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Relevance and Applicability of the Master of Arts in Educational Management Curriculum to Graduates' Professional Work: Basis for Curriculum Enhancement

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions are expected to continuously evaluate graduate programs to ensure that curricular offerings remain relevant, responsive, and aligned with the evolving demands of professional practice. This study assessed the relevance and applicability of the Master of Arts in Educational Management (MAEM) curriculum of Guagua National Colleges to the current professional work of its graduates and identified areas for curriculum enhancement. Using a quantitative descriptive-comparative research design, data were collected from 33 MAEM graduates through a structured survey questionnaire. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and ranking were utilized to analyze quantitative data, while thematic analysis was employed to examine graduates' recommendations. Results revealed that most graduates occupy positions closely related to educational leadership and management, with 87.88% indicating that their present work is highly related or related to educational management. The overall relevance and applicability of the curriculum obtained a very high rating (M = 4.69), while the adequacy of competencies developed through the program received a mean rating of 4.67. Human Resource and Organizational Management emerged as the highest-rated competency area (M = 4.76), whereas Problem-Solving and Evidence-Based Decision-Making obtained the lowest mean rating (M = 4.64), though still interpreted as very high. Graduates recommended strengthening content related to digital leadership, educational technology, artificial intelligence, instructional leadership, research utilization, and experiential learning. Based on these findings, a Responsive MAEM Curriculum Enhancement Framework was proposed. The study concludes that the MAEM curriculum remains highly relevant to current professional requirements but should continuously evolve to address emerging educational challenges and technological advancements.

Keywords: *curriculum relevance, curriculum enhancement, educational management, graduate tracer study, educational leadership, professional competencies*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid transformation of educational systems worldwide has heightened the demand for competent educational leaders capable of navigating increasingly complex organizational, technological, and societal challenges. Educational institutions are expected not only to deliver quality instruction but also to respond effectively to changing educational policies, technological innovations, stakeholder expectations, and global trends. Consequently, graduate programs in educational management play a crucial role in preparing educational professionals for leadership positions and organizational responsibilities.

The Master of Arts in Educational Management (MAEM) program has traditionally been designed to develop competencies in educational leadership, organizational management, instructional supervision,

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educational planning, research, and policy implementation. Through advanced academic preparation, the program seeks to equip educators with the knowledge and skills necessary for managing educational institutions and facilitating organizational improvement. As educational environments continue to evolve, however, graduate programs must regularly assess whether their curricula remain aligned with professional expectations and workplace realities.

Curriculum relevance has become a central concern among higher education institutions. A curriculum is considered relevant when the competencies, knowledge, and skills it develops correspond to the actual requirements of graduates' professional practice. Graduate tracer studies have emerged as valuable mechanisms for evaluating curricular relevance because they provide direct feedback from alumni regarding the usefulness and applicability of their educational experiences. Such studies offer empirical evidence that can inform curriculum review, instructional improvement, and policy development.

In the Philippine context, the Commission on Higher Education emphasizes the importance of outcomes-based education and the continuous improvement of graduate programs. Graduate curricula are expected to develop competencies that respond to the needs of industries, organizations, communities, and professional sectors. Within educational leadership programs, this expectation includes the development of competencies associated with instructional leadership, organizational effectiveness, research utilization, policy implementation, strategic planning, and innovation management.

Recent developments in educational leadership further underscore the need for curriculum responsiveness. The increasing integration of technology and artificial intelligence into educational systems has transformed leadership expectations. Contemporary educational leaders are now required to make data-informed decisions, manage technology-enabled learning environments, promote innovation, and support organizational adaptability. These emerging responsibilities necessitate curricular frameworks that extend beyond traditional management competencies and incorporate future-oriented leadership capacities.

Educational management programs must therefore continuously evaluate the extent to which they prepare graduates for contemporary professional demands. Such evaluation serves not only as a quality assurance mechanism but also as a foundation for curriculum enhancement. Understanding graduates' perceptions regarding curriculum relevance and applicability provides critical insights into the strengths and areas for improvement of graduate programs.

Guagua National Colleges has consistently offered the Master of Arts in Educational Management program to educators aspiring to advance their professional growth and leadership capabilities. Despite the program's sustained implementation and contributions to professional development, there remains a need to examine whether the curriculum continues to meet the evolving requirements of graduates' professional work. The changing nature of educational leadership, the emergence of digital technologies, and the increasing importance of evidence-based management practices highlight the need for ongoing curriculum evaluation.

This study was undertaken to assess the relevance and applicability of the MAEM curriculum to the current professional work of its graduates. Specifically, it sought to determine the extent to which competencies developed through the program are utilized in workplace settings and identify curriculum enhancement measures that may strengthen the program's responsiveness to contemporary professional requirements.

The study contributes to the body of knowledge on graduate education, curriculum evaluation, and educational leadership by providing empirical evidence regarding the relationship between academic preparation and professional practice. Furthermore, the findings may serve as a basis for curriculum enhancement initiatives that ensure continued program relevance and alignment with emerging educational trends.

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METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-comparative research design. The descriptive component was utilized to determine graduates' perceptions regarding the relevance and applicability of the MAEM curriculum, while the comparative aspect examined variations in assessments across competency areas.
The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect systematic information regarding graduates' experiences and evaluate the degree to which the curriculum supports workplace performance and professional responsibilities.

Respondents

The respondents consisted of 33 graduates of the Master of Arts in Educational Management program of Guagua National Colleges. The participants represented different graduation years, professional positions, and levels of work experience. Their inclusion provided a broad perspective regarding the applicability of the curriculum across diverse professional contexts.

Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire served as the primary data-gathering instrument. The instrument consisted of three major sections:

1. Professional Profile
2. Curriculum Relevance and Applicability
3. Recommendations for Curriculum Enhancement

The questionnaire measured perceptions regarding nine competency domains:

- Applicability of acquired knowledge and concepts
- Leadership and management
- Problem-solving and evidence-based decision-making
- Instructional leadership
- Human resource and organizational management
- Research and data analysis
- Educational laws, policies, and regulations
- Ethical and responsible decision-making
- Responsiveness to innovation and technology

Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale.

Data Gathering Procedure

Following institutional approval, the questionnaire was distributed to identified MAEM graduates through online platforms. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Data collection was conducted within the designated research period.

Statistical Treatment

The following statistical techniques were employed:

- Frequency and Percentage
- Weighted Mean
- Ranking
- Thematic Analysis for qualitative responses

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Professional Profile

Analysis revealed that most graduates were employed in educational institutions and occupied positions associated with teaching, supervision, coordination, and school administration. Furthermore, 87.88% reported that their work is highly related or related to educational management, indicating strong alignment between the program and workplace functions.

Relevance and Applicability of the Curriculum

The overall assessment of curriculum relevance and applicability produced a grand mean of 4.69, interpreted as Very High.

Human Resource and Organizational Management received the highest rating (M = 4.76), followed by Applicability of Knowledge and Concepts (M = 4.73). Meanwhile, Problem-Solving and Evidence-Based Decision-Making obtained the lowest mean rating (M = 4.64), although it remained within the Very High category.

Adequacy of Program Competencies

Graduates reported that the competencies developed through the program adequately respond to their current professional requirements, yielding a mean rating of 4.67.

Curriculum Enhancement Recommendations

Four major themes emerged:

1. Digital Leadership and Artificial Intelligence
2. Instructional Leadership Enhancement
3. Research and Data Analytics
4. Experiential and Workplace-Based Learning

The findings of the study provide strong evidence that the Master of Arts in Educational Management (MAEM) curriculum remains relevant and applicable to the professional responsibilities of its graduates. The high proportion of respondents employed in positions related to educational leadership and management suggests that the program successfully fulfills its mandate of preparing educational professionals for leadership, supervisory, and managerial roles within diverse educational settings. This finding reflects the alignment between the curricular competencies developed by the program and the demands of professional practice, an important indicator of curriculum relevance and program effectiveness (Schomburg, 2016). Furthermore, curriculum relevance is demonstrated when graduates perceive a strong connection between their academic preparation and workplace responsibilities, thereby enhancing professional competence and career advancement (UNESCO, 2021).

The very high ratings across all competency areas further demonstrate that graduates perceive the curriculum as highly beneficial to their current professional work. These results affirm the premise that graduate education programs should provide comprehensive preparation that integrates leadership, management, instructional improvement, research, governance, and organizational development competencies (Leithwood et al., 2020). The consistently favorable evaluations indicate that the MAEM curriculum equips graduates with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to navigate the complexities of contemporary educational organizations. Moreover, the findings support the outcomes-based orientation of graduate education, which emphasizes the development of competencies that are demonstrably applicable to professional practice (Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2019).

Among the competency domains, Human Resource and Organizational Management obtained the highest rating, highlighting the significance of interpersonal and organizational competencies in educational leadership practice. The finding suggests that graduates frequently apply competencies associated with communication,

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collaboration, personnel supervision, relationship management, team development, and organizational coordination. This result is consistent with the assertions of Yukl (2020), who emphasized that effective leadership is largely dependent on the ability to influence, motivate, and coordinate individuals toward the achievement of organizational goals. Similarly, Leithwood et al. (2020) argued that successful educational leaders create supportive organizational conditions by fostering collaboration, trust, and collective efficacy among stakeholders.

The strong evaluation of this competency area likewise reflects the evolving role of educational leaders as facilitators of organizational learning and institutional improvement. Contemporary leadership frameworks emphasize distributed and collaborative leadership approaches, wherein leaders empower members of the organization, build professional capacity, and establish cultures of continuous improvement (Fullan, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020). The graduates' favorable assessment suggests that the MAEM curriculum effectively develops competencies aligned with these modern leadership expectations, thereby enabling graduates to function effectively in positions that require both managerial expertise and interpersonal leadership skills.

Although Problem-Solving and Evidence-Based Decision-Making received the lowest mean rating among the competency domains, the result should be interpreted within the context of its continued classification as "Very High." Rather than indicating a weakness of the curriculum, the finding points to an area with substantial potential for enhancement. Educational leaders today operate in increasingly complex environments characterized by rapid change, accountability pressures, and data-driven decision-making requirements. Consequently, educational leadership preparation programs are expected to develop leaders capable of analyzing information, utilizing research evidence, and making informed decisions to improve organizational performance (Hallinger, 2022).

The relatively lower rating of this dimension may reflect the increasing importance of analytical and evidence-based leadership competencies in contemporary educational settings. As educational institutions become more dependent on data for planning, monitoring, evaluation, and accountability, the demand for leadership competencies related to research utilization and data interpretation continues to grow (OECD, 2021). Thus, while graduates recognize the value of the competencies gained from the program, they likewise acknowledge the need for deeper preparation in evidence-based leadership practices.

This interpretation is further reinforced by the graduates' recommendations regarding research utilization and data-driven leadership. The findings suggest that graduates increasingly recognize the importance of research-informed decision-making in educational management. According to Hallinger (2022), educational leaders who effectively utilize data and research evidence are better positioned to address instructional concerns, improve organizational effectiveness, and implement sustainable improvement initiatives. Strengthening research utilization and educational analytics within the curriculum may therefore enhance graduates' capacity to lead evidence-based reforms and contribute to school improvement efforts.

Another notable finding pertains to the recommendation to strengthen curriculum components related to digital leadership, educational technology, and artificial intelligence. This recommendation reflects the transformative impact of technological innovation on educational systems and leadership practices. The integration of digital technologies into educational processes has significantly altered the responsibilities of educational leaders, requiring them to guide digital transformation initiatives, oversee technology integration, and support innovation within their institutions (UNESCO, 2023). Consequently, educational leadership preparation programs must expand beyond traditional management competencies and incorporate digital-era leadership capabilities.

The growing demand for competencies in digital leadership also signifies a shift in the expectations placed upon educational managers in the twenty-first century. UNESCO (2023) emphasized that educational leaders must be equipped to harness technological innovations to improve teaching, learning, organizational efficiency, and stakeholder engagement. Similarly, the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers (2018) highlights the critical role of technology leadership in fostering effective educational environments. The graduates' recommendations therefore underscore the necessity of integrating emerging technology-related competencies into the MAEM curriculum to ensure continued relevance and future readiness.

Instructional leadership likewise emerged as a prominent area for curriculum enhancement. The finding highlights the continued importance of instructional leadership as a core responsibility of educational leaders.

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Hallinger (2022) asserted that instructional leadership remains one of the most significant factors influencing school effectiveness and student learning outcomes. Educational leaders who actively support curriculum implementation, teacher professional development, instructional supervision, and learning improvement are more likely to contribute positively to educational quality and organizational performance.

Given the increasing emphasis on learner achievement and educational quality, graduates' recommendations suggest the need for deeper preparation in instructional leadership competencies. Strengthening curriculum components related to instructional supervision, coaching, mentoring, and curriculum leadership may enhance graduates' ability to support teachers, improve instructional practices, and foster cultures of continuous learning within educational organizations (Hallinger, 2022; Leithwood et al., 2020).

The recommendation to expand workplace-based and experiential learning opportunities further reflects graduates' desire for stronger connections between theory and practice. While the curriculum was generally perceived as highly relevant, graduates acknowledged the value of authentic learning experiences that simulate actual leadership situations. Experiential learning opportunities such as leadership practicums, school-based projects, action research, and organizational immersion activities provide meaningful contexts for the application of acquired competencies (Kolb, 2015). These experiences not only strengthen leadership development but also enhance graduates' confidence, professional judgment, and readiness to assume leadership responsibilities.

The emphasis on experiential learning is particularly significant in graduate education, where learners are expected to integrate theoretical perspectives with practical application. According to Kolb (2015), meaningful learning occurs when individuals actively engage in reflective experiences that facilitate the transformation of knowledge into practice. Expanding workplace-based learning opportunities within the MAEM curriculum may therefore strengthen competency development and improve graduates' preparedness for leadership roles.

Overall, the findings affirm that the MAEM curriculum of Guagua National Colleges remains highly relevant, applicable, and responsive to the professional needs of its graduates. The consistently very high ratings across competency domains indicate that the program effectively develops leadership, managerial, instructional, research, and organizational competencies required in contemporary educational settings. Nevertheless, the recommendations provided by graduates highlight the importance of continuous curriculum enhancement to address emerging developments in educational leadership, digital transformation, evidence-based management, and workplace practice. Consistent with the principles of continuous quality improvement in higher education, sustaining the program's identified strengths while strategically strengthening competencies related to data-driven decision-making, instructional leadership, artificial intelligence, educational technology, and experiential learning will help ensure that the curriculum remains responsive, future-oriented, and aligned with the evolving demands of educational leadership and management (Fullan, 2020; UNESCO, 2023).

CONCLUSIONS

The MAEM curriculum remains highly relevant and applicable to graduates' professional work.

The competencies developed through the program adequately respond to current workplace requirements and contribute significantly to graduates' leadership and management capabilities.

Human Resource and Organizational Management represents the strongest competency area, while evidence-based decision-making presents the greatest opportunity for enhancement.

Emerging educational trends necessitate stronger preparation in digital leadership, artificial intelligence, instructional leadership, research utilization, and experiential learning.

Continuous curriculum review and enhancement are necessary to sustain program responsiveness and future readiness.

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Recommendations

1. Maintain the curriculum's strong emphasis on leadership and organizational management competencies.
2. Strengthen courses related to evidence-based decision-making, educational analytics, and strategic problem-solving.
3. Integrate digital leadership, artificial intelligence, and educational technology management into the curriculum.
4. Enhance instructional leadership competencies through advanced supervision, coaching, and mentoring experiences.
5. Expand experiential and workplace-based learning opportunities.
6. Institutionalize regular curriculum review involving graduates, employers, faculty members, and educational stakeholders.
7. Develop and implement the Responsive MAEM Curriculum Enhancement Framework as a guide for continuous curriculum improvement.

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