

Original Article

Governance and Operational Challenges of Converted and Established Farm Schools in the Philippines

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Abstract. This study examined governance practices, leadership challenges, and operational strategies in converted and newly established farm schools in Negros Occidental, Philippines. Employing a mixed-method descriptive design, the study integrated quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis of school governance across financial, human, and physical resource domains. Findings reveal that both converted and newly established farm schools demonstrate consistently high levels of perceived governance across all domains. Although mean score differences indicate slight advantages for converted farm schools—particularly in resource stability and institutional continuity—both groups remain within the same interpretive category of “very high”. Qualitative results identified three major challenges: financial constraints and limited fiscal autonomy; deficiencies in human capital, characterized by staffing shortages and limited specialization; and inadequacies in physical infrastructure and agricultural resources. Despite these constraints, both school types consistently reported strong reliance on stakeholder partnerships to sustain operations, mobilize resources, and promote agricultural innovation. The study concludes that while governance practices in farm schools are generally strong, structural and resource-related limitations still constrain them. It recommends differentiated policy interventions: sustainability and system enhancement measures for converted farm schools, and foundational support in staffing, infrastructure, and financial stability for newly established farm schools. These findings offer context-specific insights for strengthening agricultural education governance in rural Philippine settings.

Keywords: *Agricultural education; Comparative analysis; Educational leadership; Farm schools; Negros Occidental, Philippines; Operational challenges; Rural education; School governance; Stakeholder partnerships.*

Agriculture remains a backbone of the Philippine economy, contributing significantly to employment generation, food security, and rural livelihood sustainability. The Philippine Statistics Authority (2023) reports that a substantial proportion of the national labor force remains engaged in agriculture, underscoring its continued relevance in national development. In Negros Occidental—widely known as the “Sugar Bowl of the Philippines”—agriculture serves not only as an economic driver but also as a socio-cultural foundation that sustains rural communities and local development systems.

In response to persistent challenges in rural development and agricultural modernization, the Philippine government institutionalized agricultural education through Republic Act No. 10618, or the Rural Farm Schools Act. This policy established farm schools as alternative learning environments integrating academic instruction

with agricultural competencies and livelihood skills development. This initiative aligns with the global framework of Education for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2022), which emphasizes education as a driver of sustainable livelihoods, environmental stewardship, and inclusive rural transformation.

Despite these policy advancements, both global and local evidence indicate that rural and agricultural education systems continue to face persistent governance and implementation challenges. Schools operating in resource-constrained contexts often experience inadequate funding, limited institutional capacity, and weak access to learning resources, all of which negatively affect educational quality and outcomes (OECD, 2023). In school improvement literature, such constraints are strongly associated with governance effectiveness and leadership capacity, particularly in contexts characterized by uncertainty and resource scarcity (Hallinger, 2021; Bush & Glover, 2021).

Resource Dependence Theory provides a useful lens for understanding these challenges, arguing that organizational survival depends on the ability to secure and manage external resources such as funding, personnel, and institutional partnerships (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). In education systems, this implies that school leaders must strategically navigate external dependencies to sustain operations. Complementing this, contemporary leadership theories emphasize that effective school leadership mitigates resource constraints through adaptive governance, strategic decision-making, and organizational learning (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020). Together, these perspectives highlight that governance outcomes are shaped not only by resource availability but also by leadership capacity.

In agricultural education settings, these challenges are further intensified. Rural and technical-vocational institutions often experience shortages of qualified teachers, weak industry linkages, and limited access to modern agricultural technologies required for competency-based learning (FAO, 2022; UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2023). These systemic constraints highlight the need for context-responsive governance strategies tailored to rural education realities.

A critical yet underexplored dimension in the literature is the institutional distinction between converted farm schools and newly established farm schools. In this study, converted farm schools refer to previously existing public schools repurposed to implement agricultural education under the Rural Farm Schools Act, inheriting existing infrastructure, personnel, and administrative systems. In contrast, newly established farm schools are institutions created specifically to implement the farm school model and often begin with limited infrastructure, personnel, and organizational systems. Organizational life-cycle theory suggests that such institutional histories significantly influence governance capacity, resource access, and operational stability (Quinn & Cameron, 1983; Bryk et al., 2021). Converted schools may benefit from institutional maturity and embedded systems, while newly established schools face developmental constraints and start-up vulnerabilities.

However, despite these theoretical insights, empirical evidence systematically comparing governance structures, leadership practices, and operational challenges between these two school types in localized Philippine contexts remains limited. Existing studies generally treat farm schools as a homogeneous group, overlooking institutional variation that may shape governance outcomes. This gap is significant within systems theory in education, which conceptualizes schools as open systems influenced by internal leadership dynamics and external environmental pressures (Bush & Glover, 2021). Without differentiated evidence, policy interventions risk adopting uniform strategies that fail to address structural inequalities between institution types.

Anchored on Resource Dependence Theory, Leadership Theory, and Organizational Life-Cycle Theory, this study examines governance, leadership, and operational challenges in converted and newly established farm schools in Negros Occidental. It focuses on financial, human, and physical resource management, as well as leadership practices and stakeholder engagement mechanisms that shape institutional sustainability. By systematically comparing both school types, the study contributes to a more nuanced, systems-based understanding of agricultural education governance in rural contexts. The findings aim to inform differentiated policy interventions, resource allocation strategies, and leadership development programs to strengthen farm school implementation in the Philippines. Specifically, this study answers the following research questions: (1) What are the governance practices and operational challenges of converted and newly established farm schools across financial, human, and physical resource domains? (2) How do these institutional types compare in terms of governance effectiveness? and (3) What context-responsive strategies can be proposed based on the findings?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods descriptive design to examine the governance, leadership, and operational challenges of farm schools in Negros Occidental, Philippines. This design was appropriate because it integrates quantitative descriptive comparisons and qualitative thematic exploration to generate a more comprehensive understanding of institutional differences between converted and newly established farm schools. The quantitative strand provided measurable comparisons of governance indicators, while the qualitative strand captured in-depth experiences of school leaders and key stakeholders. Both datasets were analyzed independently and then merged for interpretation to identify convergence and divergence of findings.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The study employed total enumeration sampling to ensure full coverage of all key stakeholders directly involved in the governance and implementation of farm schools in Negros Occidental. This approach included all accessible and relevant participants across the province: 13 school heads, 10 farm school coordinators, and 10 division focal persons, for a total sample size of $N = 33$. By including the entire population of identified key actors within the farm school system, the study minimized sampling bias. It ensured representation of the full range of administrative and operational perspectives.

The unit of analysis varied depending on the strand of data. For the quantitative component, the unit of analysis was the school-level governance rating as reported by respondent groups, allowing for comparison of perceived governance practices across institutions. For the qualitative component, the unit of analysis was the individual lived experience narratives of school heads, coordinators, and division focal persons, focusing on their firsthand accounts of governance, leadership practices, and operational challenges in farm schools. In addition, participants were systematically categorized into converted farm schools and newly established farm schools, in accordance with the Department of Education classification under the implementation of Republic Act No. 10618 (the Rural Farm Schools Act). This categorization enabled a comparative analysis of governance structures and operational experiences based on institutional origin, thereby strengthening the study's capacity to examine contextual differences between the two types of farm schools.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a researcher-developed mixed-methods instrument designed to gather quantitative and qualitative data on farm school governance, leadership, and operational practices. The instrument consisted of two complementary components. The first component was a structured questionnaire that measured governance practices across three key domains: financial resource governance, human resource governance, and physical resource governance. Responses used a 5-point Likert scale to indicate the extent to which farm schools implemented governance practices. The scale was interpreted as follows: 4.49–5.00 (Very High), 3.50–4.49 (High), 2.50–3.49 (Moderate), 1.50–2.49 (Low), and 1.00–1.49 (Very Low). This rating scale provided a standardized basis for describing and comparing governance practices between converted and newly established farm schools.

The second component of the instrument was a semi-structured interview guide developed from existing literature on educational governance, school leadership, agricultural education, and rural development. The interview protocol explored participants' experiences and perspectives regarding governance and resource management practices, leadership and operational challenges, and stakeholder engagement and resource mobilization strategies. The semi-structured format allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences while ensuring that all major research domains were consistently addressed during the interviews.

Validity and Reliability

The research instrument's validity and reliability were established to ensure the credibility, consistency, and accuracy of the data collected. Content validity was determined through expert evaluation by three specialists in educational leadership and agricultural education. The experts reviewed the questionnaire and interview guide for clarity, relevance, appropriateness, and alignment with the study objectives. The researchers carefully considered and incorporated their recommendations into the final version of the instrument, resulting in revisions that enhanced the comprehensibility, contextual relevance, and overall quality of the research tools.

Before data collection, a pilot test was conducted with eight respondents not included in the final sample. The pilot testing process aimed to assess the clarity of the instructions and items, determine the appropriateness of the questions, and estimate the time required for completion. Feedback from pilot participants led to minor modifications to the wording and sequencing of several items to improve clarity and ease of understanding.

To establish the reliability of the quantitative instrument, internal consistency testing was performed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87, exceeding the generally accepted threshold of 0.70 and indicating high internal consistency among the questionnaire items. This result suggests the instrument reliably measured the governance constructs under investigation and was appropriate for assessing financial, human, and physical resource governance practices in farm schools. Collectively, the expert validation, pilot testing, and reliability assessment provided evidence that the research instrument was both valid and dependable for the study.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis procedure followed a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative descriptive analysis and qualitative thematic interpretation. For the quantitative strand, data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically mean and standard deviation, to compare governance practices between converted and newly established farm schools across financial, human, and physical resource domains. Results were interpreted using a 5-point Likert scale to provide standardized qualitative descriptors of governance levels. No inferential statistical tests were conducted, as the study did not aim to test hypotheses or establish causal relationships, but rather to describe and compare prevailing governance conditions across the two school types.

For the qualitative strand, data were analyzed using thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. This involved familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts, generating initial codes, searching for emerging themes, reviewing and refining themes, defining and naming final themes, and producing the narrative report. All interview data were transcribed verbatim and anonymized to protect participant confidentiality and ensure ethical handling of sensitive information.

The study used a triangulation approach to integrate quantitative and qualitative findings during interpretation. This involved comparing statistical patterns from the quantitative data with themes derived from interview narratives to provide a more comprehensive explanation of governance, leadership, and operational patterns across converted and newly established farm schools. This integration validated and enriched findings by identifying areas of convergence and divergence between numerical trends and lived experiences.

To ensure trustworthiness and rigor in the qualitative component, the study used member checking, in which participants reviewed and validated summarized interpretations of their responses to ensure accuracy and credibility. In addition, two independent coders analyzed 30% of the transcripts to establish inter-coder reliability, yielding a Cohen's Kappa coefficient of 0.85, indicating strong agreement and high consistency in thematic coding. For the quantitative component, rigor was ensured through a validated instrument and reliability testing, supporting the consistency and dependability of the measured constructs.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are central to this research, ensuring study integrity and protecting participants' rights. Strict ethical standards were upheld throughout every phase of the research to safeguard the dignity, rights, and confidentiality of all respondents. Before data collection began, the researcher secured approval from the relevant Ethical Review Board and obtained the necessary permissions from the Schools Division Office of Negros Occidental. Each participant received an Informed Consent Form clearly outlining the purpose of the study, their role and rights, the procedures involved, any potential risks and benefits, and assurances of confidentiality. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed that they could withdraw at any time without penalty or negative consequences. Participants' identities were protected through pseudonyms and codes in all data records and reporting. Any identifying details—such as school names, locations, or personal information—were removed or modified to prevent unintended identification. All collected data, including questionnaires, interview transcripts, and recordings, were stored securely in password-protected digital files accessible only to the researcher. All data were handled with the utmost confidentiality, in line with established data privacy standards. The researcher is committed to securely storing the data for six months following the completion of the study, after which all identifiable information will be safely destroyed. Audio recordings and

transcripts were encrypted and kept on protected storage devices. The researcher ensured that participation did not cause harm or impose undue burden on respondents. During interviews, participants could decline to answer any questions they found sensitive or uncomfortable. If anyone chose to withdraw, their data would be excluded, and their decision would be fully respected without any penalty. The study protocol was submitted to and approved by a recognized Research Ethics Committee, confirming that the research adhered to ethical standards. This external review validated that the study minimized risks, maintained voluntary participation, guaranteed data privacy, and respected participants' rights. The researcher also maintained cultural sensitivity throughout the research process, ensuring that language, approach, and interactions were respectful and considerate of the local context in Negros Occidental.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the descriptive comparison of governance practices between converted and established farm schools in Negros Occidental in terms of financial, human, and physical resources. The analysis is based on mean and standard deviation values derived from Likert-scale responses. Since no inferential statistical tests were conducted, the results are interpreted as descriptive patterns rather than statistically significant differences.

Table 1. *Comparison of Converted and Established Farm Schools in the Province of Negros Occidental in terms of Governance*

Resources		Converted Farm Schools				Established Farm Schools			
Items		N	Mean	SD	Interpretation	N	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1	Financial Resources	19	4.70	0.26	Very High	14	4.60	0.33	Very High
2	Human Resources	19	4.70	0.27	Very High	14	4.29	0.41	High
3	Physical Resources	19	4.50	0.37	Very High	14	4.24	0.37	Very High

Both converted and established farm schools obtained very high ratings, indicating generally strong perceived governance practices in terms of financial resources. Converted farm schools obtained a mean of 4.70 ($SD = 0.26$), while established farm schools obtained a mean of 4.60 ($SD = 0.33$). The proximity of these values suggests that both school types are perceived to demonstrate strong financial governance practices, including budgeting, allocation, and resource utilization. The minimal difference indicates comparable financial management conditions across institutional types. This finding aligns with governance literature emphasizing that financial management effectiveness in schools is strongly influenced by standardized public financial systems and policy-driven accountability mechanisms rather than institutional classification alone (Gaspar et al., 2023). Transparent and regulated financial systems in public education contexts tend to produce consistently high governance ratings across different school categories.

Regarding human resources, converted farm schools obtained a mean score of $M = 4.70$ ($SD = 0.27$), which corresponds to a very high level of implementation. In contrast, established farm schools recorded a lower mean score of $M = 4.29$ ($SD = 0.41$), corresponding to a high level of implementation. Furthermore, the higher standard deviation among established farm schools ($SD = 0.41$) compared to converted ones ($SD = 0.27$) indicates greater variability in respondents' experiences, which may stem from differences in staffing stability and access to specialized agricultural expertise across institutional settings. Recent studies highlight that human resource capacity in agricultural and rural education systems remains uneven, particularly in specialized instructional settings where subject expertise and professional training are critical (Gerona & Betito, 2025; Granberry et al., 2025). These findings support the observation that variability in human resource governance may persist even when overall ratings are high.

For physical resource governance, converted farm schools recorded a mean of 4.50 ($SD = 0.37$), while established farm schools recorded a mean of 4.24 ($SD = 0.37$), both interpreted as very high. This indicates that respondents perceive both school types as having strong physical resource management in terms of facilities, equipment, and learning environments, although converted schools obtained slightly higher ratings. This pattern is consistent with evidence from international educational infrastructure studies, which emphasize that physical resource adequacy remains a key determinant of instructional quality, particularly in vocational and agricultural education settings where experiential learning is essential (OECD, 2023; FAO, 2022). However, such differences are often gradual and reflect historical development rather than structural performance gaps.

Overall, the findings indicate that both converted and established farm schools demonstrate consistently very high governance ratings across financial, human, and physical resource domains, with only marginal descriptive differences between groups. Since no inferential tests were conducted, these differences should not be interpreted as statistically significant or causal. Instead, they reflect variation in perceived governance experiences among respondents.

Table 2. *Leadership Challenges in Leading Converted and Established Farm Schools*

Items	Theme	Description
1 Financial Resources	Financial Constraints and Lack of Independence.	Participants reported that financial challenges—including dependence on the main school for funding, limited operational budgets and financial autonomy, unstable income from farm sales, donations, and grants, strict auditing compliance, and high expenses for fuel, labor, and maintenance—strain the budget and hinder expansion and new project implementation.
2 Human Resources	Deficiencies in Human Capital.	Schools operate with inadequate personnel; many teachers lack backgrounds in agriculture or related expertise, and limited professional training and growth opportunities reduce performance, especially in urban areas where multiple educational choices exist.
3 Physical Resources	Deficiencies in Physical Assets.	Schools rely on shared or borrowed classrooms and labs, old farm tools and machinery impede efficiency, minimal access to precision agricultural tools limits learning and productivity, construction only began after initial years of borrowing, and a small land area for hands-on activities limits expansion.

Table 2 presents the qualitative themes on leadership challenges experienced by administrators of converted and established farm schools in Negros Occidental. The analysis generated three major themes: financial constraints and lack of independence, deficiencies in human capital, and deficiencies in physical assets. These themes emerged from recurring patterns in interview responses and reflect shared operational challenges across both school types.

Financial Constraints and Lack of Independence

The first theme highlights financial constraints and limited fiscal autonomy as a persistent leadership challenge. Participants consistently described dependence on main schools for budget allocation, combined with unstable income from farm-generated revenue, donations, and external grants. These conditions create uncertainty in planning and restrict the ability of school leaders to implement long-term development initiatives.

In addition, participants noted that operational expenditures such as fuel, labor, and maintenance consume a large portion of available resources, leaving minimal room for expansion or innovation. Strict auditing and compliance procedures were also identified as factors that slow down financial decision-making and reduce responsiveness to immediate operational needs. This finding reflects broader evidence that resource dependency significantly constrains organizational autonomy in public institutions, particularly in schools operating under centralized funding systems (OECD, 2023; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). In agricultural education contexts, income volatility from production-based activities further compounds these limitations, making financial planning more complex and less predictable (FAO, 2022).

Deficiencies in Human Capital

The second theme centers on deficiencies in human capital, particularly inadequate staffing levels and limited specialization in agricultural education. Participants reported that many schools operate with insufficient personnel, requiring teachers to assume multiple roles beyond their primary assignments. This staffing gap is more pronounced in specialized agricultural subjects, where teachers often lack formal training or background in agriculture-related disciplines. Participants further emphasized that limited access to professional development opportunities constrains teacher growth and instructional quality. In some cases, schools rely on teachers trained in non-agricultural fields to deliver agricultural content, resulting in mismatches between subject requirements and teacher expertise. This finding aligns with recent studies highlighting persistent teacher shortages and skill mismatches in technical and vocational education systems, particularly in rural and specialized school settings (Gerona & Betito, 2025; Granberry et al., 2025). It also reflects broader global patterns where rural schools face greater challenges in attracting and retaining qualified personnel compared to urban institutions (UNESCO, 2021;

OECD, 2023).

Deficiencies in Physical Assets

The third theme reveals deficiencies in physical infrastructure and agricultural learning resources. Participants described reliance on shared or borrowed classrooms, inadequate laboratory spaces, and outdated farm tools and machinery. These limitations reduce efficiency in school-based agricultural activities and constrain hands-on learning opportunities for students. Some participants also noted that infrastructure development in several schools began only after initial years of operation, indicating delayed access to essential physical facilities. In addition, the limited land area for agricultural practice further restricts experiential learning and the expansion of farm-based activities. These findings are consistent with the literature emphasizing that inadequate infrastructure negatively affects instructional quality and learner engagement, particularly in vocational and agricultural education, where practical application is essential (OECD, 2023; FAO, 2022). Physical resource limitations, therefore, represent a structural barrier to effective implementation of competency-based agricultural learning programs.

Synthesis of Findings

Collectively, the three themes illustrate that leadership challenges in both converted and established farm schools are primarily rooted in systemic resource constraints across financial, human, and physical domains. While the manifestations vary in intensity across contexts, the underlying issues are consistent across school types. From a theoretical standpoint, these findings are consistent with Resource Dependence Theory, which argues that organizational behavior and decision-making are shaped by dependence on external resources and the uncertainty of resource flows (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). In this context, farm schools operate within constrained resource environments that limit administrative autonomy and operational flexibility. Similarly, school leadership literature emphasizes that effective governance in resource-limited settings depends on adaptive leadership strategies that can navigate structural constraints rather than eliminate them entirely (Bush & Glover, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020). This suggests that the challenges identified in this study are not solely operational but systemic in nature.

Table 3. *Operational Aspects of Converted and Established Farm Schools*

Items	Theme		Description
1	Stakeholder Partnerships	Strategic Partnerships for Sustainable Development	Participants emphasized building relationships with a variety of stakeholders – including government agencies, NGOs, local communities, alumni, the private sector, and academic institutions – while local partnerships with farmers and residents were seen as key to sustainability and development, with all partnerships imagined to be built on common goals of sustainability, education, food security, and community growth.
2	Resource Mobilizations Strategies	Strategic Partnerships as the Agent for Sustainable Growth and Innovation	Stakeholder support is expected to enhance access to physical, financial, and human resources, while strategic resource mobilization through partnerships is seen as essential for sustaining farm school operations and innovation, with strong partnerships also expected to raise the farm school's profile and help it thrive academically and agriculturally.

Table 3 presents the qualitative findings on the operational aspects of converted and established farm schools in Negros Occidental, focusing on stakeholder partnerships and resource mobilization strategies. The analysis generated two interrelated themes: strategic partnerships for sustainable development and strategic partnerships as agents for sustainable growth and innovation. These themes reflect participants' shared perspectives on how external collaboration supports the continuity and improvement of farm school operations.

Stakeholder Partnerships: Strategic Partnerships for Sustainable Development

The first theme highlights stakeholder partnerships as a core operational mechanism for sustaining farm school initiatives. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of building and maintaining relationships with a wide range of stakeholders, including government agencies, non-government organizations (NGOs), local

communities, alumni, private sector partners, and academic institutions. These partnerships were described as essential in addressing resource limitations and in supporting the broader goals of agricultural education. A recurring perspective among participants was the importance of local engagement, particularly partnerships with farmers and community members. These local stakeholders were viewed as critical contributors to contextualized learning, practical agricultural activities, and long-term sustainability of school-based initiatives. Rather than being peripheral actors, community members were consistently positioned as active partners in implementation and development processes.

Across responses, partnerships were framed around shared objectives, including sustainability, food security, educational improvement, and community development. This suggests that collaboration is not only resource-driven but also value-oriented, with emphasis placed on shared goals as the foundation for sustaining engagement over time. These findings align with studies emphasizing that multi-stakeholder collaboration is essential in agricultural and rural education systems, particularly in contexts where no single institution can independently address complex development needs (Reed et al., 2020; Van der Lee et al., 2021). The results further suggest that in farm school contexts, stakeholder engagement operates as both a structural and relational mechanism that supports program continuity.

Resource Mobilization Strategies: Partnerships as Agents for Growth and Innovation

The second theme focuses on stakeholder partnerships as a mechanism for resource mobilization and institutional development. Participants described partnerships as essential pathways for accessing financial, physical, and human resources that are otherwise limited within school budgets. These external linkages were seen as critical in sustaining day-to-day operations as well as supporting long-term development initiatives. In addition, participants highlighted that resource mobilization through partnerships contributes not only to operational support but also to institutional growth and innovation. Through collaboration with external stakeholders, farm schools are able to access technical expertise, training opportunities, and material support that enhance both administrative capacity and instructional quality.

Participants also noted that strong partnerships can enhance the visibility and institutional profile of farm schools. Improved recognition was described as a secondary outcome of successful collaboration, which in turn may attract additional stakeholders and further strengthen resource flows. This suggests a reinforcing cycle in which effective partnerships generate both tangible resources and reputational benefits. These findings are consistent with the literature on inter-organizational collaboration, which argues that diversified partnerships enhance institutional resilience by expanding access to multiple resource streams and strengthening adaptive capacity (Austin & Seitanidi, 2020; Bryson et al., 2021). In agricultural education contexts, such partnerships are particularly important due to the high resource demands of experiential and production-based learning systems.

Synthesis of Findings

Taken together, the findings from Table 3 indicate that stakeholder partnerships function as a central operational strategy for both converted and established farm schools. Rather than being limited to resource acquisition, partnerships are understood as multidimensional arrangements that support sustainability, innovation, and institutional legitimacy. From a theoretical perspective, these findings align with Resource Dependence Theory, which emphasizes that organizations reduce uncertainty and enhance survival by establishing relationships with external actors that control critical resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). In this context, farm schools rely on partnerships to address structural resource constraints in financial, human, and physical domains. Additionally, the findings reflect systems perspectives in educational governance, which suggest that school sustainability depends on the interaction between internal capacities and external environmental support systems (Bush & Glover, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020). Partnerships, therefore, are not merely supplementary mechanisms but integral components of the operational system of farm schools.

Conclusion

This study examined governance practices, leadership challenges, and operational strategies in converted and newly established farm schools in Negros Occidental, Philippines. Using a mixed-method descriptive approach, findings from both quantitative and qualitative data indicate that both school types demonstrate consistently high levels of perceived governance across financial, human, and physical resource domains. However, the descriptive differences in mean scores suggest slight advantages for converted farm schools, particularly in areas associated

with resource stability and institutional continuity, while both groups remain within the same interpretive category of “very high.”

Qualitative findings further reveal that both converted and established farm schools experience similar structural challenges, particularly in financial dependence, limited human resource specialization, and deficiencies in physical infrastructure. These challenges appear to be interconnected rather than isolated, suggesting that constraints in one domain tend to intensify difficulties in others. Despite these constraints, both school types demonstrate strong reliance on stakeholder partnerships as a central mechanism for sustaining operations, improving resource access, and supporting program continuity. Partnerships with government agencies, local communities, private sector actors, and academic institutions emerged as a key enabling factor for both survival and incremental development.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest the need for differentiated policy and administrative responses rather than uniform interventions. For converted farm schools, priorities may focus on strengthening long-term sustainability mechanisms, including upgrading existing infrastructure, institutionalizing financial accountability systems, and enhancing professional development programs to sustain established capacities. Newly established farm schools require more immediate support, particularly in foundational infrastructure development, staffing augmentation, and improved access to stable funding mechanisms to reduce reliance on mother schools during early implementation stages.

While the study contributes contextual evidence on farm school governance in Negros Occidental, its findings should be interpreted within certain limitations. First, the use of descriptive statistics without inferential testing limits the ability to draw conclusions about statistical significance between groups. Second, the reliance on self-reported perceptions may introduce subjectivity in assessing governance levels. Third, although total enumeration was employed, the sample remains localized to one province, which may limit broader generalizability to other regions with different institutional conditions.

Future research may consider longitudinal designs to examine how governance practices evolve over time, particularly as established farm schools mature and converted schools transition into more specialized agricultural education systems. Further studies may also incorporate outcome-based measures such as learner performance, agricultural productivity outputs, and graduate employability to complement perception-based governance indicators.

Overall, the study highlights that farm school governance in Negros Occidental is characterized by generally strong perceived management practices alongside persistent structural constraints. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated, context-sensitive interventions that recognize the differing developmental trajectories of converted and newly established farm schools, particularly in resource allocation, capacity building, and infrastructure development.

Contributions of Authors

Author 1: conceptualization, data gathering, data analysis, interpretation of findings

Author 2: conceptualization, data analysis

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest in the conduct of the study.

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