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Implementation of Gulayan sa Paaralan Program(GPP) Among All Island Schools in Masinloc District: Foundation for Crafting GPP Interventions

Marcos L. Gonzales [1]
1 − Panglit Elementary School

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Abstract

This phenomenological study investigated the implementation of the Gulayan sa Paaralan Program (GPP) in Masinloc District's island schools to develop interventions for island educational institutions. Using qualitative inquiry through open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, data were collected from three GPP School Coordinators representing different island schools. The study revealed three major themes in program implementation: robust stakeholder engagement and community participation, significant program benefits and impact, and context-specific implementation challenges. The research identified successful program approaches including technical agricultural strategies, comprehensive stakeholder engagement methods, and systematic monitoring practices. Despite facing environmental constraints such as poor soil quality and limited water supply, the schools demonstrated remarkable adaptability through urban gardening techniques, organic farming methods, and drought-tolerant crop selection. The study culminated in the development of a GPP Implementation Framework comprising four key components: foundation elements, implementation processes, sustainability mechanisms, and outcome measures. This framework emphasizes the integration of technical expertise, community engagement, and systematic monitoring for successful program execution. Recommendations include establishing formal best-practice sharing systems, developing resource-sharing networks, and implementing standardized monitoring protocols. The findings contribute valuable insights for schools implementing GPP in geographically challenged areas, particularly highlighting the importance of community participation and adaptive agricultural practices in ensuring program sustainability.

Keywords: Gulayan sa Paaralan Program, school gardens, island schools, stakeholder engagement, agricultural education

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The Gulayan sa Paaralan Program (GPP) is an initiative introduced through DepEd Memo No. 293, s. 2007 to encourage public elementary and secondary schools to establish school gardens as a means to promote food security, improve nutrition education, and foster environmental awareness. These school gardens are meant to provide a continuous supply of fresh vegetables for school feeding programs, while also serving as educational tools to teach students about agriculture, healthy eating, and environmental stewardship. The program has gained significant attention as a powerful strategy to address hunger and food insecurity, especially within local communities. It is also an integral component of the National Greening Program aimed at enhancing sustainable food production and environmental care.

The Gulayan sa Paaralan Program serves as a significant initiative in the Philippine educational system, specifically designed to engage schools in cultivating vegetables to support food security. Molijon and Dela Rama (2014) emphasize that the GPP is part of the broader National Greening Program, demonstrating the Philippine government's commitment to fostering sustainable food production at the school level. According to Santos and Cruz (2016), successful implementation of school gardening programs relies on community engagement and strong local support systems. This aspect is critical in island schools where geographic isolation and resource limitations require collaborative efforts for success.

Research on school gardening programs highlights their multifaceted benefits. Nowak et al. (2012) underscore that school gardens not only provide sustainable sources of fresh produce but also function as practical learning laboratories for students. These gardens promote hands-on learning about agriculture, nutrition, and environmental stewardship. Moreover, school gardens serve as a means of teaching students to appreciate and engage with the environment in tangible ways. The Gulayan sa Paaralan Program specifically embodies these objectives, helping to meet food security needs while enhancing students' understanding of ecological sustainability.

However, island schools face distinct challenges that complicate the implementation of garden-based programs. Tinambacan (2017) points out that island communities often have limited land availability, making it challenging to establish large-scale agricultural programs. This issue is compounded by poor soil quality and unreliable water supply, both of which can affect garden productivity. The Gulayan sa Paaralan Program, however, has demonstrated flexibility by adapting to small spaces through urban gardening techniques, which is a particularly relevant approach for schools in geographically isolated areas. By implementing urban gardening methods, schools in island communities have found ways to maximize limited space and resources, ensuring that the program remains viable despite environmental constraints.

The role of community engagement is crucial in overcoming these challenges. Santos and Cruz (2016) assert that successful garden programs depend on the active participation of parents, local authorities, and the broader community. In island schools, where logistical and resource limitations are more pronounced, community partnerships are essential for sustaining the program. This collaborative effort helps schools overcome challenges related to transportation, materials, and labor, ensuring that the program continues to provide benefits to students and their families.

Finally, the educational impact of school gardens is well-documented. Research by Garcia (2015) found that students participating in garden programs demonstrated improved understanding of environmental concepts and a heightened interest in science and nutrition. The hands-on nature of school gardening fosters a deeper engagement with these subjects and provides students with practical skills that

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they can apply both in the classroom and in their daily lives. The Gulayan sa Paaralan Program thus not only contributes to food security but also enhances the educational experience by offering students a real-world context in which they can apply academic concepts.

The Gulayan sa Paaralan Program is an important initiative that serves multiple functions: it addresses food security, promotes environmental education, and engages students in active learning. However, the program faces challenges, particularly in island schools, which require unique strategies and approaches to overcome geographic and environmental barriers. This study seeks to understand how the GPP is implemented in island schools in Masinloc District, with a focus on the strategies used to address these challenges and the role of community participation in ensuring the program's success.

Statement of the Problem

The main purpose of this research was to describe Gulayan sa Paaralan Program implementation in Masinloc District's Island schools as basis in crafting GPP interventions to island educational institutions.

With this, the researcher aims to answer the following questions:

1. How may the Gulayan sa Paaralan Program implementation in Masinloc District's island schools be described?
2. What are the approaches or strategies of Gulayan sa Paaralan Program of Masinloc District's island schools?
3. What framework can be formulated based on the themes formed through phenomenological inquiry?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in several ways:

For the Department of Education (DepEd), the findings provide valuable insights that can guide the development of policies and programs specifically aimed at island schools. The study's conclusions could shape how DepEd adapts the GPP to schools in other challenging environments.

For teachers, the research identifies the best farming practices and programs that can be applied in island schools, providing them with practical tools to improve GPP implementation.

For researchers, this study provides a foundation for further investigation into agricultural education, community engagement, and the sustainable development of school gardens.

For future researchers, the findings present a case study of GPP implementation in geographically isolated schools, which could be applied to other similar educational settings.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, which is suited for exploring participants' lived experiences. Phenomenology allows the researcher to deeply understand the meaning and essence of the participants' experiences and perspectives regarding the GPP implementation. This approach is particularly valuable in capturing the complexities of agricultural practices and community involvement in remote areas.

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Participants

Presented in the table below were the distribution of the participants.

Table 1. Number of Participants

School	Target Respondent	No. of Participants
Panglit Elementary School	Gulayan sa Paaralan School Coordinator	1
San Salvador Elementary School	Gulayan sa Paaralan School Coordinator	1
San Salvador High School	Gulayan sa Paaralan School Coordinator	1
Total		**3**

There were three (3) respondents in this study. One (1) representative from each school which was chosen as participant particularly the School Gulayan sa Paaralan Coordinator. Each coordinator was directly responsible for managing the GPP at their respective schools, providing a unique perspective on the challenges and strategies involved in the program's execution. These three schools were selected to represent a diverse range of island school settings in the district, ensuring a comprehensive view of the GPP's implementation.

Data Collection

The data collection process consisted of semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to engage with the participants in open-ended discussions, offering flexibility to explore new ideas that arose during the interviews. The open-ended questionnaires complemented the interviews by allowing participants to reflect on their experiences in a structured manner.

The instruments were designed to gather information on the following:

- The implementation process of the GPP in each school.
- The strategies used to address challenges related to the environment, such as soil quality and water supply.
- The role of community participation in the success of the program.

The interviews and questionnaires were conducted in Filipino, ensuring that participants could respond comfortably and accurately. All responses were kept confidential, and participants were informed about the ethical guidelines surrounding data privacy.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involved open coding, where responses were carefully read and categorized into themes that emerged from the data. Each theme was then explored in depth to understand the underlying patterns and relationships between the participants' experiences. This allowed the researcher to identify common strategies for overcoming challenges and the impact of community involvement on the success of the GPP.

Thematic analysis provided a structured way to interpret the qualitative data, ensuring that key themes related to program implementation, challenges, and stakeholder engagement were thoroughly explored.

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RESULT

Program Implementation

The implementation of the Gulayan sa Paaralan Program (GPP) across the three island schools in Masinloc District revealed active and enthusiastic execution throughout the academic year. All three participating schools demonstrated a dynamic and continuous approach to the program, from initial planning to the harvest phases. Their commitment to the program was evidenced by regular monitoring and assessment, ensuring ongoing success and improvement. Notably, the schools' efforts led to recognition in competitions, with some achieving success at the division level.

Theme 1: Stakeholder Engagement and Community Participation

A key feature of the program's successful implementation was the robust involvement of stakeholders. Parents, teachers, students, and other community members participated actively in all phases of the program, from initial planning to harvesting. Formal structures were established to support community participation, such as Young Farmers Clubs and GPP Parent Officers. The schools employed recognition systems, such as awarding certificates to volunteers and establishing harvest-sharing arrangements to maintain community interest. Regular meetings and coordinated maintenance schedules ensured that all stakeholders remained engaged.

Theme 2: Program Benefits and Impact

The program served multiple beneficial purposes within the school communities. Primarily, it provided fresh produce for school feeding programs, which significantly supported nutritional initiatives. In addition to providing food, the gardens served as practical learning laboratories for students, allowing them to gain hands-on experience in agricultural practices and environmental stewardship. The program effectively promoted environmental awareness and healthy eating habits while offering students the opportunity to apply scientific concepts in real-world agricultural settings.

Theme 3: Implementation Challenges

Despite the overall success of the program, significant environmental and resource challenges were encountered. A primary challenge for all three schools was poor soil quality, with conditions ranging from muddy and compact soil to rocky and sandy ground, which hindered optimal plant growth. Additional challenges included limited water supply, especially during the dry summer months. Schools also faced difficulties due to limited availability of materials and unique transportation challenges, as the schools are located on islands, which made access to external resources more difficult.

Program Approaches and Strategies

In response to the identified challenges, the schools employed various technical solutions and strategies to ensure the success of the GPP.

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Theme 1: Technical and Agricultural Strategies

To overcome environmental limitations, the schools adopted urban gardening techniques, which helped maximize space and address soil quality issues. The schools also used organic fertilizers and pesticides to enhance soil fertility and protect crops from pests. Additionally, they strategically selected drought-tolerant and low-maintenance crops, ensuring the sustainability of the gardens despite water constraints. Other approaches, such as composting and soil enhancement methods, were implemented to improve growing conditions, and improvised planting containers helped mitigate inherent soil problems.

Theme 2: Stakeholder Engagement Approaches

The schools' engagement strategies played a crucial role in ensuring the GPP's success. They established formal structures, such as the Young Farmers Clubs and GPP Parent Officers, to ensure well-organized participation. Regular meetings with parents and community members facilitated ongoing communication and involvement. Recognition systems, including certificates for volunteers and harvest-sharing arrangements, were designed to incentivize continued participation. Additionally, the schools implemented grade-level area assignments, where specific groups were responsible for different sections of the garden. Coordination with the Municipal Agrarian Office helped secure additional resources and support for the program.

Theme 3: Monitoring and Sustainability Practices

The schools maintained robust monitoring and sustainability practices to ensure the program's continuity. These practices included regular assessments of plant growth and yield, continuous maintenance schedules, and close monitoring of garden conditions. The schools focused on sustainable agriculture practices, which helped ensure long-term viability. The emphasis on low-maintenance crops reduced the resource demands, while systems for knowledge sharing and capacity building among participants ensured that the program would continue even after initial implementation.

Framework Components Based on Phenomenological Inquiry

GPP IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

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Based on the findings from the phenomenological inquiry, a GPP Implementation Framework emerged that emphasizes four key components:

1. Foundation Elements: The framework emphasizes the importance of community partnerships and technical agricultural knowledge as the foundation for successful implementation.
2. Implementation Processes: Systematic planning, regular monitoring, and continuous stakeholder engagement are crucial for program success.
3. Sustainability Mechanisms: Knowledge sharing, resource management, and adaptive problem-solving ensure the program's sustainability.
4. Outcome Measures: The framework includes both tangible results, such as nutritional impact, and intangible benefits, such as community engagement levels and agricultural knowledge transfer.

DISCUSSION

Stakeholder Engagement and Community Participation

The robust community participation identified as a theme in the results section reflects the centrality of community involvement in ensuring the program's success. By involving various stakeholders, including parents, teachers, students, and local community members, the program fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility. This approach is critical for maintaining engagement, especially in island schools where external resources are limited. Recognition systems, such as certificates for volunteers and harvest-sharing systems, further contribute to the sustainability of the program by ensuring that community members remain motivated and invested in its success. The creation of formal structures like Young Farmers Clubs and GPP Parent Officers also plays a crucial role in maintaining a well-organized and sustained effort throughout the academic year.

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Program Benefits and Educational Impact

The GPP's role in promoting food security and nutrition education cannot be overstated. By providing fresh produce for school feeding programs, the program contributes directly to students' nutritional needs. Furthermore, the gardens serve as living classrooms, where students apply theoretical knowledge to real-life agricultural practices. This hands-on learning experience helps students better understand scientific concepts related to environmental sustainability and agriculture. As Garcia (2015) noted, school gardens significantly contribute to students' understanding of environmental concepts and foster a greater interest in science and nutrition. This study further supports the finding that the GPP not only provides food but also enhances students' educational experiences.

Implementation Challenges

The environmental and logistical challenges highlighted in the results, including poor soil quality and limited water supply, are common obstacles for schools in geographically isolated areas. The schools in Masinloc District's island communities demonstrated remarkable adaptability in overcoming these challenges through innovative gardening techniques and resourceful solutions. For example, the use of urban gardening techniques allowed schools to maximize available space, and the selection of drought-tolerant crops ensured that the gardens remained productive even during dry seasons. However, these challenges emphasize the need for continued investment in resource management and soil improvement technologies to ensure the sustainability of such programs.

Technical and Agricultural Strategies

The technical strategies employed by the schools, including the use of organic fertilizers, composting, and drought-tolerant crops, were instrumental in overcoming environmental constraints. These strategies not only addressed immediate challenges but also contributed to the long-term sustainability of the program by reducing dependence on external inputs and optimizing available resources. The schools' emphasis on low-maintenance crops and sustainable agricultural practices aligns with global best practices for school gardens in resource-constrained environments, as recommended by Nowak et al. (2012).

Sustainability Mechanisms and Framework

The GPP Implementation Framework proposed in this study emphasizes the importance of integrating community partnerships, technical expertise, and sustainability mechanisms for long-term success. The knowledge sharing and capacity-building elements within the framework are essential for ensuring that the program continues to thrive even as initial coordinators and resources change. Additionally, the framework's focus on continuous monitoring and adaptive problem-solving allows the program to evolve and adapt to new challenges and opportunities, ensuring its resilience over time.

This study reveals that, despite significant challenges, the Gulayan sa Paaralan Program in Masinloc District's island schools has proven successful. Key factors contributing to the program's success include strong community involvement, innovative agricultural practices, and effective monitoring systems. The GPP Implementation Framework provides a strategic roadmap for implementing and evaluating the program, particularly in geographically isolated schools.

CONCLUSION

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The analysis of the Gulayan sa Paaralan Program in Masinloc District's island schools reveals a robustly implemented initiative characterized by strong stakeholder commitment and innovative adaptation to challenges. The program consistently demonstrates active implementation across participating schools, successfully serving multiple purposes including nutritional support, educational enhancement, and community engagement. Despite facing significant environmental and resource challenges inherent to island locations, schools have shown remarkable resilience and adaptability in maintaining program effectiveness.

A key finding highlights the crucial role of community participation in program success. The establishment of formal structures such as Young Farmers Clubs and GPP Parent Officers has effectively facilitated organized involvement, while recognition systems and harvest-sharing arrangements have helped sustain stakeholder interest and commitment. The schools have successfully developed and implemented innovative technical approaches to overcome environmental challenges, including urban gardening techniques, organic farming methods, and adaptive planting strategies. Regular monitoring and maintenance systems have proven integral to ensuring program sustainability.

The framework developed through this study provides a comprehensive structure for program implementation, successfully integrating foundation elements, processes, sustainability mechanisms, and outcome measures. This balanced approach effectively addresses both technical and social aspects of program implementation, creating a sustainable model for island school gardens.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance program effectiveness, several key recommendations emerge from this study. First, there is a need to establish a formal system for sharing best practices among island schools, coupled with the development of a resource-sharing network to address material and transportation challenges. Implementing standardized monitoring and evaluation systems across participating schools, along with regular capacity-building programs for coordinators and stakeholders, would further strengthen program implementation.

Resource management could be improved through strategic partnerships with agricultural agencies and NGOs, alongside the development of water conservation systems and rainwater harvesting facilities. Investment in soil improvement technologies suitable for island environments and the creation of seed banking systems would ensure more sustainable operations. Stakeholder engagement could be enhanced by strengthening existing recognition systems, developing structured training programs for parent volunteers, and creating regular forums for sharing experiences and success stories.

Technical improvements should focus on regular soil analysis and targeted improvement measures, along with research into climate-resilient crop varieties. Developing specific guidelines for urban gardening in island school settings and implementing systematic documentation of successful farming techniques would support more effective practice. Policy development should prioritize creating specific guidelines for GPP implementation in island schools, establishing clear protocols for resource allocation and distribution, and instituting regular program review mechanisms.

For long-term sustainability, attention should be given to succession planning for program coordinators, creating systems for knowledge transfer and documentation, and establishing long-term partnerships with agricultural support agencies. Educational integration could be strengthened through

structured learning materials based on garden activities and clear assessment tools measuring student learning through GPP. Finally, community development aspects could be enhanced by expanding program impact through outreach initiatives and creating mechanisms for broader community involvement.

These recommendations, implemented systematically and with consideration for local contexts, would significantly enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the Gulayan sa Paaralan Program in Masinloc District's island schools. The focus on both immediate practical needs and long-term development goals ensures a comprehensive approach to program improvement. By addressing technical, educational, and community aspects simultaneously, these recommendations provide a roadmap for sustained program success and increased impact on both student learning and community development.

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