviews with fifteen elementary teachers from the Schools Division of the City of Batac.

The findings of this study reveal that school heads in the Schools Division of the City of Batac consider the Quality Management System (QMS) a valuable framework for improving school processes. They recognize, however, that sustaining QMS requires deliberate effort, strategic action, and active engagement from all stakeholders. Among the strategies identified, continuous staff training and capacity building emerged as the most emphasized ($f = 13$). School heads explained that regular workshops, refresher courses, and targeted training sessions help both teachers and administrative staff understand their responsibilities in implementing QMS. As one participant shared,

“Continuous training for both teachers and administrative staff will help maintain QMS standards and ensure everyone knows their responsibilities” (SH1).

This demonstrates that professional development is essential for maintaining competence and confidence in managing quality standards, reflecting the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM), which emphasize continuous improvement and the involvement of all personnel (Ariani et al., 2026; Miciano & Miciano, 2024).

Another key strategy highlighted was systematic auditing and data-driven monitoring ($f = 12$). School heads noted that conducting periodic audits, tracking performance, and monitoring compliance enables them to identify gaps early and implement timely corrective actions. One participant explained,

“Periodic auditing and reviewing our QMS processes allow us to correct errors early and improve our system consistently” (SH2).

This finding underscores the importance of evidence-based oversight in sustaining QMS, demonstrating

how ongoing evaluation strengthens accountability and ensures the reliability of school processes (Martin et al., 2019; Karakose et al., 2024).

Integration of QMS into daily school operations and the use of digital documentation were also highlighted as effective strategies ($f = 12$). Participants observed that embedding QMS procedures into routine administrative tasks, along with digital record-keeping, reduces errors and simplifies compliance. One respondent explained,

“Integrating QMS processes into our daily routines and using digital platforms for documentation will make compliance easier and reduce errors” (SH11).

This illustrates how aligning workflows and utilizing technology can make QMS more manageable, sustainable, and transparent (Aquino, 2025; Camañero & Paglinawan, 2024).

Strengthened leadership and stakeholder collaboration emerged as another critical strategy ($f = 11$). School heads emphasized that actively engaging teachers, parents, and division-level officials fosters understanding, accountability, and shared responsibility in maintaining QMS standards. As one participant remarked,

“Leadership must actively engage teachers, parents, and division officials to ensure QMS processes are understood and sustained” (SH4).

This aligns with institutional theory, which explains that compliance and sustainability are influenced by leadership practices, organizational culture, and engagement with key stakeholders (Ariani et al., 2026; Karakose et al., 2024).

Strategic planning and prioritization were also recognized as essential ($f = 11$). School heads described the importance of organizing tasks, establishing clear timelines, and anticipating potential challenges to ensure that QMS activities are executed efficiently. One participant shared,

“We developed a clear schedule for audits, documentation, and monitoring activities to make sure nothing is delayed or overlooked” (SH14).

This demonstrates that careful planning allows leaders to balance QMS responsibilities with day-to-day administrative and instructional tasks, reflecting systems theory, which highlights the interdependence of organizational processes (Martin et al., 2019; Miciano & Miciano, 2024).

Finally, resource management and data-driven decision-making were identified as critical strategies ($f = 11$). School heads emphasized the need to make efficient use of available resources, leverage community and government support, and use monitoring and audit data to inform corrective actions. One participant noted,

“We track all QMS activities and use the data to identify gaps and improve our processes continuously”

These findings demonstrate that practical resource management, coupled with evidence-based decision-making, is essential for sustaining QMS and supporting consistent quality improvement.

The findings show that school heads in the Schools Division of the City of Batac view the Quality Management System (QMS) as a valuable framework for improving school processes, but sustaining it requires strategic action, active leadership, and stakeholder engagement. Key strategies, including staff training, systematic audits, digital integration, strategic planning, and resource management, illustrate how Total Quality Management (TQM), systems theory, and institutional theory intersect in practice. This provides empirical support for the applicability of these frameworks in Philippine elementary schools and highlights the importance of aligning processes, leadership, and organizational culture to sustain QMS.

Practically, sustaining QMS requires structured support, stakeholder collaboration, and evidence-based decision-making. Policy recommendations include regular professional development, scheduled audits, integration of the QMS into daily operations, strategic planning, and efficient use of resources. Implementing these measures can strengthen QMS, foster a culture of continuous improvement, and improve overall school performance and accountability.

Results and discussion

The study reveals that while the Quality Management System (QMS) is recognized in the Schools Division of the City of Batac as a structured and beneficial framework, its implementation remains challenging for school heads. Major difficulties include limited understanding of QMS principles, heavy workloads, resource constraints, and inconsistent technical support from higher offices. These challenges highlight that effective QMS implementation requires not just compliance but also competence, adequate resources, and sustained guidance (Martin et al., 2019; Miciano & Miciano, 2024). To cope, school heads employ strategies such as strong leadership, strategic planning, staff engagement, efficient resource use, data-driven decision-making, and continuous professional development, demonstrating how leadership and collaboration are critical in sustaining quality management practices (Ariani et al., 2026; Karakose et al., 2024).

This study contributes to the literature by providing context-specific insights into QMS implementation in Philippine elementary schools, illustrating how TQM, systems theory, and institutional theory operate in practice (Camañero & Paglinawan, 2024). Policy implications include the need for sustained capacity-building programs, enhanced technical support, adequate resources, integration of QMS into daily operations, workload rationalization, and stronger stakeholder collaboration (Aquino, 2025).

Limitations include the small sample size, focus on a single division, reliance on self-reported data, and exclusion of other stakeholders, which may limit generalizability. Future research should include larger, more diverse samples, gather perspectives from teachers and learners, explore digital tools in QMS implementation, assess long-term effects on student outcomes, and examine the sustainability of QMS

Conclusion

The study revealed that school heads in the Schools Division of the City of Batac encounter several challenges in implementing the Quality Management System (QMS). Key obstacles include limited knowledge and understanding of QMS principles, heavy workloads that compete with daily administrative and instructional duties, insufficient resources, and inconsistent technical support from higher offices. These challenges often make it difficult for school heads to fully comply with QMS standards and maintain consistent documentation and monitoring processes.

To address these challenges, school heads implemented a range of strategies to strengthen QMS implementation. These included exercising strong leadership and accountability, applying strategic planning to prioritize tasks, actively engaging staff in QMS processes, optimizing available resources, and using audit and monitoring data to inform decision-making. Collectively, these strategies enabled schools to sustain QMS practices, promote continuous improvement, and integrate quality standards into daily operations.

Participants also proposed practical recommendations to sustain QMS implementation over time. These included continuous professional development for teachers and administrative staff, regular and systematic audits of QMS processes, integration of QMS procedures into daily operations through digital tools, and strengthened collaboration with stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and division-level officials. These measures aim to ensure consistency, enhance staff competence, and reinforce accountability across schools.

Overall, the findings highlight that effective QMS implementation depends on strong institutional support, targeted training, and evidence-based monitoring. When these elements are in place, schools can improve operational efficiency, strengthen staff capacity, and foster a culture of continuous quality improvement. It is therefore recommended that the Schools Division Office provide sustained technical assistance and structured training programs to support school heads and teachers in effectively implementing QMS.

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