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## **Strengthening The Implementation of the DepEd Education Service Contracting (ESC) Program: A Foundation for Standardized-School Improvement Plan**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the implementation and effectiveness of the DepEd Education Service Contracting (ESC) program in private junior high schools (JHS) in the Division of Bulacan, Philippines. Using a convergent mixed methods design, it analyzes data from 1,484 students, 242 teachers, and 13 school principals across 13 private JHS. The study evaluates school profiles, adherence to ESC guidelines, and stakeholder perceptions. Quantitative results show that variables such as student population, school type, and principal qualifications do not significantly influence ESC implementation. However, principals and teachers show consistent perceptions of the program, underscoring the value of shared understanding. Qualitative findings reveal challenges in strategic planning, supervision, professional development, and performance evaluation. Despite general positive feedback, areas for improvement remain, particularly in benefit distribution and administrative processes. Recommendations include enhancing marketing, resource allocation, and communication to strengthen ESC implementation and support private schools in delivering quality education.

*Keywords: Education Service Contracting, Private Schools, Standardized-School Improvement Plan, DepEd ESC Guidelines, Program Implementation, Qualitative and Quantitative Research*

### **Introduction**

A Junior High School (JHS) involved in the Educational Service Contracting (ESC) Program of the Department of Education (DepEd) is required to meet minimum standards for secondary educational institutions. It must also strive to be an effective school that delivers quality educational programs aligned with the K–12 curriculum goals. DepEd encourages ESC-

participating private schools to provide grantees with a rigorous academic experience within a supportive and values-based environment (DepEd, 2022).

Recent policy reviews emphasize that ESC is not only a mechanism to decongest public schools but also a tool to strengthen public-private partnerships in basic education delivery (World Bank, 2023; PEAC, 2022). The ESC program, under the Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education (GASTPE), has significantly contributed to access and equity in secondary education. However, its implementation faces continuing challenges, especially concerning quality assurance and sustainability (UNESCO, 2023).

Private schools, despite their long-standing role in Philippine education, are currently facing a multitude of crises. According to PEAC (2022) a survey on parental satisfaction and private school participation, over 900 private schools have ceased operations since the pandemic, and enrollment declined by more than 50% in many regions, revealing structural vulnerabilities. A World Bank (2023) survey also noted that many parents have become more selective due to concerns about value for money, quality, and stability in private institutions. While private schools can exercise greater autonomy, their dependence on tuition and subsidies makes them sensitive to regulatory pressures and market fluctuations.

A private school operates independently but under government regulation. It often charges tuition and follows a specific educational philosophy. With scholarships and grants like ESC, these schools offer financial flexibility to learners from various socioeconomic backgrounds. The historical evolution of private schools in the Philippines—from faith-based institutions during the Spanish era to modern ESC-participating schools—underscores their enduring contribution to nation-building (Bernardo et al., 2022).

These schools are also guided by articulated philosophies, visions, and missions that define their operational and strategic directions. These guiding principles, when actively implemented, ensure alignment with national education goals and foster stakeholder ownership in instructional and organizational decisions. Current frameworks for school improvement

planning, such as DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2022 requires schools to contextualize their strategies within measurable learning outcomes, teacher development, and learner support systems.

Private schools also foster closer teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships, which contribute to stronger learning communities. The small class sizes, usually 25–30 students, allow for more personalized instruction and better monitoring of student progress. According to a PEAC (2021), private school parents ranked teacher responsiveness and student monitoring as top reasons for school choice. However, these benefits are under threat due to declining enrollments and increasing operational costs.

Despite their contributions, private schools are now experiencing financial instability. Many operate under tight budgets, and teacher migration to public schools continues to be a concern. The Annual Report of the Coordinating Council of Private Educational Associations (COCOPEA, 2023) highlighted that 3 in 5 private schools struggle to meet salary benchmarks, while 70% of ESC school administrators express concern about long-term viability under current subsidy rates. These realities raise critical questions about quality, equity, and sustainability in private education.

Article XIV of the 1987 Philippine Constitution and Republic Act No. 8545 also known as E-GASTPE Act provide the legal foundation of ESC. The State affirms the complementary role of private schools in achieving universal access to quality education. The ESC program, managed by PEAC and funded by DepEd, is a strategic policy to extend access to basic education while promoting school choice (DepEd-PEAC, 2023). The ESC also aims to promote diversity in the education system while easing the burden on the public sector.

According to Estrella (2010), efficient universal education is the mother of national prosperity. People need to realize that expenditures laid in education, which are investments in individual human resources, continue to yield dividends generation after generation. Education raises the productive skills of gainfully employed persons; it increases the wants and demands of the consumer. A nation guarantees its future by raising its citizens' level. Citizens with high

productive capacity and economic efficiency can pay their share of the cost account to the government.

Similarly, Estrella (2010) confirms that an effective educational program increases individuals' occupational efficiency, multiplies their demand for valuable services, and raises participation in economic processes. The financial status of other nations of the world further supports these statements. He confirms that education is the key concept to attain the objectives of every individual toward a quality life and a better foundation to face the challenges they may face.

This study is crucial for enhancing the implementation of the DepEd Education Service Contracting (ESC) Program by aiming to create a standardized framework for school improvement plans. Evaluating the ESC program's effectiveness allows identifying best practices and areas that need enhancement, thereby ensuring that participating schools deliver high-quality education. Furthermore, this research will support the development of a cohesive strategy aligned with national educational objectives, which is anticipated to lead to improved student outcomes. A standardized approach will also promote better resource allocation and accountability, cultivating an academic environment where all students, particularly ESC grantees, can excel. This study establishes a robust foundation for ongoing improvement and sustainable growth within the ESC framework.

## *Statement of the Problem*

The general problem of the study is: How may the implementation of the Education Service Contracting (ESC) program be strengthened to enhance the school improvement plan?

Specifically, this study aims to:

1. How may the profile of the ESC participating schools be described in terms of:
  - 1.1. JHS population;
  - 1.2. educational attainment of the school principal;
  - 1.3. type of school, and

- 1.4. number of licensed teachers?
2. To what extent have school principals and junior high school teachers perceived the implementation of the ESC guidelines as intended in terms of;
  - 2.1. objectives of the ESC program;
  - 2.2. management of the program;
  - 2.3. benefits derived from the program, and
  - 2.4. distribution of ESC beneficiaries?
3. Does the profile of the private schools affect the extent of the ESC program implementation?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the perceptions of the school principals and JHS teachers regarding the implementation of the DepEd ESC program?
5. What problems have been encountered by the school principals in implementing the DepEd ESC program?
6. How may the DepEd ESC program be strengthened to enhance the standardized school improvement plan?

## **Review of Related Literature and Study**

### *Equity, Access, and Opportunity in Education*

At the heart of the ESC program lies an enduring commitment to educational equity: the conviction that every Filipino child, regardless of socioeconomic status, deserves a meaningful chance to succeed. The Theory of Equal Educational Opportunity (DeCesare, 2016; Gutman, 2016) frames this commitment by stressing that justice in schooling is achieved not by equal inputs alone but by ensuring comparable learning outcomes. Philippine policies such as RA 6728 and RA 8545 operationalize this principle by channeling state funds to private schools so that learners who would otherwise crowd public classrooms can study in environments that meet DepEd standards. Empirical evidence strengthens the argument: Santos (2017) demonstrates that tutoring, mentoring, and financial aid elevate at-risk students' engagement, while Davis (2017) shows that scholarships expand access to high-quality resources for both pupils and teachers. Together, the theory and evidence illuminate how ESC, when faithfully implemented, narrows persistent achievement gaps and supports the constitutional mandate to make quality education "accessible to all."

## *Leadership and School Effectiveness*

High-stakes programs thrive or falter on the quality of school leadership. Trait theory (Robbins & Judge, 2014) contends that hallmarks such as drive, integrity, and initiative distinguish strong leaders from weak ones, but contemporary research reminds us that these qualities must be cultivated and aligned with modern management practices. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs adds nuance: principals cannot inspire teachers toward "esteem" and "self-actualization" if a school's basic "safety" and "physiological" needs—adequate classrooms, instructional materials, and salaries—remain unmet. In Philippine private schools, Johnson (2017) finds that principals holding master's and doctoral degrees excel at strategic planning and, consequently, deliver higher student outcomes. Complementing these insights, Leithwood et al. (2014) and Hallinger and Wang (2018) show that when principals and teachers share a clear, mission-driven vision, curriculum delivery is more coherent, and student learning improves. In the ESC context, professionalizing school heads through advanced study and leadership coaching strengthens program fidelity, ensuring that subsidies translate into measurable learning gains.

## *Curriculum, Instruction, and Standards-Based Reform*

The ESC program does not fund private schools unconditionally; it requires alignment with DepEd's Minimum Standards and, by extension, with the curricular logic of RA 10533 also known as the K–12 Law. Curriculum theory—from Kliebard and Schiro's (2014) humanist and social-efficiency camps to Schiro's learner-centered and social-reconstruction ideologies—reminds us that curricular choices carry philosophical weight. Philippine reforms tilt toward a scholar-academic spine enriched by competencies for the twenty-first century. Empirical literature underscores the consequences: Stronge & Tucker (2017) document how rigorous appraisal systems can steer teachers toward standards-aligned practice, while Hobson et al. (2015) show that sustained mentoring sharpens instructional quality. Within ESC schools, these insights translate into concrete obligations: curriculum maps must be periodically reviewed, teachers must be coached in outcomes-based pedagogy, and assessment data must feed back into lesson design. Ultimately, the synergy between national standards and local curricular adaptation forms the instructional core that legitimizes continued government support.

## *Policy Implementation and Systemic Change*

Implementing ESC is more than an administrative exercise; it is a case study in managing complex change. Progressive theory views policy as an evolutionary response to societal needs—an apt description of ESC's origins as a pragmatic solution to overcrowded public schools. Herzberg's Multi-Causation Theory (1959), as cited by Raouf (2016), cautions, however, that success depends on a web of factors: school culture, stakeholder buy-in, timely subsidy releases, and transparent accountability mechanisms. Hoy and Miskel's (2017) goal-system resource model provides a practical evaluative lens, positing that effective organizations balance resource acquisition with goal attainment and stakeholder integration. National and international reviews (DepEd (2022); World Bank (2023); UNESCO (2023b)) reveal both progress and pain points: rising public-education spending and lower student-teacher ratios coexist with funding delays and uneven quality assurance. For researchers and policymakers alike, these analyses underscore that ESC's promise can only be realized through iterative refinement, multi-layered monitoring, and sustained professional development.

## *Financial Support and Resource Management*

Education is a labor-intensive enterprise, and, as Coombs (2015) argues, its productivity defies simple economic metrics. Nonetheless, financial instruments—ESC subsidies, Senior High School vouchers, and the Teacher Salary Subsidy—are indispensable levers for shaping school behavior and improving teacher welfare. By offsetting tuition and operational costs, these programs enable private schools to invest in qualified teachers, smaller class sizes, and modern facilities that the most disadvantaged families could not otherwise access. Yet funding alone is insufficient: prudent resource management, guided by DepEd's financial reporting protocols, determines whether subsidies translate into enriched learning environments or dissipate in administrative overhead. The literature, therefore, calls for capacity-building in fiscal planning, transparent budgeting, and community engagement to maximize every peso spent under ESC.

## *School Improvement and Quality Assurance*

Finally, lasting gains emerge when financial aid is embedded in a culture of continuous improvement. DepEd's requirement for School Improvement Plans (SIPs) pushes ESC schools to set SMART goals, monitor outcomes, and adjust strategies—a cycle echoed in the Learning Action Cell (LAC) model for collaborative teacher development. Studies by Hallinger and Heck

(2014) and Hobson et al. (2015) confirm that schools with strong internal quality-assurance systems achieve better alignment between vision, curriculum, and assessment, leading to higher student achievement. Moreover, the K–12 reform agenda demonstrates that system-wide innovations—pre-school expansion, contextualized learning materials, and catch-up programs—are most effective when local schools interpret and enact them through their own SIPs. In the ESC landscape, robust QA processes thus become the bridge linking government investment to demonstrable educational returns, ensuring that the program remains not only an access initiative but also a driver of excellence.

### *Contemporary Policy Evaluations and Emerging Sector Diagnostics (2023–2025)*

Recent studies, government reports, and independent assessments provide a clearer picture of how the Education Service Contracting (ESC) program is performing within the current educational landscape in the Philippines. These evaluations have highlighted operational challenges, funding gaps, shifts in parental decision-making, and the precarious situation of many private schools.

The Department of Education's (2024) Budget Accountability Report revealed that over 1 million ESC and Senior High School voucher recipients were billed in School Year 2024–2025, confirming the program's substantial scale. However, the World Bank (2025) emphasized that the real value of ESC subsidies has declined due to inflation, placing financial strain on participating private schools and questioning the long-term sustainability of the current funding model. This underscores the importance of timely adjustments in subsidy levels to align with increasing operational costs.

The decline in private school enrollment and closures has also been well documented. According to the DepEd Basic Education Report (2023), more than 1,600 private schools permanently shut down between 2020 and 2022 due to pandemic-related disruptions. Senate reports added that 185 more schools closed in SY 2021–2022, while enrollment levels remained significantly below pre-pandemic numbers. This data confirms the growing vulnerability of private schools, particularly those that depend heavily on ESC subsidies for survival.

Parents have likewise become more selective in choosing schools for their children. A 2024 household survey in South Cotabato found that academic quality (71%) and class size (62%) were the most significant factors in school choice, surpassing cost and proximity. Furthermore, UNESCO's 2023 Global Education Monitoring report identified a regional trend of increased "value-for-money" scrutiny by parents, especially in contexts where tuition costs have risen disproportionately to household income. These findings suggest a shift toward more cautious and economically informed decision-making among Filipino families.

The governance and quality assurance mechanisms of the ESC program have also been examined. The World Bank (2025) reported delays in ESC fund disbursements, with only 73% of approved claims paid within the target fiscal year, thereby creating financial uncertainty for many schools. Meanwhile, the PEAC's 2025 monitoring data indicated that around 17% of ESC-participating schools received a "revisit" status due to issues such as a lack of licensed teachers or substandard facilities. These indicators point to inconsistencies in the implementation of quality standards across participating schools.

Taken together, these recent evaluations provide critical context for the present study, reinforcing the urgency of refining ESC policies and implementation frameworks. They also highlight the relevance of examining leadership capabilities, financial management, and stakeholder perceptions to assess the effectiveness of the ESC program in supporting equitable access to quality education

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

This study employed a convergent mixed methods design to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the DepEd Education Service Contracting (ESC) program in private junior high schools. In this design, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the same phase of the study, analyzed independently, and then compared to assess the degree of convergence or divergence in the findings (Wisdom & Creswell, 2013). The use of both methods provided deeper insights into the research problem by validating, complementing, or elaborating on the results from one method using the other. Quantitative

data were used to address research questions related to school profiles, perceived implementation, and statistical relationships (RQ1–RQ3), while qualitative data were employed to explore relational perceptions, implementation challenges, and proposed improvements (RQ4–RQ6).

## *Research Locale and Respondents of the Study*

The study was conducted in thirteen (13) ESC-participating private junior high schools under the jurisdiction of the Schools Division Office (SDO) of Bulacan. These schools were purposively selected using convenience sampling, considering their proximity to the researcher and their willingness to participate. This sampling method, while non-random, allowed for efficient data collection and active participation of key stakeholders.

These groups were selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implementation and operational dynamics of the ESC program from various perspectives. School principals offered managerial insights, junior high school teachers provided instructional and operational viewpoints, and students offered direct experiences and perceptions regarding the program's impact. The specific number of participants from each group (1,484 students, 242 teachers, and 13 principals) reflects the total population surveyed across the participating schools.

## *Research Instrument*

The primary research instrument was a researcher-developed questionnaire that included both structured and open-ended items. It was divided into six major parts, aligned with the study's research questions. Part I collected data on school profile indicators, including student population, principal's educational attainment, type of school, and number of licensed teachers. Part II focused on the perceived implementation of ESC guidelines and consisted of items measured using a five-point Likert scale (1.00 to 5.00), categorized as follows: Poorly Implemented (1.00–1.49), Fairly Implemented (1.50–2.49), Implemented (2.50–3.49), Well Implemented (3.50–4.49), and Fully Implemented (4.50–5.00). Part III examined the relationship between school profiles and ESC implementation. Part IV sought to determine the relationship between the perceptions of principals and teachers. Part V addressed problems encountered in

program implementation through open-ended responses, and Part VI gathered suggestions for strengthening ESC as a strategy for enhancing school improvement plans.

To ensure the instrument's content validity, it was subjected to expert validation by three professionals with extensive experience in private school governance and ESC implementation: Dr. Ariel M. Culala (DepEd Region III), Dr. Cecille S. Custodio (SDO-Bulacan), and Ms. Honey Grace P. Dela Cruz (a private school principal). Their feedback was used to revise and improve the clarity and relevance of the questionnaire. A pilot test was also conducted in a non-sample ESC school to evaluate reliability and usability.

### *Data Collection Procedure*

Upon receiving ethics clearance and approval from relevant school authorities, the researcher personally visited the identified schools to distribute the questionnaires and explain the purpose and instructions for completion. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and voluntary participation. During data collection, clarifications were provided when necessary, and follow-up visits were made to retrieve the completed questionnaires. This approach helped reduce misinterpretations and increased the completeness and accuracy of responses. Open-ended responses were recorded as written and, in some cases, supplemented with brief follow-up interviews to clarify key points raised.

### *Data Analysis*

Quantitative data were encoded and analyzed using SPSS Version 26. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, and mean were computed to summarize the school profile and the extent of ESC implementation. To examine the relationship between variables, regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive capacity of school profile factors on ESC implementation, while Pearson correlation was used to assess the relationship between the perceptions of school principals and teachers. The interpretation of mean scores followed the pre-defined Likert scale range to maintain consistency in evaluation.

Qualitative data gathered from open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step procedure: familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. A combination of in-vivo coding and descriptive coding was used. In-vivo coding allowed direct expressions from participants (e.g., "late release of funds," "lack of monitoring") to guide initial interpretation, while descriptive coding clustered these into broader categories such as "funding issues" or "administrative gaps." Themes were then synthesized to develop a nuanced understanding of perceived problems and areas for improvement in ESC implementation.

### *Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data*

In keeping with the convergent design, data from both methods were interpreted in parallel and then compared. Areas of convergence were noted where qualitative responses reinforced or explained trends seen in quantitative findings, such as alignment in perceptions about management effectiveness. Divergences, on the other hand, provided insight into gaps or contradictions, such as when school profile variables did not statistically influence implementation but were highlighted qualitatively as perceived barriers. This integration enriched the findings and allowed for more robust recommendations grounded in multiple forms of evidence.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Prior to data collection, the study was granted ethics clearance by the Bulacan State University Ethics Review Committee (ERC Code: u10-CDp-b). Respondents were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, confidentiality provisions, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. All participants signed an informed consent form. The study strictly adhered to the Data Privacy Act of 2012 also known as Republic Act 10173), ensuring that all personal and institutional information was handled with utmost care and used solely for academic purposes.

## **Results and Discussion**

### *Profile of ESC-Participating Junior High Schools*

**Table 1**  
*Profile of ESC Participating Schools in terms of JHS population S.Y. 2023-2024*

No.	School	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Total Number of ESC Grantees
1	A	30	26	26	27	109
2	B	33	41	29	23	126
3	C	25	28	30	27	110
4	D	26	25	28	28	107
5	E	26	26	29	30	111
6	F	30	25	28	29	112
7	G	30	33	29	31	123
8	H	20	23	23	22	88
9	I	23	23	25	28	99
10	J	28	28	29	27	112
11	K	24	27	27	28	106
12	L	40	43	46	49	178
13	M	29	25	25	24	103
<b>Total Number of ESC Grantees</b>						<b>1,484</b>

Private junior high schools play a crucial role in supporting students through a critical developmental stage. These schools typically offer smaller class sizes and holistic learning experiences, promoting both academic and socio-emotional development. The data shows that 1,484 students are ESC grantees across 13 schools, with School L having the largest number of beneficiaries (178), and School H the smallest (88).

The population distribution reveals that most schools (61.54%) accommodate 101–120 students, reflecting moderate school sizes. Only one school (7.69%) had between 161–180 students, suggesting limited large-scale private JHS institutions in the division. Studies such as those by Garcia (2020) and Reyes (2018) support the ESC's role in improving access and equity by easing overcrowding in public schools and enabling low-income families to access quality education in private institutions.

**Table 2**

*Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Highest Educational Attainment of the School Principal*

<b>Educational Attainment</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Bachelors' Degree w/ units in MA</b>	8	61.54%
<b>MA Holder</b>	4	30.77%
<b>Doctorate Degree</b>	1	7.69%
<b>TOTAL</b>	13	100.00%

Leadership quality, often reflected in the educational attainment of school principals, significantly impacts school effectiveness. Among the 13 school principals, 61.54% had a bachelor's degree with master's units, 30.77% held a master's degree, and 7.69% had a doctorate.

Based to the study of Johnson (2017) and Martinez (2020) confirms that advanced degrees in educational leadership improve principals' decision-making, strategic planning, and instructional supervision. This trend aligns with DepEd and PEAC's efforts to elevate school leadership through continuous professional development and alignment with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH).

**Table 3**

*Frequency and Percentage Distribution on the Type of School*

<b>Type of School</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Sectarian</b>	1	7.69%
<b>Non-Sectarian</b>	12	92.31%
<b>TOTAL</b>	13	100.00%

Table 3, the 13 ESC-participating schools, 92.31% are non-sectarian, while only 7.69% are sectarian. Non-sectarian schools typically focus on inclusive, secular education, while sectarian schools integrate religious values and teachings into their curricula.

According to Rivera (2018) and Brinig (2018), both school types have distinct advantages. Sectarian schools foster moral and spiritual development, while non-sectarian institutions promote inclusivity and academic diversity. Understanding this distinction is essential in tailoring improvement plans under the ESC program to suit institutional strengths and student needs.

**Table 4**

*Profile of ESC Participating Schools in Terms of Licensed Teachers S.Y. 2023-2024*

No.	School	Number of JHS Teachers	Number of Licensed Teachers
1	A	15	10
2	B	20	20
3	C	15	15
4	D	18	13
5	E	20	15
6	F	15	11
7	G	20	12
8	H	13	5
9	I	20	15
10	J	18	10
11	K	18	10
12	L	30	25
13	M	20	15
<b>Total Number</b>		<b>242</b>	<b>176</b>

The presence of licensed teachers is a key indicator of instructional quality. Across the 13 schools, there are 176 licensed JHS teachers out of 242 total teachers. School L had the highest number (25 licensed teachers), while School H had the fewest (5).

Most schools (53.85%) employ 11–15 licensed teachers, while 30.77% have 5–10. This distribution reflects varying capacities for delivering quality instruction, depending on teacher qualifications. Studies by Alvarez (2022) and Santos (2021) emphasize that licensed teachers ensure pedagogical competence and uphold national standards, directly influencing student achievement and curriculum delivery.

The Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges, and Universities (PAASCU, 2023) advocates for prioritizing licensed teacher recruitment in private schools to maintain educational excellence. Encouraging unlicensed teachers to take the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) is essential for professional growth and the sustained success of the ESC program.

*Perception of JHS Teachers and School Principals on ESC Implementation*

**Table 5**

*Summary Descriptive Measures on the Extent of Implementation of ESC Guidelines as Perceived by School Principals*

Indicators	Ave Rating	SD	Description	Rank
Objectives of the ESC program	4.75	0.44	Fully Implemented	1
Management of the program	4.65	0.51	Fully Implemented	2
Benefits derived from the program	4.36	0.72	Well Implemented	3
Distribution of ESC beneficiaries	4.29	0.76	Well Implemented	4
<b>OVERALL</b>	<b>4.51</b>	<b>0.61</b>	<b>Fully Implemented</b>	

The results presented in Table 5 reveal that school principals perceive the implementation of the Education Service Contracting (ESC) guidelines as highly effective, with an overall average rating of 4.51 and a relatively low standard deviation of 0.61, indicating consistency in their responses. The highest-rated indicator, “Objectives of the ESC Program,” received a mean score of 4.75, suggesting that the program’s goals are clearly understood and well-integrated into school operations. “Management of the Program” also scored strongly (4.65), highlighting efficient administrative practices and oversight. Meanwhile, “Benefits Derived from the Program” (4.36) and “Distribution of ESC Beneficiaries” (4.29) were both rated as “Well Implemented,” though they showed slightly higher variability. These scores indicate that although the ESC is generally performing well, there is room for improvement in how benefits are provided and how beneficiaries are allocated. As emphasized by Reyes (2018), consistent implementation and equitable resource allocation are necessary to fully realize the program's objectives, with continuous support and monitoring from DepEd being vital.

**Table 6**

*Summary Descriptive Measures on the Extent of Implementation of ESC Guidelines as perceived by JHS Teachers*

Indicators	Ave Rating	SD	Description	Rank
Objectives of the ESC program	4.94	0.22	Fully Implemented	1
Management of the program	4.85	0.33	Fully Implemented	3
Benefits derived from the program	4.37	0.74	Well Implemented	4
Distribution of ESC beneficiaries	3.87	1.25	Well Implemented	2
<b>OVERALL</b>	<b>4.51</b>	<b>0.64</b>	<b>Fully Implemented</b>	

Table 6 reveals that junior high school (JHS) teachers generally perceive the implementation of the Education Service Contracting (ESC) guidelines as "Fully Implemented," with an overall average rating of 4.51 and a standard deviation of 0.64, indicating high satisfaction but some

variation in perceptions. Teachers rated the program’s objectives the highest (4.94), reflecting strong clarity and alignment with educational goals, followed by effective management (4.85). However, lower ratings for "Benefits derived from the program" (4.37) and especially "Distribution of ESC beneficiaries" (3.87, SD = 1.25) suggest inconsistencies in how equitably the program’s benefits are delivered across schools. These differences may stem from varying school contexts or implementation practices, underlining the need for clearer distribution criteria, greater transparency, and improved oversight. According to Kluger et al. (2014), achieving program effectiveness requires a shared understanding of outcomes among all stakeholders. In this light, enhancing consensus among teachers through participatory evaluation and feedback mechanisms may further improve the ESC program’s implementation. Moreover, the profile of private schools—including school size, leadership qualifications, institutional type, and teacher licensure—plays a crucial role in shaping how effectively ESC guidelines are applied, emphasizing the importance of contextual considerations in optimizing the program’s reach and impact.

### *Influence of School Profile on ESC Implementation*

**Table 7**

*Regression Analysis on the Extent of Implementation of ESC Guidelines as perceived by the School Principals*

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
JHS Population	-0.092	0.116	-0.343	-0.795	0.449
Educational Attainment of Principal	-0.187	0.121	-0.456	-1.547	0.161
Type of School	0.449	0.275	0.458	1.629	0.142
No. of Licensed Teachers	0.04	0.146	0.127	0.274	0.791

**R = 0.702**

**R-square = 0.493**

**F-value = 1.948**

**p-value = 0.196**

**alpha = 0.05**

*Dependent Variable: Extent of Implementation of ESC Guidelines*

Regression analysis found no statistically significant predictive relationship between school profile variables and the level of ESC implementation. This suggests that internal management processes and leadership dynamics may exert a stronger influence on program execution than structural factors alone.

### *Correlation Between Principal and Teacher Perceptions*

**Table 8***Correlation on the Extent of Implementation of ESC Guidelines*

Variables	R	Description	Sig.	Decision	Interpretation
Extent of Implementation of ESC Guidelines as Perceived by the Principal	0.76	Strong/High Positive Correlation	0.003	Significant Reject Ho	There is a significant relationship between the perceptions of the Principals and their Teachers regarding the extent to which the ESC Guidelines are implemented.
Extent of Implementation of ESC Guidelines as Perceived by the JHS Teachers					

Table 8 reveals a strong positive and statistically significant correlation ( $r = 0.76$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ) between the perceptions of school principals and junior high school (JHS) teachers regarding the extent of implementation of the Education Service Contracting (ESC) guidelines. This indicates that when principals perceive high implementation of ESC guidelines, teachers tend to share that view, and vice versa. The alignment in perception reflects effective communication, shared understanding, and cohesive leadership, which are critical for the successful execution of educational programs. Supported by Raouf (2016) and Hallinger and Wang (2018), this finding underscores the importance of collaborative leadership and a unified vision between administrators and teachers. When principals demonstrate strong support and clarity in ESC implementation, it positively influences how teachers engage with and deliver the program. Therefore, principal-teacher alignment not only strengthens program fidelity but also serves as a key predictor of the ESC program's success, highlighting the need for continuous coordination, shared goals, and supportive leadership practices in school-based implementation efforts.

#### *Challenges Encountered in ESC Implementation*

Thematic analysis of the qualitative data revealed five major challenges that significantly affect the effective implementation of the Education Service Contracting (ESC) Program. These include (1) inconsistent application of program guidelines, which leads to varied interpretations and implementation across schools; (2) insufficient capacity-building programs for school administrators and teachers, limiting their ability to fully understand and carry out ESC procedures; (3) delays in the release of government subsidies, disrupting school operations and eroding trust in the program's reliability; (4) weak performance monitoring systems, resulting in inadequate feedback mechanisms and limited data-driven decision-making; and (5) limited support and engagement from key education stakeholders such as local government units,

parents, and community partners. Together, these issues highlight critical areas requiring immediate policy attention and institutional reform to ensure the ESC Program achieves its intended goals of expanding access to quality education and supporting private school sustainability.

*The DepEd ESC Program should be strengthened to enhance the Standardized School Improvement Plan (SSIP)*

**Table 9**  
*Proposed Standardized School Improvement Plan*

THREE-YEAR STANDARDS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN					
IMPROVEMENT PLAN ITEM	SMART GOALS	ACTION STEPS	OUTPUT	TIME PERIOD	MONITORING
A CLEAR, UNIQUE, WELL-ALIGNED, ACTIVE, AND LIVING STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY, VISION, MISSION, GOAL, AND OBJECTIVES	To be able to have a unified PV/MGO that is aligned with the needs of 21st century learners.	Make a proposal plan to be evaluated and approved by the school director.	An improvement plan will be proposed.	Every three (3) years	A faculty meeting will discuss and update the progress of integrating core values into classroom activities.
A SYSTEM INVOLVING THE PARTICIPATION OF VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS FOR REVIEWING AND REVISING, WHEN APPROPRIATE, THE PHILOSOPHY, VISION, MISSION, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES	To be able to conduct a committee and board to review and revisit the PV/MGO with the active collaboration of the Stakeholders of the institution		To have a revised and competitive PV/MGO that is aligned with the 10-point agenda by the Department of Education, 21st Century Learners, and Institutionalized Core Values	April-May	An instrument tool will be used. Verify for the approval of the school director.
A SYSTEM FOR REVIEWING, REVISING, AND UPDATING THE CURRICULUM MAP.	To be able to review, revise, and update the curriculum map every quarter of the school year. To have a board committee that will review the curriculum map, composed of experts. To be well-equipped and knowledgeable about the curriculum.	Prepare a document that verifies and checks all the submitted curriculum maps. Create a committee that will verify and check the curriculum map composed of curriculum developers.	To be able to review, revise, and update the curriculum map every quarter of the school year.	Every quarter of the school year	The committee comprises curriculum developers that will administer the revising, reviewing, and updating of the curriculum map and to be echoed to the teachers. The committee will use an instrument to review and review the curriculum map. Secure the proposal submitted to the school director.
A PROGRAM FOR COACHING AND MENTORING FACULTY MEMBERS IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF THE K-12 STANDARDS AND INTEGRATION OF THE SCHOOL'S VISION AND MISSION	To have continuous academic training and seminars for teachers on teaching and learning. K12 standards should align with the institution's vision and mission.	Documentation of the participation in creating the committee that will analyze, release, and learn the program in teaching K12 standards. Submit all the documented files to the school director for approval.	Conduct an academic training for teachers.	Every Quarter of the School Year	Check and verify the availability of the training and seminars. Look for resource speakers to provide academic mentoring and coaching for the faculty.
A SUPERVISORY PROGRAM THAT MONITORS AND EVALUATES TEACHERS' INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND USE OF THE STANDARDS IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT, ASSESSMENT AND INSTRUCTION	To be able to observe the teachers' performance in instruction and assessment. Recommend weaknesses and strengthen the strengths.	Documentation of the classroom observation, along with the student's activities and performance.	Classroom Observation Sheet	Every quarter of the school year	Observe the teacher's performance.
A SYSTEM FOR PREPARING QUARTERLY BUDGET MONITORING PERFORMANCE REPORTS AND DISTRIBUTING THE REPORTS ACCORDING TO POLICY GUIDELINES	To be able to have a meeting in preparing the quarterly budget, monitoring performance, and reports	The financial team will consolidate and create a comprehensive plan for monitoring the reports and performance.	A comprehensive report	Every quarter of the school year	Conduct a Committee meeting to prepare the comprehensive report.
A THREE-YEAR STANDARDS BASED SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN THAT COVERS ALL AREAS OF SCHOOL OPERATIONS	To revisit the SIP for a three-year period in all areas of school operations Create a committee that will plan the SIP	Propose a plan that will cover the SIP.  Identify all the stakeholders and the board of committee, which is subject to approval.	Create a three-year standards-based SIP  Determine the task of all committee members Identify the stakeholders who will participate in the SIP	March	Verify the proposed plan of the SIP Conduct a meeting with the stakeholders and the board committee Minutes of Meeting Attendance at the Meeting Documentation (Pictures)

This table outlines the gaps in qualitative research related to the challenges school principals face in implementing the DepEd Education Service Contracting (ESC) program. It highlights areas within the proposed standardized school improvement plan (SSIP) that require enhancement. The SSIP serves as an intervention program for private schools to address the identified gaps in the implementation of the ESC program.

The SSIP is instrumental in improving the quality of education provided to students by addressing these gaps. The study focuses on several key Improvement Plan Items that aim to strengthen the implementation of the DepEd ESC program. These items include:

*A Clear, Unique, Well-Aligned, Active, and Living Statement of Philosophy, Vision, Mission, Goals, and Objectives:* A clear, unique, well-aligned, active, and living statement of philosophy, vision, mission, goals, and objectives is crucial for guiding a school's educational efforts and fostering a shared sense of purpose among stakeholders. It is essential to appoint a specific individual or

team responsible for its development, implementation, and ongoing evaluation, ensuring the statement resonates with the entire school community. Additionally, allocating a dedicated budget for related initiatives—such as professional development and community engagement—reinforces the school's commitment to its foundational statement. This comprehensive approach ensures that the philosophy and mission are dynamic, shaping the educational environment and driving continuous improvement toward the school's goals.

*A System Involving the Participation of Various Stakeholders for Reviewing and Revising When Appropriate:* A system that involves various stakeholders in regularly reviewing and revising the school's philosophy, vision, mission, goals, and objectives is essential for maintaining their relevance and effectiveness. Designating a specific person or committee to oversee this process ensures coordinated engagement and fosters inclusivity among administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members. Additionally, allocating a dedicated budget for workshops, surveys, and professional development reinforces the school's commitment to continuous improvement. This collaborative approach keeps foundational statements dynamic, strengthens community ties, and promotes a shared sense of purpose, ultimately driving the school toward its educational goals.

*A System for Reviewing, Revising, and Updating the Curriculum Map:* A system for reviewing, revising, and updating the curriculum map is essential for ensuring that educational offerings remain relevant and meet the evolving needs of students and educational standards. Designating a specific individual, such as a curriculum coordinator or committee, to oversee this process ensures structured evaluations and facilitates feedback from teachers, students, and parents. Additionally, allocating a dedicated budget is crucial for supporting activities like professional development, data analysis, and collaborative workshops that engage educators in the review process. Ultimately, this system enhances the learning experience and prepares students for future challenges by aligning the curriculum with current standards and best practices.

*A Program for Coaching and Mentoring Faculty Members in Teaching and Learning:* Coaching and mentoring faculty members in teaching and learning is essential for enhancing educational

quality and aligning teachers with K–12 standards and the school's vision and mission. Designating a specific individual, such as a lead mentor or professional development coordinator, to oversee the program ensures effective implementation and support for teachers. Additionally, allocating a dedicated budget is necessary to facilitate training workshops, mentorship sessions, and resources for instructional materials and evaluate the program's impact. By investing in this structured program, schools can promote continuous improvement among faculty, ultimately leading to better student learning outcomes and a more cohesive educational environment.

*A Supervisory Program that Monitors and Evaluates Teachers' Instructional Effectiveness:* A supervisory program that monitors and evaluates teachers' instructional effectiveness is essential for promoting high-quality education and ensuring teachers effectively use standards in curriculum development, assessment, and instruction. Designating a specific individual, such as a lead supervisor or instructional coordinator, to oversee this program ensures structured assessments and valuable feedback for continuous improvement. Additionally, allocating a dedicated budget is necessary to fund training for supervisors, data collection resources, and teacher professional development workshops. By investing in this program, schools can enhance instructional practices, support teacher growth, and improve student learning outcomes.

*A System for Preparing Quarterly Budget Monitoring Performance Reports:* A system for preparing quarterly budget monitoring performance reports is crucial for effectively managing financial resources within a school. Designating a specific individual, such as a financial officer or budget coordinator, to oversee this process ensures accurate data collection, analysis, and report compilation. Additionally, allocating a dedicated budget is necessary to support financial training, software for analysis, and the development of clear policy guidelines for report preparation and distribution. Ultimately, this system enhances financial oversight, promotes accountability, and fosters stakeholder confidence in the school's commitment to sound financial practices.

*A Three-Year Standards-Based School Improvement Plan:* This comprehensive plan should address all areas of school operations, providing a roadmap for sustained growth and development. By focusing on these improvement areas, the SSIP can significantly enhance the

effectiveness of the ESC program and contribute to better educational outcomes for students. Implementing these strategies will help create a more supportive and effective educational environment, ultimately benefiting the school community.

Guthrie and Goe (2016) state that implementing school improvement plans is crucial for enhancing school performance, emphasizing how different components of these plans affect educational outcomes. Guthrie and Goe's study highlights several key factors that influence the success of school improvement plans. These factors are directly applicable to the analysis of the DepEd ESC program's implementation in private junior high schools. Their research emphasizes that the effective execution of improvement plans involves careful attention to various elements, such as the alignment of the plan with school needs, the commitment of school leadership, and the involvement of all stakeholders.

In connection with the current study, understanding these factors can provide valuable context for evaluating how private schools implement the ESC program. Just as Guthrie and Goe found that effective implementation of improvement plans correlates with better school performance, this study can examine whether adherence to ESC program guidelines similarly impacts the success of private schools in achieving their educational goals. Additionally, their findings underscore the importance of strategic planning and stakeholder engagement, which are critical for the successful deployment of the ESC program and its ability to address the needs of students and schools effectively. Hattie and Timperley (2017) state that school improvement plans (SIPs) impact student achievement and school climate. Their study underscores the significance of focusing on academic outcomes and addressing the overall school environment to enhance the effectiveness of improvement plans.

According to Hattie and Timperley, effective school improvement strategies contribute to measurable improvements in student performance and foster a positive school climate, which is crucial for the success of educational programs. In the context of the DepEd ESC program, their findings suggest that for the program to achieve its objectives of easing the demand on public schools and ensuring equitable access to quality education, it is essential to consider not only the program's direct impacts on student achievement but also its influence on the broader

school environment. This includes assessing how effectively the ESC program aligns with the needs of students and staff and how it contributes to an improved overall school atmosphere.

In summary, these studies provide a robust framework for understanding the multiple dimensions of school improvement. Guthrie and Goe's emphasis on implementation effectiveness and Hattie and Timperley's focus on overall impact contribute to a comprehensive evaluation of the ESC program. Their combined perspectives allow for a more nuanced understanding of the factors that drive successful educational outcomes, including the importance of strategic planning, teacher engagement, and student-centered approaches. By applying these insights, your study can more thoroughly assess how well the ESC program meets its goals and identify areas for enhancement, ensuring that it benefits student achievement and the overall school experience. Furthermore, evaluating the ESC program through these lenses enables a more targeted approach to addressing potential gaps in program delivery or student support. The program can be better equipped to foster an environment conducive to student success by continuously improving teaching practices, curriculum alignment, and resource allocation. Additionally, the application of these frameworks helps to ensure that the ESC program remains flexible and adaptable to the changing needs of both teachers and students. Ultimately, this comprehensive evaluation approach will provide a more straightforward path for refining the ESC program, ensuring it positively influences educational outcomes and school quality.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The study affirms that the ESC program plays a vital role in supporting diverse junior high school contexts by ensuring the presence of licensed teachers and encouraging strong educational leadership. While school profiles such as size, type, and principals' qualifications do not significantly impact the implementation of ESC guidelines, teachers' perceptions appear influenced by the type of school and the number of licensed teachers. Both principals and teachers generally view the ESC program positively, particularly its objectives and management, though concerns about the equitable and timely distribution of scholarships persist. The strong alignment in their perceptions highlights the importance of shared understanding and collaborative leadership. However, various implementation challenges—such as unclear guidelines, delayed fund releases, limited training opportunities, and weak monitoring—hamper program efficiency. Despite these issues, the ESC program remains a promising tool for

school improvement, provided that systemic refinements in administration, communication, capacity-building, and stakeholder engagement are addressed.

In light of the study's findings and conclusions, it is recommended that ESC participating schools enhance their marketing strategies to increase junior high school enrollment, support principals and teachers in pursuing graduate studies, and encourage teachers to take the licensure examination. Schools should also implement efficient resource management systems and improve compensation and benefits to attract and retain qualified teachers, while ensuring fair and strategic distribution of ESC beneficiaries in accordance with program guidelines. Continuous operational improvement aligned with DepEd's minimum standards should be pursued, including the establishment of regular learning action cells (LAC) and collaborative professional development workshops to foster alignment and shared understanding among school leaders and teachers. Furthermore, schools should strengthen their support for academic and administrative staff through competitive compensation and concrete planning toward full compliance with DepEd standards, particularly in developing and implementing school improvement plans. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct comparative studies across various regions and school types to further assess the implementation and effectiveness of the ESC program.

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