

The Operational Practices of Selected Private Higher Education Institutions in Agusan Del Norte

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ABSTRACT

This research intended to study the operational practices of selected private higher education institutions in Agusan del Norte. Specifically, it sought to determine the extent to which operational practices are observed by the HEIs in the areas of: forecasting, enrolment promotional activities, capacity planning and expansion, and facilities and equipment upgrading. Using the descriptive survey method and with the aid of a researcher-made questionnaire, the following findings were established: 1) the practices of HEIs in the areas of forecasting, enrolment and promotional activities, and capacity planning and expansion were rated to a great extent, while the facilities and equipment upgrading was rated to a very great extent; 2) there is no significant difference in responses among schools using Friedman's test; and 3) there is a significant difference in certain areas between positions of respondents using ANOVA test.

KEYWORDS

Higher Education Institution (HEI); operational practices; school facilities; educational services

INTRODUCTION

Today's school administrators are confronted daily with various concerns ranging from academics to operational issues. Academic issues normally include compliance with regulatory agency standards, student performance outcomes, faculty, and others that concern the delivery of the service—which is teaching. On the other hand, operational issues include maintenance and upgrade of school facilities, enrollment promotional activities, administrative office support for the teaching force and employees and so on (Stevenson, 2017).

To deliver its expected service, schools are divided into two basic functional groups: the Academics group (in charge of direct interaction with the students thru the teaching force) and the Support group (composed of the Accounting, Human Resource, Logistics and other offices necessary to ensure unhampered services to all employees and students) (Collins, 2019).

Contrary to popular belief that a school's greatest asset is its teaching force, this group cannot function as it should without the assistance from the Support group (Collins, 2019). While the Academic group has its problems, the Support group has also its fair share of the problems. The problems from both groups often intertwine with each other and adversely affect the outcome of the school's services (Baillie & Gordon, 2017).

While many studies have been conducted on the Academic group's concerns, very few studies dealing with the operational side of schools have been facilitated (google scholar). This gap is more apparent in the area where this study is to be conducted—Agusan del Norte, where no study has been made. It is in this context that the researcher intends to initiate a

study on the concerns of the operational side of a school, its implication to the delivery of their service and develop proposals to improve it.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research adopted a descriptive survey design, which aimed to gather quantitative and qualitative data on the operational practices of private higher education institutions (HEIs) in Agusan del Norte. The primary data-gathering instrument was a researcher-developed questionnaire, complemented by online interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). These additional methods were employed to clarify responses, validate information provided by participants, and obtain deeper insights into institutional practices.

Locale of the Study

The investigation was carried out among selected private HEIs located in Agusan del Norte, a province situated in the Caraga Region of Mindanao, Philippines. Geographically, Agusan del Norte lies in the western section of Caraga. It is bordered by Butuan Bay to the northwest, Surigao del Norte to the northeast, Surigao del Sur to the mid-east, Agusan del Sur to the southeast, and Misamis Oriental to the southwest.

The province has a total land area of approximately 2,730.24 square kilometers (1,054.15 square miles). If the independent city of Butuan is included for geographical reference, the area extends to 3,546.86 square kilometers (1,369.45 square miles). The central lowland of the province encompasses the lower basin of the Agusan River, the third longest river in the Philippines, which flows northward into Butuan Bay. Consequently, the landscape ranges from flat and rolling terrain near the river basin to mountainous regions along the northeast and western portions. The northern boundary is home to Lake Mainit, the fourth-largest lake in the country, which lies adjacent to Surigao del Norte.

The province was established as a separate political entity in 1967 under Republic Act No. 4979, which divided the former Agusan province into Agusan del Norte and Agusan del Sur. At present, Agusan del Norte comprises ten municipalities and one component city, with a total of 253 barangays (including Butuan City). The City of Cabadbaran serves as the official provincial capital as mandated by Republic Act No. 8811. Although Butuan is geographically part of Agusan del Norte, it operates independently as a highly urbanized city.

The transfer of the provincial government seat from Butuan to Cabadbaran was formally declared on August 16, 2000, pursuant to Republic Act No. 8811. Cabadbaran was later converted into a component city through Republic Act No. 9494, which was ratified on July 28, 2007. Despite legal challenges, the city's status was reaffirmed by the Supreme Court on February 15, 2011, declaring the cityhood law constitutional.

According to the 2020 Philippine Census, Agusan del Norte had a population of 387,503, ranking as the 64th most populous province in the country with a population density of 140 persons per square kilometer. When Butuan City is included for demographic purposes, the population reaches 691,566, yielding a density of 195 persons per square kilometer (510 per square mile).

The Cebuano language is predominantly spoken in the province, while Tagalog and English are widely used for government, education, and business purposes. Indigenous groups continue to preserve their native dialects, while migrants from Luzon and the Visayas maintain their respective ethnic languages within local communities.

Economically, Agusan del Norte is primarily agricultural, producing major crops such as rice, corn, coconut, abaca, banana, and mango. The province is also notable for its renewable

energy facilities, including the 24.9 MW Lake Mainit Hydropower Plant and the 8 MW Asiga Hydropower Plant, which provide electricity to the province and nearby areas.

As of Academic Year 2022–2023, the province hosts a total of 20 recognized higher education institutions, of which 2 are public and 18 are privately operated. These institutions play a vital role in promoting tertiary education and workforce development in the Caraga Region.

Table 1. HEIs in Agusan del Norte

Public	Private		Total
SUC	Non-sectarian	Sectarian	
2	14	4	20

For purposes of confidentiality, the schools were not identified by their registered names; instead, it was designated by capital letters of the alphabet. While the researcher endeavored to get as many respondent-schools to get involved in this study, only five signified their intention to participate.

School A

Founded in 1971, this is a private higher-education institution located in Butuan City, Agusan del Norte. It offers basic elementary, junior high school, senior high school, college and graduate studies.

School B

This HEI was founded and established in 1967. This is a private institution that offers elementary, junior high school, senior high school and college. It is located in Nasipit, Agusan del Norte.

School C

It was immediately after the Second World War that a handful of enterprising and public-spirited Cabadbaranons founded the school on March 15, 1946. This HEI offers basic education, college, TESDA programs and graduate studies. It is located in Cabadbaran City.

School D

This is a private Catholic institution established on July 1, 1948. It is run by the Diocese of Butuan. It offers elementary, and junior high school education and college. It is located in Nasipit, Agusan del Norte.

School E

This is a Filipino, Catholic, diocesan educational institution founded on October 21, 1901. It offers elementary, junior high school, senior high school, undergraduate and graduate programs. For this study, a total of 78 selected personnel from the target HEI's in Agusan del Norte will comprise the respondents. They will be grouped according to their position in the school as VP, Dean, or Department Head. They will comprise the total universe of the study.

Table 2. Shows the listing of the Research Respondents (n=78)

School Classification	Name of School	VP	DEAN	DEPT. HEAD	Total	%
Non-sectarian	A	5	6	6	17	22
	B	4	5	5	14	18
	C	5	6	6	17	22
Sectarian	D	5	6	5	16	20
	E	4	5	5	14	18
Total		23	28	27	78	100

A researcher-made questionnaire served as the main tool for data collection. After the questionnaire was formulated and verified, copies were submitted to the panel during the proposal hearing for review and improvement.

A dry-run was made to test its validity. It was answered by 17 people who were school administrators but were not part of the official respondents of this study.

The first part of the survey questionnaire focused on the profile of the respondents. The second part focused on the operational effect of the school to deliver its services in the areas of forecasting, enrolment promotional activities, capacity planning and expansion, facilities planning and upgrading.

Each item in the questionnaire had a corresponding numerical and qualitative scale as follows:

Scale	Description	Interpretation
4	Very Great Extent (VGE)	means that this has a <u>great positive effect</u> on the delivery of the school's services
3	Great Extent (GE)	means that this has a <u>positive effect</u> on the delivery of the school's services.
2	Less Extent (LE)	means that this has a <u>slight or moderate positive effect</u> on the school's services.
1	No Extent (NE)	means that this has a <u>negative effect</u> on the school's services.

Description Equivalency

- The higher the figure, the better the result
- The lower the figure, the lower the result

Very Great Extent (VGE) = Strongly Agree (SA)
 Great Extent (GE) = Agree (A)
 Less Extent (LE) = Moderately Agree (MA)
 No Extent (NE) = Disagree (D)

Data collection was conducted using google forms, through email, and in some instances, video conferencing was also used. The data gathered from the questionnaire were tallied, tabulated, and presented in tables. These were recorded according to the frequencies and corresponding percentages. To compute the percentage, the researcher divided the frequency of each factor by the number of respondents and multiplied by 100.

This is the formula used:

$$P = f / nx100$$

Where:

P = Percentage
 f = frequency
 n = number of respondents
 100 = constant number used as multiplier

The researcher computed the weighted average, using the formula:

$$\mu = \sum fx / n$$

Where:

μ = weighted average
 \sum = summation notation
 f = number of responses under each scale

x = weight assigned to each scale
 n = number of respondents

To make a definite understanding regarding the weighted average the proposed average range with the interpretation and equivalents was used.

RANGE	DESCRIPTION
3.26 - 4.00	Very Great Extent (VGE)
2.51 - 3.25	Great Extent (GE)
1.76 - 2.50	Less Extent (ME)
1.00 - 1.75	No Extent (NE)

To check the validity of the statement of the null hypothesis, it was subjected to the following test:

1) For significant difference among schools, Friedman's test was conducted with the use of an on-line statistics calculator based on the formula:

$$F_r = \frac{12}{nk(k+1)} \left(\sum_{j=1}^k R_j^2 \right) - 3n(k+1)$$

Where:

- n = Number of independent blocks or rows
- K = Number of groups or treatment levels or columns
- R_j=Sum of ranks from column 1

2) For significant difference according to positions, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was done, based on the data gathered using the minitab software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study concerning the operational practices of selected private higher education institutions (HEIs) in Agusan del Norte. The discussion integrates statistical results with theoretical interpretation to provide a coherent understanding of the data.

Overview of Results

The study examined four core operational domains—forecasting, enrollment promotional activities, capacity planning and expansion, and facilities and equipment upgrading. Table 1 presents the overall weighted means for each area based on responses from vice presidents, deans, and department heads.

Table 1. Summary of Operational Practices by Area

Operational Area	Vice President (WM)	Dean (WM)	Department Head (WM)	Overall Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Forecasting	3.24	3.19	2.74	3.05	Great Extent
Enrollment Promotional Activities	3.15	3.05	2.81	3.01	Great Extent
Capacity Planning & Expansion	2.59	2.50	2.46	2.52	Great Extent (Low)
Facilities & Equipment Upgrading	3.44	3.28	3.16	3.29	Very Great Extent
Average	-	-	-	2.97	Great Extent

The data reveal that facilities and equipment upgrading obtained the highest mean (3.29), indicating very strong institutional commitment to maintaining physical and technological resources. Forecasting and promotional activities were rated to a *great extent*, suggesting that these are regularly conducted but may lack advanced data-driven methods. Capacity planning and expansion recorded the lowest rating, highlighting a gap in proactive space and resource management among the institutions.

Forecasting Practices

The findings show that all participating HEIs conduct enrollment forecasting primarily through administrative meetings and historical trend analysis. However, projections are often based on modest percentage increments (1–2%) rather than comprehensive market research or demographic modeling. This approach results in stable yet conservative estimates of enrollment growth.

The involvement of key personnel such as marketing heads and deans in the forecasting process was reported to a *great extent* (WM = 3.08), but department heads—mainly from non-teaching sectors—registered lower awareness. The results affirm that while forecasting systems exist, they are not fully institutionalized as a strategic management tool.

Accurate forecasting enables schools to plan for faculty loading, classroom allocation, and financial budgeting effectively (Heizer & Render, 2011). The limited use of statistical modeling and predictive analytics among HEIs in Agusan del Norte suggests a need for enhanced capacity-building in data-based decision making.

Enrollment Promotional Activities

Enrollment promotional activities were implemented to a *great extent* (overall mean = 3.01). Most institutions use traditional outreach programs, such as school visits, flyers, and open-house events. However, focus group discussions revealed that these efforts are typically managed by ad hoc committees rather than dedicated marketing offices.

Budget constraints and lack of full-time marketing staff were identified as barriers to consistent promotional initiatives. This supports Kotler and Frey’s (2019) argument that sustainable marketing requires professional oversight and alignment with institutional strategy. The absence of structured marketing plans among many HEIs indicates a potential area for reform, particularly in leveraging digital platforms and analytics for recruitment.

Capacity Planning and Expansion

Capacity planning and expansion received the lowest weighted mean (2.52), implying limited formal processes for managing increases or decreases in enrollment. Respondents reported that few institutions conduct regular facility reviews or maintain updated capacity plans.

Table 2. Summary of Capacity Planning Practices

Indicator	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Existence of updated capacity plan	2.62	Great Extent (Low)
Alignment with enrollment forecasts	2.57	Great Extent (Low)
Inclusion of temporary learning areas	2.53	Great Extent (Low)
Existence of long-term expansion plan	2.48	Moderate Extent
Overall Mean	2.52	Great Extent (Low)

The limited attention to capacity planning indicates that most HEIs are reactive rather than proactive in responding to fluctuations in student population. Barrett et al. (2019) emphasize that inadequate space management can hinder learning efficiency and

institutional image. Institutions are therefore encouraged to adopt integrated planning models linking enrollment projections with infrastructure development.

Facilities and Equipment Upgrading

Among the four domains, *facilities and equipment upgrading* achieved the highest mean (3.29, *Very Great Extent*). Respondents consistently agreed that their institutions maintain clean, functional, and technologically equipped environments. Regular maintenance, computer updates, and reliable internet connectivity were cited as key strengths.

Table 3. Facilities and Equipment Upgrading Summary

Indicator	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Maintenance of classrooms, labs, and utilities	3.38	Very Great Extent
Regular maintenance of IT equipment	3.52	Very Great Extent
Reliable internet connectivity	3.03	Great Extent
Presence of emergency back-up systems	3.26	Great Extent
Adequate number of maintenance personnel	3.28	Great Extent
Overall Mean	3.29	Very Great Extent

These findings validate the notion that physical and technological readiness significantly influence institutional reputation and student satisfaction (University of Oregon, 2022). Investments in infrastructure have become central to competitive positioning, particularly in the post-pandemic context where digital learning environments are essential.

Tests of Significant Difference

Using Friedman’s test, the study found **no significant difference** among the five HEIs across all operational domains ($p > 0.05$). This suggests a generally uniform level of operational implementation across schools in the province.

However, the ANOVA results revealed **significant differences among respondent positions**, particularly between vice presidents and department heads ($p < 0.05$) in forecasting and facilities management. The differences may be attributed to the varying levels of administrative responsibility and access to operational data.

These statistical findings reinforce the argument that institutional hierarchy influences operational awareness (Kuru & Pasek, 2016). Senior administrators, who oversee multiple departments, tend to have a broader understanding of planning and forecasting, whereas department heads often focus on immediate functional concerns.

The results collectively indicate that private HEIs in Agusan del Norte perform relatively well in operational management but remain short of the *high-performing organization (HIPO)* model proposed by Collins (2005). The “great extent” ratings suggest functionality but not optimal efficiency.

Forecasting and promotional activities demonstrate commitment but require modernization through data analytics and targeted marketing. Capacity planning emerges as a strategic weakness, revealing an underdeveloped link between enrollment forecasting and infrastructure development. On the other hand, facilities and equipment upgrading stands out as a key strength, reflecting institutions’ investment in tangible assets over process-oriented systems.

Overall, these findings align with the broader discourse in higher education management, which underscores the need for operational agility, evidence-based planning, and integration of business principles into educational administration (Bhalla et al., 2011; Breen, 2019). By addressing the gaps identified, private HEIs in Agusan del Norte can enhance their competitiveness and long-term sustainability.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the key areas discussed in this study were only practiced by the respondents to a great extent as shown by their weighted mean rating of 2.97. This means that there is still a lot of room that can still be improved especially in the context of updated knowledge and best practices.

The results also confirm the theory of Jim Collins (2005) who posited that schools should be run like a *high-performing-organization (HIPO)* where every good quality of a great business that applies to an independent school is captured in the idea of a high-performing-organization. The concept being that schools run like a HIPO are better positioned to withstand any abrupt changes in the environment without disrupting and affecting the quality of their services and the schools' primary vision and mission.

Recommendations

To improve the practice of HEIs in Agusan del Norte, the researcher highly recommends the following:

Primary Recommendation

Implement the proposals outlined in Chapter IV of this study in order to improve the delivery of services by running like a HIPO.

Secondary Recommendations:

1. HEI's to conduct benchmarking and adopt / replicate the best practices from industries and refine it to meet their needs.
2. Initiate a study aimed at rationalizing needed infrastructure support from the government for HEIs in Agusan del Norte.

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