



A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL-BASED OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE: UNDERSTANDING EDUCATIONAL POLICIES FOR BETTER SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Ponciano M. Colocado, MAEd

School Head

Cagudalo Elementary School - SDO Catbalogan City

Catbalogan City, Samar, Philippines

Email: colocadofonzy@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the underlying linguistic structures and power dynamics in official school-based correspondence on educational policies within the Schools Division of Catbalogan City, Philippines. Grounded in Norman Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, the research utilizes a hybrid Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analytical approach to evaluate policy communications transferred from the division office to four selected secondary schools: Samar National School, Guinsorongan National High School, Catbalogan National Comprehensive High School, and Silanga National High School. The analyzed corpus comprises key documents from the last quarter of the 2024–2025 School Year, focusing on school-community partnerships, learner performance indicators, teacher professional development, and instructional leadership. The corpus linguistic analysis reveals four primary discursive strategies: administrative, teachers', disciplinary, and interventional content. Grammatical examination of transitivity and lexical selection reveals an authoritative and highly prescriptive linguistic register. This linguistic framing positions local school leaders and teachers within a deficit model, prioritizing rigid bureaucratic compliance over local agency. The analysis highlights a systemic misalignment between the collaborative, decentralized goals of School-Based Management under Republic Act No. 9155 and the centralized, surveillance-oriented language of official correspondences. Based on these findings, this study demonstrates the need to reformulate educational policies using non-authoritative, collaborative, and culturally responsive linguistic patterns to foster genuine shared governance.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS), Educational Policy, School Leadership, Official Correspondence*



Introduction

Leadership within educational systems plays a central role in establishing workplace cultures, which in turn dictate teacher engagement, professional efficacy, and overall school effectiveness. Effective school leadership promotes open communication, provides clear instructional direction, and fosters collaborative environments where educators feel valued and empowered. When school heads act as transformative, pedagogically focused leaders, the resulting organizational climate correlates with improved teacher performance and student learning outcomes. However, contemporary educational administrators frequently navigate complex administrative environments dominated by policy demands, where their role oscillates between instructional leadership and bureaucratic compliance.

In the Philippine basic education sub-system, the legislative foundation for school-level leadership is Republic Act No. 9155, also known as the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001. This act established a policy of shared governance and institutionalized School-Based Management. SBM was designed to decentralize authority, giving public school heads, teachers, and local communities the autonomy to make decisions on planning, budgeting, and instructional delivery. Under RA 9155, school heads are legally designated as pedagogical and administrative leaders accountable for continuous school improvement. SBM posits that local decision-making improves resource efficiency, teacher professionalism, and student performance.

Despite the decentralizing intent of RA 9155, the implementation of SBM remains highly uneven, and school administrators often experience a structural tension between local autonomy and top-down accountability. Educational policies are not neutral procedural manuals; instead, they represent ideological constructs and value systems that construct power relations within institutions. Memos, directives, and letters from regional and division offices construct reality for school-level stakeholders. The linguistic structures of these correspondences regulate what is valued, how teachers and students must behave, and what constitutes acceptable professional performance.

Critical Discourse Analysis offers a rigorous framework to examine how institutional power, dominance, and social inequalities are reproduced, naturalized, and contested through language. In the context of educational policy, CDA serves as a micro-analytic and macro-analytic tool to evaluate how local school actors make sense of policy mandates and how centralized authorities enforce institutional control. While substantial literature addresses educational administration and policy implementation in the Philippines, a critical gap remains in how the linguistic structures of official correspondence shape the power dynamics of school leadership, particularly in localized division contexts.

To address this gap, this study examines the underlying discourses in school-based official correspondence on educational policies within the Schools Division of Catbalogan City, Samar, Philippines. Specifically, the study examines the official correspondence distributed during the last quarter of the 2024–2025 School Year to four secondary schools: Samar National School, Guinsorongan National High School, Catbalogan National Comprehensive High School, and Silanga National High School. The inquiry focuses on how administrative, teachers', disciplinary, and interventional discourses are linguistically framed and how they affect the exercise of school leadership under the SBM paradigm.



Methods

This study employs a hybrid methodological framework that combines Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis—often referred to as Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies—with Norman Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis. CADS integrates the quantitative capacity of corpus linguistics with the qualitative depth of critical discourse analysis. Quantitative techniques, such as tracking word frequencies, lexical collocations, and concordance lines, allow the researcher to process larger bodies of linguistic data objectively, uncovering patterns that might escape qualitative observation alone. Concurrently, CDA provides the interpretive and explanatory framework necessary to link these linguistic patterns to broader social, historical, and institutional structures. This methodological integration minimizes researcher subjectivity and enhances the analytical credibility of the findings.

The corpus compiled for this investigation comprises official documents and policy correspondence issued by the Schools Division of Catbalogan City and received by the four selected secondary schools during the last quarter of School Year 2024–2025. The selection of texts for inclusion in the corpus was guided by five strict criteria:

- The documents must have been formally communicated from the Schools Division of Catbalogan to the selected secondary schools in support of educational policies for leadership.
- The texts must possess a clear mandate to direct, guide, or make recommendations to schools regarding policy implementation.
- The documents must target school-level stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, and students.
- The materials must have been produced and distributed during the last quarter of School Year 2024–2025.
- The correspondences must be explicitly intended to guide school-based institutional responses to educational policies under SBM.

Based on these parameters, a specialized, ad hoc corpus was generated, comprising five highly representative official correspondences that direct core operational areas of basic education. The operational areas analyzed include school and community partnerships, learners' performance indicators, teacher professional development, and instructional supervision. The corpus profile, including the document titles and their associated mandates, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: School-Based Official Correspondences Analyzed

Document	Mandate of the Document
“Pintakasi or Bayanihan sa Paaralan” for School and Community Partnership	To create a healthy school environment by supporting policies that promote school and community partnership as part of the School-Based Management (SBM) program.
“Creation of Parents’ and Teachers’ Association (PTA)” for School and Community Partnership	To provide support to the Department of Education's (DepEd) policy on the regulation and support for the operations of PTAs and to strengthen stakeholders’ support for SBM.



“School-Based Academic Activities” for Learners’ Performance Indicators	To provide schools with guidelines for implementing policies for the conduct of academic activities, such as Science Quiz Bee, Mathematics Quiz Bee, Reading Contests, and others, to focus on assessing learners’ performance indicators.
“Teacher Induction Program (TIP) for Newly-Hired Teachers” for Professional Development of Teachers	To direct schools to provide newly hired teachers with information about what they must abide by in terms of the appropriate code of conduct and eventual professional growth and development in DepEd for improved teaching competence and need-based instructional supervision by school administrators.
“Guidelines on Technical Assistance to Teacher Intervention and Verification of Failing Learners” for Instructional Leadership	To provide guidelines on the conduct of technical assistance (TA) by immediate supervisors to improve competence in designing interventions and verifying the failing learners.

Data collection was initiated by securing formal administrative approval from the school principals of Samar National School, Guinsorongan National High School, Catbalogan National Comprehensive High School, and Silanga National High School to retrieve and analyze the target documents. The retrieved texts were digitized and pre-processed to ensure compatibility with linguistic analysis software.

The analytical phase was operationalized using Norman Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model, which structures critical discourse analysis across three mutually explanatory, nested levels:

- **Textual Dimension (Description):** This micro-level analysis focuses on the formal, linguistic properties of the text, including vocabulary, transitivity, semantic choices, and sentence structure. In this study, particular attention is dedicated to the usage of verbs, which serve as direct indicators of agency and modality.
- **Discursive Practice Dimension (Interpretation):** This meso-level analysis evaluates the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption. It examines how the division office encodes specific ideologies and authority structures into policy texts and how school principals, teachers, and parents receive and decode these communications. This dimension also considers intertextuality—the ways in which division memos borrow from, reference, or rewrite national DepEd orders, such as DepEd Order No. 13, s. 2022 for PTA guidelines or DepEd Order No. 43, s. 2017 for the Teacher Induction Program.
- **Social Practice Dimension (Explanation):** This macro-level analysis situates the communicative event within the broader sociopolitical and institutional context of the Philippine education system. It analyzes how national mandates (e.g., SBM, RA 9155) and division-level operational cultures shape the power relations expressed in local policy texts.



Results

The corpus-assisted critical analysis of the official correspondences identifies four dominant discursive themes embedded in the policy documents of the Schools Division of Catbalogan City. These themes reveal how division officials construct the responsibilities of administrative leaders, classroom teachers, external stakeholders, and non-compliant actors. The defining characteristics and scope of these four discursive themes are structured in Table 2.

Table 2: Discursive Themes Related to Educational Policies

Discursive Theme	Description and Core Content
Administrative Contents	Textual segments that make explicit reference to mandated bureaucratic processes and structural documentation regarding school-community partnerships, learner performance metrics, teacher professional induction, and supervisory actions. These contents specify procedures that school administrators are expected to follow verbatim, including exact schedules and adherence to timelines.
Teachers' Contents	Textual segments designed to direct, coordinate, or evaluate teacher collaboration with school heads in implementing educational policies. These content areas focus on collaborative problem-solving, structural responsibility for student achievement, and the alignment of teaching practices with division-level educational outcomes.
Disciplinary Contents	Textual segments that establish formal mechanisms, rules, and paradigms for dealing with non-compliance. These sections explicitly outline the administrative and disciplinary consequences of failing to adhere to division mandates and highlight the mandatory, non-negotiable nature of the policies.
Intervention Contents	Textual segments that enforce evidence-based corrective models to address identified operational or academic deficits. These sections mandate specific remedial structures, supervisory mentoring, and technical assistance programs to resolve performance gaps in schools.

To understand how these discourses are operationalized at the linguistic level, a transitivity and trans-functional analysis was performed on the verb selections within each theme. The verbs utilized in institutional texts serve as direct indicators of agency, highlighting who is authorized to act and how those actions are structured. Table 3 details the linguistic patterns in terms of the specific verbs identified across the four discursive categories.

Table 3: Linguistic Patterns in terms of Verbs Used in the School-Based Official Correspondences

Administrative Contents	Teachers' Contents	Disciplinary Contents	Intervention Contents
Attend	Provide	Enhance	Ask
Convene	Remind	Ensure	Conduct
Request	Ensure	Inform	Attend



Promote	Design	Familiarize	Mandate
Prepare	Require	Facilitate	Implement
	Show	Allow	
	Conduct	Provide	
	Sign	Authorize	
	Confirm	Guide	
	Authorize	Assess	
	Entrust		

The administrative content uses verbs that denote structured bureaucratic functions, such as attend, convene, and prepare. These selections emphasize the procedural and organizational duties expected of school heads to maintain administrative alignment with the division office. In contrast, the verbs within the teachers' contents combine both creative instructional verbs (design, entrust) and administrative directives (require, sign, confirm), signaling that teachers' collaborative duties are closely monitored. The disciplinary contents feature highly directive verbs such as ensure, authorize, and assess, which establish the legal and regulatory framework within which school-level actors must operate. Finally, the intervention content relies on action-oriented verbs such as conduct, mandate, and implement, emphasizing structured remediation and supervisory correction.



Discussion

Applying Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model to the corpus exposes a structural misalignment between the cooperative, decentralized ideals of School-Based Management under RA 9155 and the centralized power dynamics embedded in division-level communications. This divergence is analyzed across the four discursive strategies, revealing how linguistic patterns reproduce institutional control.

First Discursive Strategy: Administrative Content

The dominance of administrative content in division correspondences demonstrates that policy texts function as instruments of bureaucratic regulation. In public secondary schools, administrators are positioned as key actors responsible for disseminating and implementing external directives to improve overall school performance. However, the lexical selection in these documents restricts the agency of school heads. Verbs such as attend, convene, and prepare frame the school head's primary function around procedural compliance.

For example, the document directing the "Pintakasi or Bayanihan sa Paaralan" program utilizes administrative language that codifies community-based voluntary cooperation into a highly scheduled, division-monitored task. Historically, bayanihan and pintakasi are native socio-cultural traditions of organic, voluntary community assistance. By embedding these concepts in division memoranda that dictate exact dates, monitoring tools, and submission deadlines, the division office transitions these cooperative cultural practices into mandatory administrative duties. Under this framing, school leadership is reduced to supervising transactional checklists and compliance reporting, leaving limited room for localized, adaptive governance.

Second Discursive Strategy: Teachers' Content

The teachers' content within the analyzed correspondences nominally emphasizes collaboration and professional partnership in achieving school goals. The text includes collaborative verbs such as provide, design, and entrust, suggesting a school climate that values teacher agency. However, a critical reading of this theme reveals a shift from collaborative support to mandatory accountability, driven by the concurrent use of directive verbs such as require, sign, confirm, and remind.

These linguistic patterns establish a managed school climate. The division-level correspondence constructs collaboration as a top-down mandate rather than an organic, professional process. Teachers are "entrusted" with responsibilities, but their performance is constrained by prescriptive validation procedures. For instance, in the "Teacher Induction Program (TIP) for Newly-Hired Teachers," the policy language outlines professional development as a mechanism of strict socialization into existing organizational norms. The newly hired teacher is expected to "comply with policy guidelines" and assemble extensive portfolios as Means of Verification (MOVs). This framing constructs professional development as a process of bureaucratic socialization rather than a pathway for pedagogical growth, fostering a performative culture among teachers.

Third Discursive Strategy: Disciplinary Content

The disciplinary content in the official correspondence highlights the underlying power dynamics between the division office and school-level actors. The inclusion of strict compliance clauses and explicit warnings of administrative consequences indicates that policymakers anticipate resistance from local stakeholders. By utilizing verbs such as ensure, authorize, assess, and mandate, the texts establish a framework of bureaucratic surveillance.

This linguistic framing suggests a low-trust institutional paradigm. Under SBM, school heads and teachers are theoretically empowered to exercise professional agency and adapt policies to their local contexts. However, when official communications frame policy implementation in terms of punitive measures, they generate a culture of defensive compliance. The extent of stakeholder engagement and organizational commitment decreases when



policies are presented as non-negotiable mandates. Consequently, teachers and parents often invest their energy in meeting the formal, documented requirements of division guidelines to avoid sanctions, rather than focusing on qualitative improvements in the educational environment.

Fourth Discursive Strategy: Intervention Content

The intervention content in the correspondence focuses on providing technical assistance and corrective mentoring to address instructional deficits. The document "Guidelines on Technical Assistance to Teacher Intervention and Verification of Failing Learners" utilizes verbs such as conduct, implement, and assess to guide instructional supervision. While structured remediation is essential for addressing academic gaps, the language used in these documents reveals a deficit-oriented construction of both teachers and learners.

This deficit model presents a significant structural contradiction in the performance management framework. As highlighted in recent national educational reviews, Philippine public schools operate under strict performance targets in which high student promotion rates are rewarded, and high failure rates are interpreted as institutional or pedagogical failures. Consequently, when division memos use authoritative language to mandate the "verification of failing learners" and the "conduct of technical assistance" to address teacher deficits, they hit a systemic wall of disincentives. Teachers and school heads are disincentivized from reporting learning gaps honestly. Because the policy language frames "failing learners" as a pedagogical deficit requiring corrective intervention and surveillance, school-level actors are pressured to artificially promote students rather than risk negative performance evaluations. The authoritative and prescriptive linguistic register of the division correspondences thus reinforces performative compliance, undermining authentic remediation and instructional transparency.

Social Practice and Power Dynamics

Evaluating these discursive strategies within the sociocultural context of the Philippine Department of Education reveals a highly centralized power structure. Although RA 9155 and SBM are designed to empower local stakeholders, the language of division-level correspondence remains authoritative, prescriptive, and top-down.

This centralization is reflected in the linguistic patterns and the flow of communication. The perspectives circulating in these documents represent the voices of division-level officials, establishing their authority to direct school-level behaviors. This authoritative register limits school heads' ability to act as autonomous leaders, positioning them instead as middle managers tasked with executing top-down mandates.

The extensive documentation required by these policies—such as the MOVs for SBM validations and the verification checklists for student academic performance—creates an administrative burden that shifts school heads' focus from pedagogical leadership to clerical management. This performative compliance reduces school leaders' capacity to foster authentic community partnerships and to address the unique pedagogical needs of their student populations.



Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the official correspondence distributed by the Schools Division of Catbalogan City employs an authoritative, highly prescriptive, and deficit-based linguistic framework. These discursive strategies construct a bureaucratic environment that prioritizes rigid compliance over local agency, creating a structural tension with the decentralized, collaborative goals of School-Based Management under RA 9155. By framing policy implementation through punitive measures, prescriptive timelines, and extensive documentation requirements, the official language limits the administrative autonomy of school heads and reduces teacher professionalism to clerical compliance. Furthermore, the deficit-based construction of academic gaps and teaching competence creates negative incentives that hinder authentic remediation and diagnostic honesty.

To address these linguistic and structural challenges, the following actions are recommended for regional and division policy planners:

- **Reframe Policy Language and Communication Templates:** DepEd division-level policy makers must transition away from authoritative, prescriptive, and deficit-oriented linguistic registers. Correspondence templates must be redesigned to utilize collaborative, culturally responsive, and non-deficit language. The tone of official memos must shift from enforcing punitive compliance to supporting school heads and teachers as capable professionals, acknowledging mutual accountability.
- **Realign Performance Management Frameworks:** DepEd should modify its Results-based Performance Management System (RPMS) and SBM validation criteria to reward qualitative educational outcomes, pedagogical innovation, and diagnostic honesty. The evaluation metrics should minimize the reliance on extensive clerical documentation and instead prioritize active, contextualized instructional leadership and community-based engagement.
- **Implement Consultative and Interpretive Leadership Models:** Division officials must move away from normative, top-down policymaking and embrace interpretive, collaborative governance. Before formalizing and distributing policy mandates, division offices should conduct consultative dialogues with school heads, teachers, parents, and community representatives. This collaborative process ensures that the situational expertise and localized realities of school-level stakeholders are integrated into policy design, fostering authentic shared governance.



References

1. Bafadal, I., Nurabadi, A., Sobri, A. Y., & Gunawan, I. (2019). The competence of beginner principals as instructional leaders in primary schools. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, 5(4), 625–639. https://www.ijcc.net/images/vol5iss4/Pt_2/54217_Bafadal_2019_R.pdf
2. Becerril, M. J. Z., Carcallas, M. C., Bentillo, J. D., Omilig, H. S., Nellas, M. A., Pacaldo, M. C., Cabilla, E. B., & Ocba, P. S. (2021). School administrators leadership styles in the new normal. *World Journal on Education and Humanities Research*, 3(1), 81–92. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6136856>
3. Broadley, A. (2024). Research news: A global snapshot of the role of a school leader. *Teacher Magazine*. https://www.teachermagazine.com/au_en/articles/research-news-a-global-snapshot-of-the-role-of-a-school-leader
4. Brooks, J. S., & Brooks, M. C. (2024). Hot leadership, cool leadership: How education policies are implemented (and ignored) in schools. *Educational Policy*, 38(7), 1608–1637. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08959048241268309>
5. Cardno, C. (2018). Policy document analysis: A practical educational leadership tool and a qualitative research method. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 24(4), 623–640. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1305631.pdf>
6. Cheng, J. N., Cheng, Y. G., Shiramatsu, S., & Liang, C. M. (2021). Factors influencing the job involvement of teachers: A comparison of Japan and Taiwan. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*, 25(S6), 1–27. <https://www.abacademies.org/articles/factors-influencing-the-job-involvement-of-teachers-a-comparison-of-japan-and-taiwan.pdf>
7. Cohen, J., Loeb, S., Miller, L. C., & Wyckoff, J. H. (2020). Policy implementation, principal agency, and strategic action: Improving teaching effectiveness in New York City middle schools. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 42(1), 134–160. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373719893338>
8. Deniz, U., & Erdener, M. A. (2020). Levels of school administrators exhibiting instructional supervision behaviors: Teachers' perspectives. *Research in Educational Administration & Leadership*, 5(4), 1038–1081. <https://doi.org/10.30828/real/2020.4.3>
9. Ganon-Shilon, S., & Schechter, C. (2018). School principals' sense-making of their leadership role during reform implementation. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 22(3), 279–300. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323968750_School_principals'_sense-making_of_their_leadership_role_during_reform_implementation
10. Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2023). The importance of school leadership? What we know. *School Leadership & Management*, 43(5), 449–453. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2023.2287806>
11. Kauppila, O. P. (2024). Revisiting the relationships between leadership and job satisfaction. *European Management Review*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/emre.12637>
12. Lusterio, C. G. C., & Arnejo, J. M. (2023). School administrators' leadership styles and teachers' performance. *International Journal of Research Publications*, 127(1), 12–26. <https://doi.org/10.47119/IJRP1001271620235045>
13. Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines. (2001). *Republic Act No. 9155: Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001*. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2001/08/11/republic-act-no-9155/>



-
14. Ogunode, N. J., Ojochnemi, U. B., & Ayoko, V. O. (2023). Leadership styles and school effectiveness. *International Journal of Development and Public Policy*, 3(11), 1–18.
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Victor-Ayoko/publication/375519076_Leadership_Styles_and_School_Effectiveness/links/654d156ace88b87031d8b38a/Leadership-Styles-and-School-Effectiveness.pdf
 15. Rivera, P. A. P., & Ibarra, F. P. (2020). The extent of principal's empowerment and their functions towards management of public elementary schools. *Indonesian Research Journal in Education*, 4(1), 188–203.
<https://download.garuda.kemdikbud.go.id/article.php?article=2035750&val=12360&title=The%20Extent%20of%20Principals%20Empowerment%20and%20Their%20Functions%20towards%20Management%20of%20Public%20Elementary%20Schools>
 16. Surahman, Ilmi, Z., & Jiuhardi. (2021). The influence of organizational culture, compensation and leadership on motivation and job satisfaction of employees PT Intan Pariwara regional branch manager 11 Balikpapan. *International Journal of Business and Management Invention*, 10(5), 8–15.
<https://doi.org/10.35629/8028-1005010815>
 17. Thimmaraju, T. (2019). A study on effectiveness of job involvement of teacher educators in relation to their job satisfaction. *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, 6(3), 471–475.
<https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR1903M57.pdf>