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Impact Assessment of the Extension Activities Conducted by the College of Governance of the Marinduque State University - Santa Cruz Campus

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ABSTRACT

This study found that extension activities by the College of Governance of Marinduque State University in fifty-five barangays of Sta. Cruz, Marinduque, significantly empowered local officials and community members. Rooted in the University's mission to share knowledge beyond the classroom, these initiatives aimed to increase citizen participation and local governance capacity. Using qualitative methods such as document analysis and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), the study assessed impacts on barangay officials' performance. Results showed improved transparency, participatory planning, accurate documentation, organized record-keeping, and well-drafted official documents. Challenges such as scheduling conflicts and limited monitoring resources underscore the need for blended training and institutional reforms to ensure inclusivity and sustainability. The assessment affirms that these activities advanced participatory and accountable local governance.

Keywords: barangay governance, capacity-building, extension activities, Marinduque State University participatory governance

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Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines are required by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to execute three primary functions: instruction, research, and extension, in accordance with Republic Act 7722, known as the Higher Education Act of 1994. Among these, extension services are crucial in integrating theories, information, and research findings into practical programs that meet the needs of the real-world community. These programmes make a significant contribution to social development, capacity building in the community, and empowerment of local stakeholders. The importance of the extension is further underlined by CHED Memorandum No. 63, s. 2017, which lays policies and regulations to guarantee that the extension initiatives are impactful, sustainable, and responsive.

Marinduque State University's (MarSU) College of Governance exemplifies this extension purpose by academic knowledge to tackle urgent local governance issues. Marinduque State University conducted a comprehensive training program for Sta. Cruz barangay officials, in line with Board of Trustees Resolution No. 53, Series of 2020, in partnership with the Department of the Interior and Local Government–Marinduque and the Lupon ng mga Punong Barangay. The program was thoughtfully split into three stages: advanced management training for Punong Barangays, mandatory training for Kagawads, and job-essential skills training specifically designed for secretaries and treasurers. All 55 barangays in Sta. Cruz was involved in this effort, with the goals of strengthening technical proficiency, enhancing administrative effectiveness, and developing leadership potential.

The degree to which these extension initiatives have resulted in observable governance enhancements and long-term performance increases among barangay officials has not been investigated, despite the program's scale and focused design. Understanding the program's efficacy and identifying current issues need assessing the learning and application of information and skills, as well as monitoring the governance achievements that follow. Such an evaluation will yield evidence-based insights to direct future extension interventions' improvements, guaranteeing their continued relevance and responsiveness to Marinduque's local governance needs.

The primary objective of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the extension activities conducted by the College of Governance of MarSU by exploring how the training enhanced the capacities of barangay officials, influenced governance practices, and identified gaps that impede sustained progress.

Statement of the Problem

1. How do the knowledge and skills acquired from the extension activities affect the performance and contributions of the barangay officials in their respective barangays?
2. What are the challenges encountered by the barangay officials in participating the extension activities?
3. What recommendations can be proposed to improve future extension activities in terms of effectiveness, inclusivity, and sustainability?

Methods

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The interpretive phenomenological approach developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer served as the primary framework to direct a qualitative case study designed to scientifically examine and understand participants' lived experiences (Gadamer, 1998). Purposive sampling, as recommended by Creswell (2003), was utilized to select key human participants directly involved in and affected by the extension activities of the College of Governance of Marinduque State University.

The participants consisted of fifty-five barangay officials from Sta. Cruz, Marinduque, covering the varied roles within the barangay governance structure, including Punong Barangay Secretaries, Treasurers, and Kagawads. These officials represented all 55 barangays in Sta. Cruz was the focus of the extension programs. The selection ensured a comprehensive range of governance roles to capture diverse perspectives on the training's impact.

The study employed Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and interviews guided by a semi-structured interview tool. This tool was developed to anchor the study's objectives and was reviewed by experts to ensure its relevance and clarity. Interviews and FGDs were conducted at venues convenient to participants, to facilitate open and authentic dialogue.

The qualitative data obtained were systematically coded and thematically analyzed following Gadamer's interpretive phenomenology, which involves two major phases: (1) analyzing the contextual social perspectives of participants, understanding their situated political and administrative realities; and (2) analysis of the textual content of their verbalizations, extracting the natural attitudes and thematic essences or eidos of their experiences with the extension activities.

Specifically, the analysis was conducted in the following categories: (a) interpretation of the natural attitudes and themes or eidos concerning the significant dimensions and effects of the extension activities as perceived by barangay officials; (b) interpretation of the dynamics and interactions involved in the execution and reception of the extension programs; and (c) integration of participant perspectives to develop a cohesive understanding, subsequently fusion of participant horizons to construct an integrated understanding, followed by a transformation of the fused eidos into an ideal-type employing Max Weber's method of verstehen (Weber, 1978).

The hermeneutic interpretation was further elaborated using Anthony Giddens' structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) to understand how governance structures and agency of barangay officials mutually constituted the observed phenomena. This theoretical elaboration provided a normative frame for proposing governance improvements grounded in the lived realities of participants.

Lastly, the resultant interpretive synthesis has guided policy suggestions based on Archon Fung's idea of democratic co-governance (Fung, 2006). The study promotes the establishment of institutional mechanisms for discursive communication grounded in Amartya Sen's framework of economic functions and capabilities (Chambers, 1983; Sen, 1992), Robert Chambers' structural economic sustainable livelihood approach, and Jurgen Habermas' theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984), and the securitization of the local governance framework to ensure inclusive, responsive, and accountable barangay leadership.

Results and Discussion

1. Barangay Officials' Interpretation of their Natural Attitude and Eidos of their Lived Experience of the Extension Activities

a. Context

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Barangay officials interpreted the extension activities as invaluable opportunities to enhance their governance, leadership, and administrative functions. These interpretations were deeply shaped by their roles as local leaders responsible for managing essential programs and services for their constituents.

b. Textual Evidence and Analysis

1.1 Governance and Leadership Development

Barangay officials emphasized that the training greatly enhanced their capacity for leadership and enhanced their ability to plan and make decisions. According to one Punong Barangay,
"Ang una ko pong pinukos ay yung Good governance… ito ay isang napakalaking katulungan kung paano mamuno sa barangay." (Kapitan, P2)
This statement emphasized that in line with the findings of Brillantes & Fernandez (2011), who concluded that strengthening leadership abilities necessary for accountable and participative governance through focused capacity-building is crucial to enhancing the efficacy of local governance.

1.2 Ordinance and Documentation Skills

Participants addressed about developing useful technical skills in creating resolutions, drafting ordinances, and keeping organized records. According to a secretary:
"Up-to-date na paggawa ng ordinansa… paggawa ng minutes." (Secretary, P5)
These capacities demonstrate the institutionalization of bureaucratic processes, which aligns with Weber's (1978) theory of rational-legal authority, according to which formalized regulations and documentation validate and enhance the effectiveness of government.

1.3 Improved Service Delivery

Officials stated that they were using the newly acquired knowledge to improve the effectiveness of barangay services:
"Mas napadali ang basic services po sa barangay." (Kapitan, P1)
This practical improvement supports the UNDP's (2016) findings that institutional recognition and measurable improvements in service delivery follow from capacity-building at the grassroots level.

2. Challenges Encountered by Barangay Officials in Extension Activities

a. Context

Despite favorable outcomes, barangay officials identified contextual and structural challenges that hindered full participation and optimal application of the extension activities.

b. Textual Evidence and Analysis

2.1 Logistical and Financial Barriers

During the COVID-19 epidemic, transportation costs and associated expenses presented major obstacles to participation: According to the Secretary,
"Mahal ang pamasahe, kailangan pang mag-hire ng sasakyan." (Secretary, P6)
This is in line with the wider socio-economic limitations that Llanto (2012) emphasized, emphasizing how crucial it is to take these realities into account when creating inclusive local government initiatives.

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2.2 Time and Attendance Issues

Balancing official duties with personal and family responsibilities led some officials to leave early or skip sessions:

"Yung iba po kase napapansin ko ay umaalis… ako'y nagbababad para malaman ang kabuuan." (Kapitan, P1)

It emphasizes the necessity of training approaches that take into consideration the variety of responsibilities that grassroots leaders carry out.

2.3 Venue and Food Concerns

Environmental discomforts and unconsidered dietary restrictions further affected focus and engagement:

"Mahirap makinig kapag mainit ang paligid… dapat tanungin muna kung ano yung bawal na pagkain." (Kapitan, P2; Secretary, P7)

Addressing such practicalities is critical to facilitate conducive learning environments and participant well-being.

2.4 Language and Comprehension Gaps

English-only instructional delivery proved challenging for some participants:

"Hindi po namin maabsorb… dapat taglish, huwag pure English." (Kapitan, P2)

Incorporating mixed language approaches like Taglish, as participants suggested, aligns with educational best practices to improve comprehension and inclusiveness.

3. Recommendations to Improve Future Extension Activities

a. Context

Barangay officials proposed practical steps for enhancing future programs.

b. Textual Evidence and Interpretation

3.1 Expand MarSU Training to All Barangay Officials

"Sa tingin ko po mas maganda kung lahat ng barangay officials ay maisama sa training. Kapag pantay-pantay ang kaalaman namin, mas madali kaming magtulungan at mag-desisyon para sa barangay." (Kapitan, P3)

"Minsan kasi ang kapitan o treasurer lang ang naiimbita, pero kami kagawad din kailangan ng ganitong kaalaman para maging epektibo sa tungkulin." (Kapitan, P3)

Inclusive training ensures collective accountability and prevents gaps in performance, consistent with studies showing improved governance when all officials are capacitated (PIDS, 2018).

3.2 Use Clear, Local-Language Materials

"Maganda po sana kung ang training modules ay nasa Tagalog o lokal na wika. Mas naiintindihan namin agad at hindi kami natatakot sa sobrang teknikal na mga salita." (Kapitan, P4)

"Kapag komplikado ang mga termino, natatagalan bago namin ma-absorb. Kung simple lang at gamit ang sariling wika, mas mabilis naming naia-apply."

Simplified, culturally appropriate language boosts comprehension and participation, reinforcing principles from Knowles' Adult Learning Theory (1973) and UNESCO (2016).

3.3 Provide Orientation for Newly Appointed Officials

"Kung bago ka sa serbisyo, malaking tulong ang orientation bago umupo. Doon pa lang alam mo na agad ang tungkulin at hindi ka nangangapa."

"Kailangan may orientation para malinaw ang proseso, lalo na sa pondo at dokumento.
Mahirap kasi kung trial and error lang."

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Structured on boarding aligns with DILG's Newly Elected Officials Program, enhancing institutional memory and easing transitions (DILG, 2019).

3.4 Maintain Ongoing Extension Programs

"Hindi sapat yung isang seminar lang tapos na. Sana tuloy-tuloy ang training para updated kami sa mga bagong polisiya at programa ng gobyerno."

"Kapag regular ang extension programs, nagiging mas consistent ang kaalaman at mas handa kami sa mga bagong hamon sa barangay."

Continuous capacity-building addresses evolving governance challenges, supported by the Local Government Academy's recommendations (LGA, 2020).

3.5 Conduct Refresher and Advanced Training

"Mabuti rin kung may refresher at advanced training. Kahit matagal na sa serbisyo, kailangan pa rin ulit-ulitin para sariwa at mas lalong lumalalim ang kaalaman."

"Kung may mas advanced na modules, natututo rin kaming humarap sa mas komplikadong problema, hindi lang yung basic."

Refresher courses sustain knowledge retention and support advanced skill development, critical for seasoned officials.

3.6 Include Practical, Context-Relevant Topics

"Mas gusto namin yung mga training na tumatalakay sa praktikal na problema—tulad ng kalusugan, agrikultura, at pagresolba ng alitan. Yun kasi ang madalas naming hinaharap."

"Kung ang tatalakayin ay mga totoong sitwasyon sa barangay, mas ramdam namin ang gamit at hindi lang puro teorya."

Practical content increases relevance and empowers officials to tackle real community issues effectively.

3.7 Facilitate Internships for Governance Students

"Maganda rin kung may estudyante mula sa unibersidad na mag-intern sa barangay.
Natututo sila, at kami naman nadadagdagan ng tulong sa mga gawain."

"Kung may interns, nadadala rin nila yung mga bagong kaalaman mula sa school.
Malaking tulong yun para sa amin."

Partnering with academic interns fosters knowledge exchange and augments barangay administration support (Manalo, 2022).

4. Fusion of Horizons and Transformation of the Interpretation of Extension Activities

a. Fusion of Horizons on the Natural Attitude and Eidos of the Lived Dynamics

The fusion of horizons represents the convergence of perspectives from all barangay officials regarding their lived experience of the extension activities conducted by Marinduque State University (MarSU). On the other hand, some officials stressed the importance of the extension programs' practical governance skills, leadership development, and inclusive training. They identified two important results of the training: enhanced decision-making skills and the ability to perform community service.

Moreover, challenges such as logistical constraints, language barriers due to the complexity of training materials, and limited orientation for newly appointed officials emerged from the collective narratives. Many officials highlighted that the trainings predominantly involved select officers, excluding vital members like Kagawad and Secretaries, which limited overall cohesion and effectiveness at the barangay level.

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Further, given the officials' combined experience, both the advantages and the difficulties are there. This intersection displays a nuanced natural attitude toward the extension programs that strikes a balance between critical comments on areas that need significant improvement and appreciation for capacity-building efforts. The combination of these perspectives shows a common yet nuanced understanding of the function and effects of extension activities, which are marked by both unmet needs and empowerment.

b. Transformation of the Eidos of the Dynamics into an Idealized Type

The lived dynamics of the barangay officials' involvement with MarSU's extension programs can be idealized into a kind characterized by inclusivity, accessibility, and ongoing capacity building by utilizing Max Weber's verstehen approach. This concept combines the systematic delivery of training programs with the active participation and application of acquired skills by each barangay official.

The ideal kind of extension activities would systematically include all barangay officials, use language materials that are clear and understandable in the local context, give new elected officials structured orientations, and maintain regular refresher and advanced training modules that are pertinent to the real-world issues that the barangays face. To enhance the governance experience, ongoing interaction with academic institutions through internships and hands-on training will also be included.

Conclusion

The study's initial goal was to evaluate how Marinduque State University's (MarSU) extension initiatives affect the barangay's leadership. Initial findings showed how barangay officials viewed the training, pointing to notable gains in leadership, service delivery, and governance abilities. Nevertheless, the findings also pointed to difficulties like low levels of inclusion, communication difficulties, logistical problems, and inadequate training for recently appointed officials.

Further examination revealed that although some officials benefited from empowerment and the development of practical skills, others pointed out gaps brought about by selective participation and complicated training materials, which had an impact on overall effectiveness and group ability. This duality in perspectives reflects a nuanced lived experience that balances appreciation of the extension benefits with critical concerns that undermine full impact.

The fusion of these interpretations leads to a complex understanding of the extension activities as both enabling and constrained, forming a practical basis for transformative improvement. Applying Max Weber's method of verstehen allows this lived experience to be theorized into an ideal-type of fully inclusive, accessible, and continuous capacity-building programs. This ideal emphasizes inclusive trainings for all officials, use of clear local-language materials, structured onboarding for new appointees, and ongoing refresher and advanced modules tailored to the practical realities faced by barangays.

This ideal-type can therefore guide the development of policies and programs that institutionalize ongoing, culturally relevant, and participatory extension initiatives, incorporating frameworks for experiential adult learning and promoting preparedness for collaborative governance. A coordinated approach involving educational institutions, local government entities, and community stakeholders is required for the implementation of such initiatives.

Ultimately, the findings imply the following:

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1. The need for comprehensive, inclusive capacity-building strategies to improve barangay governance has been established by a nuanced effect assessment.
2. The study supports the use of interpretive approaches to capture the nuanced lived experiences of local officials with regard to extension programs.
3. To increase the effectiveness of extension activities, a theoretical and practical framework for understanding transformation to an ideal-type may be provided.
4. Policymaking may focus on institutionalizing inclusive training, simplifying communication materials, and maintaining ongoing learning opportunities to ensure sustained governance improvement at the grassroots level.

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