

# SERVICE DELIVERY AND QUALITY ASSURANCE IN ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC

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## Abstract

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In the challenging backdrop of the pandemic, educational institutions, particularly teacher education entities, found themselves at a crossroads. Administrative services, traditionally seen as the backbone of these institutions, underwent significant shifts. Using a tool inspired by the Area X. Administration section of the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACUP) instrument and grounded in the principles of Kivistö and Pekkola (2017), this study adopts a mixed-method approach to dissect these transitions. Our research unveils a robust move towards digitization, emphasizing the growing role of online learning and communication platforms in the modern educational business model. However, this digital embrace brings forth challenges, especially in areas like resource allocation, supply chain management, and stakeholder communication, which demand innovative business solutions. The findings underscore the need for ongoing improvement, adaptability, and the integration of modern business practices in the educational sector. This research serves as a roadmap, offering actionable insights for institutions aiming to optimize their administrative functions amidst changing business landscapes. Furthermore, it sets the stage for future researchers, emphasizing the blend of traditional educational values with contemporary business strategies, and encourages a more profound exploration of how educational institutions can navigate and thrive in today's dynamic business environment.

**Keywords:** Administrative Services, Business Strategies, Digitization, Educational Institutions, Resource Allocation, Supply Chain Management

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of educational frameworks, administrative services play a pivotal role, particularly in the context of the pandemic. This study is set against this backdrop, focusing on teacher education institutions (TEIs). We employ the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2011) definition of program evaluation to delve into the intricacies of university operations, seeking a deeper understanding in light of the current health crisis.

The Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACUP) elevates these services from operational necessities to the core of “governance and management”, highlighting the need for continuous introspection and pursuit of excellence. This global health crisis has prompted educational institutions worldwide, including in Europe with its rigorous quality assurance standards, to seek resilient operational models (Kivistö & Pekkola, 2017).

In the midst of the pandemic’s transformative impact on education, our study embarks on a journey to unravel the intricate fabric of administrative services within TEIs. At its core, this exploration is driven by two fundamental questions that guide our scholarly inquiry. Firstly, we seek to uncover the current state of administrative services in these institutions during such unprecedented times. This inquiry delves into understanding how these services have adapted and evolved in response to the challenges and demands brought forth by the pandemic.

Simultaneously, our investigation is anchored in a deeper analytical pursuit. We employ a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis to meticulously dissect these services’ strengths and vulnerabilities, aiming to glean insights that go beyond surface-level observations. This leads us to our second question: How do the identified strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, of these administrative services inform their potential trajectory moving forward? Through this lens, we aspire to forecast the future paths these services might navigate, considering the lessons learned and adaptations made during this global health crisis. This dual line of questioning forms the backbone of our study, setting the stage for a comprehensive examination of the ever-evolving realm of administrative services in the context of teacher education during a time of global upheaval.

Guided by the work of Kivistö and Pekkola (2017), we aim to spotlight the crucial sector of “governance and management”, often overshadowed by other institutional activities. While the integration of digital technologies (Bharadwaj et al., 2013; Santos, 2023) and the focus on supply chains and sustainable practices (Santos, 2023) are pertinent, they are peripheral to our central theme. Our research objectives are threefold. First, to explore the quality of administrative services across selected TEIs. Second, to capture tales of administrative excellence and best practices. Third, to identify areas needing enhancement to bolster the services’ robustness and agility for a future marked by uncertainties. Employing a mixed-methods approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), we synthesize quantitative evaluations with qualitative insights, aiming for a comprehensive understanding of

the administrative services landscape during the pandemic. The study’s findings highlight the significant role of administrative services in shaping academic experiences, pinpointing key strengths, and areas needing attention. These insights offer actionable directions for refining administrative services, ensuring their adaptability and resilience.

The paper’s structure unfolds as follows: Section 2 provides a detailed literature review. Section 3 details the research methodology. Section 4 presents the primary findings. Section 5 discusses these results. Section 6 concludes with recommendations for future research.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Quality and administration in higher education

Quality in higher education, as elucidated by Elken and Stensaker (2018), Bual and Madrigal (2018), and others, is a multifaceted concept encompassing dimensions like teaching efficacy, curriculum relevance, and student perspectives (Lazic et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2018). Objective quality targets universally recognized attributes, while relative quality reflects individual evaluators’ perspectives (Elken & Stensaker, 2018; Nasim et al., 2019; Fidan et al., 2022). Region-specific challenges in Turkish and Saudi institutions illustrate the diversity in the quality landscape of higher education (Yildirim & Aslan, 2021; Albaqami, 2019).

Recent studies have expanded this understanding. Mrwebi (2019) discusses the impact of leadership style on employment in emerging economies, highlighting the significance of administrative roles in educational settings. Al-Shboul et al. (2022) emphasize the effect of human resources in supply chains on firm performance, underlining the importance of efficient administrative practices in educational institutions.

Harvey and Green’s (1993) dimensions of quality — exceptionality, consistency, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformation — are influential across various fields (Ambrós-Pallarès et al., 2023; Wysocka et al., 2022; Anwar, 2017). Additionally, the role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in administrative settings has gained attention. Fortuna et al. (2020), Backhouse and Wickham (2020), and Osemeke et al. (2020) provide insights into how CSR practices influence governance and management within educational institutions.

Kivistö and Pekkola (2017) discuss the distinct yet complementary roles of academic and administrative professionals. Recent literature, such as that by Lahjie et al. (2021), Velte (2022), and Nagalingam et al. (2022), further explores the dynamic between corporate governance and educational administration.

The continuum of administrative functions developed by Kivistö and Pekkola (2017), and further analyzed by Mahmoud et al. (2020), categorizes administrative tasks into distinct levels, aiding in understanding their complexity. This framework aligns with recent studies like Pisano et al. (2022), which examine the effectiveness of CSR committees in enhancing independent director roles.

Integrating these contemporary perspectives establishes a more comprehensive understanding of quality and administration in higher education. It underscores the need for continuous improvement, adaptability, and alignment of

administrative functions with academic missions, as well as the increasing importance of CSR and corporate governance in shaping the future of higher education institutions.

## 2.2. Continuum of administrative functions

The continuum of administrative functions developed by Kivistö and Pekkola (2017) offers a valuable framework for categorizing university administrative tasks. This framework recognizes the diversity and complexity of administrative functions and emphasizes the balance between required skill levels and their alignment with academic missions. It features two axes: one representing the spectrum of skills from “highly skilled” to “low skilled”, and the other delving into the alignment of tasks with the university’s missions, ranging from “control and support functions” to “core academic functions and missions”.

The confluence of axes yields five distinct staff categories, each representing unique administrative roles. Staff category 1 epitomizes expertise in administrative acumen, primarily focused on administrative oversight and support. Staff category 2 balances expert administrative tasks with moderate academic control and support. Staff category 3, the para-academics, bridges the administrative and academic realms seamlessly. Staff category 4 immerses itself in academics but occasionally takes on administrative responsibilities. Lastly, staff category 5, the bedrock, handles indispensable grassroots roles. Kivistö and Pekkola’s (2017) continuum reflects the multifaceted nature of administrative roles in higher education, highlighting the importance of every role in the university’s functioning.

The conceptual framework for this project is designed to intricately meld the analysis of accreditation data with outcome evaluation (De Lara, 2017), all within the realm of administrative services in TEIs during the pandemic. This framework is built on the foundational understanding that administrative services are multifaceted and dynamic, especially in the context of the challenges posed by the pandemic.

At the outset, the framework places significant emphasis on the importance of accreditation data. This data is bifurcated into two main streams: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative aspect involves a descriptive analysis based on existing documents, aiming to derive measurable and

statistical insights. This approach provides a solid empirical basis for the study. In contrast, the qualitative aspect focuses on capturing the essence of experiences and subjective perceptions, offering depth and context to the quantitative data. It seeks to comprehend the nuanced and interpretive facets of administrative services that may not be readily apparent through quantitative measures alone.

The framework then transitions into a systematic approach for outcome evaluation. A critical step in this process is the formation of a working group, bringing together diverse expertise and perspectives. The composition of this group plays a vital role in shaping the focus of the evaluation, including the determination of the target audience and the specific outcomes to be measured. This step highlights the direct influence of stakeholder perspectives on the evaluation process.

Following the establishment of the working group, the framework advocates for conducting a pilot test of the chosen data collection methodologies. This preliminary step is pivotal in ensuring that the methods align with the project’s overarching objectives and are effective in capturing the intended data. The pilot test acts as a quality check, allowing for refinements in methodology before broad-scale data collection commences.

The culmination of this framework is represented by the integration of a SWOT analysis, which identifies the SWOT intrinsic to the administrative services under study. This diagnostic component is informed by both quantitative and qualitative data, thus providing a comprehensive overview of the current state of administrative services and highlighting potential areas for improvement and growth.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was designed as an evaluation study, employing a mixed-method design that combined the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Under the quantitative design, the study utilized a descriptive approach to cover the profile of identified TEIs in the country. In parallel, the qualitative component included a documentary analysis of existing accreditation files of select TEIs, supplemented by questionnaire responses. This qualitative aspect was significant in the process and outcome evaluation of the administrative services provided by the selected institutions.

**Table 1.** Distribution of participants

<i>Participating institutions</i>	<i>Admin</i>	<i>Faculty</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Code</i>
1	A1, A2, A3	F1, F2		I
2		F3, F4, F5	S1, S2, S3	II
3			S4	Dropped
4	A4, A5, A6, A7, A8	F6, F7, F8, F9	S5	III
5	A10, A11	F10		IV
6	A12, A13	F11	S6, S7	V
7		F12	S8	VI
8	A14	F13	S9	VII
9	A15, A16, A17	F14, F15, F16	S10	VIII
10	A18, A19	F17	S11	IX
11	A20, A21	F18		X
12	A22			Dropped
13		F22		Dropped
14	A23	F19, F20	S12	XI
15	A24	F21	S13	XII
16	A25, A26	F23		XIII
17		F24		Dropped
18		F25		Dropped

Source: Authors’ elaboration.

Participants were stakeholders involved in the administrative services of the selected TEIs. From 18 consenting institutions, the number was refined based on representation criteria, ensuring at least one representative per institution from faculty, staff, and administration. A questionnaire was developed based on the Area X. Administration section of the AACUP instrument, with data analysis focusing on the mean and standard deviation for descriptive results. Coding was applied to extract common themes from the questionnaire responses.

### 3.1. Alternative research methods

While the mixed methods approach was chosen for its comprehensive insights, alternative methodologies could have been considered. A purely qualitative approach, such as a series of in-depth interviews or focus groups, might have provided richer, more detailed personal narratives and insights into the administrative practices and challenges faced by TEIs. Conversely, a purely quantitative approach, perhaps a large-scale survey with a broader participant pool, could have offered more generalized data, allowing for broader applicability of the findings.

### 3.2. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount, especially regarding the sensitivity of accreditation data. Participating TEIs were formally approached for consent, with the provision to withdraw at any point. A research report excluding identifiable information will be shared with TEIs before publication. Participants, primarily school leaders, were not part of any vulnerable group. Sensitive performance data about the TEIs will be handled cautiously to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. All participants signed a consent form with an explanatory note for clarity. Data will be securely stored for a year post-study, and then destroyed. The final research report will encapsulate key findings and recommendations to enhance administrative services.

## 4. RESULT

### 4.1. Evaluation of teacher education institution administrative services by internal stakeholders

In the study, faculty, staff, and administrators evaluated the administrative functions of their institutions using eight specific parameters (Area X. Administration from the AACUP Accreditation Instrument). These parameters covered areas such as A) Organization; B) Academics; C) Student administration; D) Financial management; E) Supply management; F) Records management; G) Institutional planning and development; and H) Performance of administrative personnel. Participants rated each parameter on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 indicating the highest level of satisfaction. If participants felt they could not adequately judge a particular parameter, they had the option to select "CJ".

To provide clarity to the ratings, Table 2 was established to interpret the evaluation scores qualitatively. Scores ranging from 4.21 to 5.00 were

interpreted as "very high", those from 3.41 to 4.20 were considered "high", scores from 2.61 to 3.40 were deemed "average", ratings between 1.81 and 2.60 were labeled as "low", and scores from 1.00 to 1.80 were characterized as "very low".

#### 4.1.1. Evaluation by administrators

Administrators at TEI evaluated various administrative service parameters, shedding light on the institution's internal effectiveness. Their assessments revealed that both "organization" and "academic administration" are highly regarded, with means of 4.54 and 4.56, respectively. The consistency in these perceptions is highlighted by the close standard deviations. "Student administration" was similarly esteemed with a score of 4.36. However, "financial management" and "supply management" received slightly lower scores of 4.08 and 3.84, indicating areas for potential enhancement, especially given the more varied opinions on these aspects. Meanwhile, "records management" and "institutional planning and development" affirmed the institution's strong foundations with scores over 4. In essence, while the administrators recognize TEI's strengths in many administrative facets, some areas might require focused attention for improvement.

**Table 2.** Evaluation of administrative services at teacher education institutions by administrators

<i>Administrative service parameters</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>Qualitative interpretation</i>
A. Organization	4.54	0.51	VH
B. Academic administration	4.56	0.51	VH
C. Student administration	4.36	0.57	VH
D. Financial management	4.08	0.95	H
E. Supply management	3.84	0.94	H
F. Records management	4.00	0.87	H
G. Institutional planning and development	4.36	0.64	VH

Note: VH indicates very high, and H indicates high in qualitative interpretation.

Source: Authors' calculation.

#### 4.1.2. Evaluation by faculty

The faculty of TEI assessed the administrative services, showing a predominantly high level of satisfaction across various parameters. The "academic administration" stood out with a "very high" rating of 4.24, emphasizing its effectiveness. All other parameters, from "organization" to "institutional planning and development", received a "high" rating, with mean scores hovering around the 4.00 mark. However, the standard deviations close to 1.00 across the board suggest varied opinions among faculty members on these topics. While most parameters are highly regarded, there is evident room for improvement in "records management" which had the lowest score of 3.68.

**Table 3.** Evaluation of administrative services at teacher education institutions by faculty

<i>Administrative service parameters</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>Qualitative interpretation</i>
A. Organization	4.10	1.00	H
B. Academic administration	4.24	1.00	VH
C. Student administration	4.00	1.05	H
D. Financial management	4.00	1.07	H
E. Supply management	3.86	1.08	H
F. Records management	3.68	0.99	H
G. Institutional planning and development	3.95	1.00	H

Note: VH indicates very high, and H indicates high in qualitative interpretation.

Source: Authors' calculation.

#### 4.1.3. Evaluation by staff

The staff's evaluation of TEI's administrative services reveals an overwhelmingly positive perspective, with most parameters like "organization", "academic administration", "student administration", "financial management", "records management", and "institutional planning and development" receiving "very high" ratings. These high scores, ranging from 4.42 to 4.67, indicate a strong satisfaction level among staff regarding these administrative aspects. However, "supply management", with a score of 4.08 and labeled as "high", suggests there might be slight room for improvement in this area, even though it is still favorably perceived. The standard deviations, generally below 0.7, suggest consistent opinions among staff about these services, with the exception of "supply management", which displayed a slightly broader range of views.

**Table 4.** Evaluation of administrative services at teacher education institution by staff

<i>Administrative service parameters</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>Qualitative interpretation</i>
A. Organization	4.67	0.49	VH
B. Academic administration	4.67	0.49	VH
C. Student administration	4.58	0.51	VH
D. Financial management	4.42	0.67	VH
E. Supply management	4.08	0.79	H
F. Records management	4.50	0.52	VH
G. Institutional planning and development	4.42	0.67	VH

Note: VH indicates very high, and H indicates high in qualitative interpretation.

Source: Authors' calculation.

## 4.2. Insights into teacher education institution administrative services

In the qualitative section, respondents were prompted to share insights on four distinct aspects of their institution's administration. They reflected on the exemplary administrative practices their institution is known for. Furthermore, they shed

light on the myriad challenges they confronted, especially during the pandemic. Looking ahead, they provided recommendations to ensure their institution's administrative practices remain resilient against future disruptions. Lastly, they highlighted various innovations their institution had either introduced or adopted in the realm of administration or management.

These shared insights have been organized into four overarching themes: best practices, challenges, recommendations, and innovations. A detailed Table 1 encapsulates the commendable practices as highlighted by the survey participants.

#### 4.2.1. Best practices in teacher education institution administrative services

One of the most foundational best practices across the surveyed institutions revolves around fostering a culture of teamwork and inclusion. The emphasis is not just on collective effort but also on recognizing individual contributions and ensuring everyone is equipped with the resources they need. The spirit of collegiality is championed, especially in decision-making, emphasizing the importance of shared responsibility and collaboration in addressing the challenges of the academic environment (A1, A20, F4, F12, F20). Seamless and transparent communication emerges as a pivotal practice. Institutions prioritize maintaining consistent channels of communication, especially important in times of physical distance, like during the pandemic. They champion academic collaborations, both locally and internationally, and ensure open channels of feedback and consultation, guaranteeing that all stakeholders remain informed and engaged (A3, A8, A11, A19, F3, F5, F6, F8, F9). Institutions showcase an unwavering commitment to continuous improvement. This is evident in their strategies for sustainable improvements across various sectors—from instruction and research to community service. Investments in learning management systems (LMS) and provisions like Internet allowances highlight the dedication to facilitating both teaching and learning. The drive towards benchmarking, acquiring certifications, and ensuring a highly trained administrative team underscores the focus on quality (A6, A10, A12, F14). Administrative functionality, these institutions are proactive, establishing units like knowledge management for efficient information processing and planning for potential challenges with initiatives like disaster recovery plans (A10, A15). Commitment to quality assurance, and continuous participation in accreditations, certifications, and reviews signals the relentless pursuit of excellence. Whether it's seeking higher levels of institutional accreditation or achieving ISO certifications, the emphasis is on maintaining and elevating standards (A5, A10, F2, F13). Holistic health services, institutions have recognized the importance of the overall well-being of their community. This has led to provisions for health services and initiatives promoting physical, mental, and social wellness, especially during challenging times like the pandemic (A2, F21). A testament to adapting to the times, the importance given to effective LMS ensures continuity in education (A8). Organizational efficiency, the surveyed institutions stand out for their well-structured

organizational plans. From having clear hierarchies and strategic blueprints to fostering international collaborations, these establishments ensure that their operations run smoothly and are aligned with global standards (A7, A14, A21). Institutions demonstrate a strong commitment to safety. From adhering to standard safety protocols to implementing additional institution-specific precautions, the focus remains on ensuring the well-being of every member (A10, A16, A22, A26, F1). Decentralization and delegation, embracing decentralization, institutions provide autonomy to their campuses, while ensuring alignment with the overarching institutional goals (F7). Optimal resource utilization, ensuring that faculty and students have the necessary resources, from high-end laptops to stable Internet connections, reflects the dedication to facilitating seamless online learning (F10). Some members showcase remarkable service dedication, often going beyond their designated roles to support the institution and its community (F18). Adapting to the new normal, institutions have championed flexible work and learning schedules, integrating methods like blended learning to cater to the evolving needs of their community (F24, F25).

#### 4.2.2. Challenges

During the unexpected advent of the pandemic, educational institutions encountered a series of profound challenges. First and foremost, there was the urgent transition to online learning. Institutions grappled with shifting from traditional face-to-face interactions to digital platforms, which posed significant operational and methodological hurdles. This swift change inevitably brought forth the issue of maintaining student engagement. With the absence of physical classrooms, educators had to devise novel strategies to ensure students remained invested in their learning journey (A1, A22, A23, F4, F5, F7, F14). This new mode of instruction starkly highlighted the Internet connectivity issues prevalent among the student and faculty population, especially those residing in remote areas. The struggle with unstable or even non-existent connections was widespread (A5, A15, F6, F9, F11, F20). Hand-in-hand with this was the challenge of information and communications technology (ICT) integration, where the integration of ICT into daily teaching became a vital but complicated component (A10). Meanwhile, internally, institutions were wrestling with operational problems. Internal operations, institutions navigated operational disruptions such as employee promotions (A2, F15), communication logistics (A4, F13, S3), and readiness for the pandemic, as pointed out by (A7, A11, A14, F3). A significant challenge arose in the form of resource management. From procuring basic supplies like paper to navigating financial constraints, the institutions found themselves walking a tightrope (A6, A17, A19, A21, F2, F12, F23). Ensuring that the academic standards remained high, and students received quality education became a focal challenge in this new virtual environment (A10, A16, A25). Traditional services, too, needed an overhaul, leading to the redesigning of services, such as adapting libraries for the digital age (A12). One of the more long-term investments that institutions recognized

as essential was capacity building. Both faculty and students require training and resources to navigate the unique challenges posed by online education. But beyond the confines of academics and infrastructure, the pandemic brought with it a series of health concerns (A14). Health and safety challenges were not limited to physical health. Institutions quickly realized the growing mental health issues among students, faculty, and staff, demanding immediate attention (A26, F1, F10, F14). Operational troubles did not end with online platforms. Institutions faced an overburdened workforce, with many reporting feelings overwhelmed by the new demands (F8, F18). Additionally, frequent power interruptions further disrupted the already shaky operations (S4).

#### 4.2.3. Recommendations

In the midst of the pandemic's chaos, educational institutions found themselves facing unprecedented challenges. The feedback from their community—teachers, students, and staff—became a beacon, guiding the path forward. A culmination of these voices presents a series of recommendations vital for shaping the educational landscape in these tumultuous times. Central to these recommendations is the principle of continuous improvement and innovation. Advocates like (A1, A20, A22, F2, F3, F14) emphasize the need for institutions to adopt a fluid approach. This encompasses a harmonious blend of traditional and contemporary methodologies, championing the cause of hybrid classrooms, advanced equipment, and vital training for faculty. It's a clarion call for evolution, ensuring educational methodologies remain pertinent. Parallel to this is the heartfelt plea for promotion for non-teaching personnel. Voices from (A2, F15) reiterate the importance of recognizing and valuing the contributions of every member of the educational ecosystem, irrespective of their designation. Consistent communication is heralded as a cornerstone. Respondents (A3, F14) underline its significance, with a pressing need for clear directives, prompt announcements, and a well-defined strategy for potential disruptions. The essence of this recommendation is to engage all stakeholders, ensuring no voice goes unheard. Consistent monitoring, review, and evaluation stand out as the backbone of pragmatic strategy implementation. Inputs from (A9, A10, F14, S3) underscore the need for policies to be more than mere written directives; they must be tangible, actionable, and effective in real-world scenarios. Augmenting this is the importance of a research-driven approach, ensuring decisions are grounded in empirical evidence. Empowerment becomes the watchword for empowering units and people. This sentiment, as echoed by (A6, F4, F14), resonates with the overarching theme of building a resilient community, one primed to tackle challenges and evolve with the times. Additional facets like optimal resource allocation, crafting contingency strategies, unwavering adherence to safety protocols, immediate responsiveness, and ensuring transparency further strengthen institutional resilience, as voiced by respondents (A7, A8, A17, A19, A23, A24, F1). Yet, two aspects command distinct attention. Health and safety mindfulness, as championed by (F18), underscores the necessity of prioritizing the holistic

well-being of university personnel. Central to the educational mandate is the push to address the learning gap. This call, voiced emphatically by (S4), remains resolute in its mission: to foster an environment conducive to holistic growth for every member, be they student or staff.

#### 4.2.4. Innovation

Innovations in digitization and online learning and communication, a significant wave of digitization swept across various institutions. One of the most notable innovations in this realm was the transition towards online learning and communication platforms. Institutions evolved their administrative practices, moving from traditional paperwork to a seamless online enrolment system, further embracing a paperless approach. They employed various digital platforms to facilitate communication and implemented LMS to benefit both faculty and administrators (A1, A3, A9, F3, F15, F25, S1). Organization and management innovations, on the organizational front, some institutions sought to decentralize their operations. Providing autonomy to campuses and initiating the establishment of the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning (CITL) exemplified this commitment to fostering better management and leadership, especially under the shadow of pandemic-related restrictions (A6, F20, S4). Resource management and utilization, the proactive management of resources also emerged as a focal point. Institutions went above and beyond, distributing laptops or iPads to staff, enhancing Internet bandwidth, and even introducing custom virtual platforms tailored specifically for their ecosystem, such as the “stalwart LMS” and “Hikmat” online library (A7, F21, S3). Collaborative projects, Institutions also recognized the potency of collaboration. There was a concerted effort to strengthen research projects, sometimes in conjunction with other state universities and colleges (SUCs), and also by fostering international partnerships (A8, F12). Institutional commitment to innovation, the quest for innovation was not limited to surface-level changes. Institutions anchored themselves in a broader vision. This included crafting learning continuity development plans, aiming for a smart campus landscape, and even establishing units dedicated to knowledge management, ensuring the optimal processing and utility of institutional knowledge (A10). The flexible work schemes, flexibility emerged as a significant theme, with institutions pioneering work-from-home arrangements and contactless transactions. This shift wasn’t merely about safety; it also translated to operational efficiencies, evident in the reported uptick in enrolments and successful graduations across various programs (A11, A14, A21, F18). Pandemic-induced challenges catalyzed a series of innovative programs and services. Universities showcased their adaptability, introducing systems for online enrollment, data analytics for improved decision-making, and even new methods to manage student progress and employee records (A14, F14, F19). The use of diverse digital platforms further enhanced the learning experience, ensuring that education remained accessible even in trying times (A16). With safety paramount, institutions pivoted to contactless transactions, ensuring that essential services remained unhindered (A17, A26).

Institutions also recognized the need for training initiatives. Numerous training sessions, webinars, and seminars were orchestrated to familiarize teaching personnel with digital tools like Moodle, thereby promoting a more integrated approach to digital education (A22, F11, F13). Lastly, the embrace of paperless reporting underscored the broader move towards digital solutions and sustainability (F16). These eleven innovations, ranging from digitization to paperless operations, showcase the educational sector’s adaptability and resilience, foregrounding a commitment to excellence even in the face of unprecedented challenges.

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1. Assessing the administrative services of teacher education institutions by those within

#### 5.1.1. Assessment conducted by administration

The evaluation of administrative services by administrators at TEI provides insights into the institution’s strengths and areas needing attention. “Organization” and “academic administration” are identified as strengths, highlighting proficiency in structural and academic management. However, “financial management” and “supply management”, though receiving positive feedback, show slightly reduced scores, possibly due to pandemic-related challenges, especially in supply chain management. The prevalence of “very high” ratings, particularly for “academic administration”, reflects a commendable response to academic challenges. Conversely, feedback on “supply management” echoes logistical challenges faced during the pandemic. This feedback emphasizes the need for ongoing adaptability and improvement in response to external challenges.

#### 5.1.2. Assessment conducted by teaching staff

The faculty’s feedback on TEI’s administrative services paints a largely favorable picture, especially in the domain of “academic administration”, which stood out with a “very high” rating. Other areas, spanning from “organization” to “institutional planning and development”, were also positively perceived with “high” evaluations. However, the broad standard deviations across the parameters hint at a spectrum of opinions, highlighting the complex nature of academic administrative functions. Specifically, “records management” and “supply management” emerged as potential areas for enhancement. This convergence of feedback between faculty and administrators on these areas underscores the importance of revisiting strategies, particularly in the context of pandemic-induced challenges, to ensure the efficient and effective management of resources.

#### 5.1.3. Assessment conducted by support staff

The staff’s overwhelmingly positive feedback underscores their trust and satisfaction in TEI’s administrative services. Notably, while most parameters received “very high” ratings, reflecting excellence in performance, “supply management” was the sole aspect that garnered a “high” rating.

While this still signifies a commendable performance, it pinpoints an area for potential enhancement. The consistency in views among the staff on most services contrasts the slight variation seen in “supply management”, underscoring its unique position. Interestingly, this aspect’s rating aligns with the evaluations from faculty and administrators, affirming a collective sentiment on its relative standing. Such consensus across different evaluators emphasizes the need for the institution to re-evaluate and possibly bolster its supply management strategies, especially in challenging times.

## 5.2. Understanding the administration of teacher education institutions

### 5.2.1. Best practices

The practices observed reflect agile and innovative institutions deeply committed to excellence, fostering an environment of communication, collaboration, and continuous improvement. To identify progressive institutions that prioritize their community, consider several key practices and perspectives. Sustainability is paramount, positioning educational institutions as community development catalysts (Moura et al., 2019). Mobility justice emphasizes inclusive transportation planning (Verlinghieri & Schwanen, 2020), aligning with community-focused decisions. Community engagement, particularly in literacy coaching, addresses community-specific concerns (Esperat, 2021). Cybernetic governance promotes effective management (Noor, 2020), while community involvement in healthcare decisions demonstrates a commitment to community welfare (Berger, 2019). Institutions embodying adaptability, progression, and community focus can be recognized through practices in sustainability, mobility justice, community engagement, governance innovation, and inclusive decision-making.

### 5.2.2. Obstacles

During the pandemic, educational institutions confronted challenges such as a swift shift to online platforms, maintaining student engagement, widespread Internet connectivity issues, especially in remote regions, and integrating ICT into instruction. These institutions grappled with operational issues, resource constraints, ensuring academic quality in virtual settings, and digitizing traditional services like libraries. Recognizing the importance of capacity-building, they addressed rising mental health issues and navigated disruptions from overworked staff and frequent power outages. The move to digital education is deeply examined today. Specifically, online learning in nursing education presents unique challenges due to its hands-on nature (Koirala et al., 2020). This necessitates innovative approaches by nurse educators. Research in Nepal has explored ICT’s role in higher education, notably in teacher education (Rana & Rana, 2020). Organizations like Interburns offer a mix of traditional and digital courses, ranging from online burn care courses to in-person fellowships (Potokar et al., 2020). Knowledge brokers are utilizing strategies such as workshops and

online tutorials for capacity building (Caduff et al., 2023; Angelo, 2023). In the UK, the momentum for this capacity-building is driven by factors like changing demographics, funding shifts, research relevance, and a push for evidence-based methods aiming for elevated standards (Oancea et al., 2021). Joshi (2022) and Kandel (2022) stress the increasing complexity of higher education activities and the importance of ICT integration. Beyond merely abandoning traditional methods, the focus is on equipping educators and students for a digital age. The COVID-19 pandemic, especially evident in regions like Vietnam, accelerated this transition, spotlighting the associated challenges and achievements (Kunnari et al., 2021).

### 5.2.3. Suggestions for improvement

The pandemic compelled educational institutions to confront an array of challenges. Feedback gleaned from these institutions spotlighted key recommendations essential for navigating these trying times. Foremost among the recommendations is the emphasis on continuous improvement and innovation, promoting a synthesis of traditional and modern educational methods. Acknowledging the efforts of all, particularly non-teaching staff, has been underscored. Consistent and clear communication stands out as imperative. The establishment of research-backed, actionable policies via regular monitoring, review, and evaluation is accentuated. The discourse also champions resilience-building strategies: empowering stakeholders, judicious resource allocation, devising contingency plans, adhering rigorously to safety measures, maintaining transparent operations, and ensuring swift action in response to emerging needs. Furthermore, holistic well-being and bridging learning gaps are central to fostering a thriving educational environment. Drawing from recent literature, amidst the pandemic upheaval, educational institutions are counseled to champion innovation and adaptive strategies. Embracing both age-old and contemporary educational methods and ensuring the preparedness of the teaching community is paramount (Ahmat et al., 2021). The narrative emphasizes the significance of acknowledging contributions from non-teaching staff and fostering a sense of inclusiveness. Research-supported decision-making and robust communication form the backbone of these recommendations (Dong, 2023). Furthermore, educational establishments are encouraged to bolster their communities, prioritize health and safety, and tackle educational disparities head-on (Ahmat et al., 2021). Collectively, these recommendations serve as a compass, guiding institutions to remain resilient and attuned to their community’s needs in these challenging times.

### 5.2.4. Innovations

In recent years, the educational sector has transformed with a strong embrace of digitization and innovative administrative solutions, including paperless systems and LMS (Song et al., 2021). Decentralization and dedicated centers for innovative teaching have enriched the academic ecosystem (Rachmawati et al., 2021; Charina et al., 2022).



Digital devices and online platforms have revolutionized resource management (Pavlova et al., 2022), while collaboration on both domestic and international levels has thrived (Sudarwati et al., 2022). The sector aspires to smart campuses and flexible learning continuity strategies (Prasetyo et al., 2022), with a focus on adaptability through remote work and contactless transactions (Ali et al., 2022). Universities have swiftly adopted online enrollment, data analytics, and innovative management techniques (Yu et al., 2022). Training programs empower educators with digital tools. The move towards paperless operations underscores the sector's commitment to a digital, sustainable future.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study has provided an in-depth look at the dynamics of administrative services within educational institutions during the pandemic, highlighting satisfaction levels and areas for improvement as perceived by administrators, faculty, and staff. The quantitative data revealed general satisfaction, especially in academic administration, but also pinpointed areas needing further attention, such as supply management.

The qualitative insights complement these findings, showcasing institutions' adaptability, communication strengths, and commitment to continuous improvement. Challenges like the transition to flexible learning and Internet connectivity issues were highlighted, underscoring the necessity for capacity building and effective resource management.

This study's key recommendations advocate for a focus on continuous innovation, individual empowerment, consistent communication, and a research-backed decision-making process.

Prioritizing health and safety, addressing learning gaps, and maintaining transparency in operations are also emphasized.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The geographical scope primarily focused on specific regions in the Philippines, and the reliance on self-reported data might limit the generalizability of the findings. The methodological approach, though comprehensive, may not fully capture the nuances of the administrative challenges and innovations experienced during the pandemic. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings and applying them to different contexts.

From a managerial perspective, the findings have significant implications. Institutions are encouraged to prioritize effective resource management strategies, particularly in procurement and financial constraint management. The importance of capacity building, especially for navigating online education challenges, is evident. Mental health concerns among the academic community call for immediate and ongoing support initiatives. Institutions are also advised to manage increased workloads effectively and to strategize against operational disruptions, like power interruptions. Adapting traditional services for the digital age, such as modernizing library resources, is another key recommendation.

This research not only sheds light on administrative challenges and successes during the pandemic but also lays the groundwork for future research. It opens avenues for comparative analyses and highlights the need for ongoing exploration and refinement in educational administration, ensuring continued improvement and adaptation in an evolving educational landscape.

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