

Digital Learning Policies and Library Governance: A Comparative Policy Analysis of CHED and DepEd Initiatives in the Philippines

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Abstract

This study compares the digital learning and library governance policies of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines and evaluates their impact on academic and school library management with respect to access, resources, and staffing. A qualitative comparative policy analysis was conducted on CHED CMO No. 22, s. 2021; CHED CMO No. 4, s. 2020; DepEd Order No. 56, s. 2011; and DepEd Order No. 16, s. 2023, utilizing open, axial, and selective coding, and guided by Digital Divide Theory and an adapted Library-TPACK framework. The findings indicate a distinct vertical policy divide: CHED prioritizes advanced digital integration and credentialed leadership, whereas DepEd emphasizes foundational, equitable access for curriculum support. This misalignment necessitates that university library administrators address local gaps in student transitions. The scope of analysis is limited to official policy documents. The paper proposes an operational framework for library administrators to strengthen digital literacy, reallocate budgets toward digital infrastructure, and optimize workflows. The study demonstrates how national policies structurally influence library administration and human resource management across the Philippine educational sectors.

Keywords: Academic libraries, School libraries, Policy analysis, Digital divide, Library management, Information literacy, Student transition, Philippines

1. Introduction

Digital learning has become a fundamental aspect of education policy, reshaping the organization of resources, instructional delivery, and learner support within technology-enabled environments [1, 2].

Libraries now extend beyond their traditional roles of collection and preservation to include equitable digital access, promotion of information literacy, and academic preparedness through technology-enabled services [3, 4].

In the Philippine context, expectations regarding digital learning and library services differ markedly across educational sectors. Policies in basic education prioritize equitable access to learning resources and school-based instructional support, whereas policies in higher education emphasize professional leadership, digital integration, resource sharing, and research support. This study undertakes a comparative analysis of the policy frameworks promulgated by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Department of Education (DepEd) [5–7]. The divergence in policy priorities reflects broader structural differences in governance between these sectors. While analogous trends are observable in other developing educational systems, the present analysis is delimited to the Philippine context [8, 9].

This research examines the influence of macro-level policy design on library management. Specifically, it analyzes how CHED and DepEd delineate the operational roles of libraries, establish expectations for staffing and resource allocation, and shape institutional responses to digital learning across educational sectors [5, 7, 10].

Although previous research has examined digital transformation, educational technology, and library management as discrete topics, there remains a paucity of scholarship investigating the impact of national education policies on library governance across both higher and basic education. Most studies in the Philippine context have focused on individual agencies or institutional practices, rather than undertaking a systematic comparison of policy frameworks. Consequently, there is insufficient empirical evidence regarding the extent to which variations in national policy priorities affect library management, digital resource provision, professional staffing, and information literacy development across educational sectors. This study contributes to the library and information science literature by presenting a comparative policy analysis of digital learning and library governance policies in CHED and DepEd. By examining official policy documents through the lens of Digital Divide Theory and a library-adapted Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, the research offers evidence-based insights into how national policy frameworks influence library management and digital learning within the Philippine educational system.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Modern Library Management: Competing Paradigms

Recent scholarship acknowledges that libraries have transitioned from custodial institutions focused on preserving print collections to dynamic organizations that facilitate digital access, information literacy, research services, and institutional learning [11]. As a result, libraries are now regarded as strategic partners contributing to teaching, research, and organizational development [12].

While there is a broad consensus regarding the expanded role of libraries, the literature offers varying perspectives on the impact of digital transformation on library management. One viewpoint emphasizes systems management, electronic resource administration, and digital librarianship [13]. In contrast, another prioritizes organizational strategy, cross-departmental collaboration, assessment, and evidence-based practice [10,12]. These perspectives should not be viewed as competing models but rather as complementary dimensions of contemporary library management that require integration within institutional practice.

Evidence-based practice (EBP) is widely advocated to support strategic decision-making in libraries [14]. However, much of the existing literature is based on experiences from well-resourced institutions, which limits its relevance to contexts with resource constraints and fragmented policy environments. Therefore, there is a need for frameworks that integrate technological capacity, strategic management, and evidence-informed decision-making across diverse institutional settings.

2.2 Digital Transformation in Education: Structural Context

The literature consistently identifies digital transformation as an organizational process that goes far beyond the acquisition of technological infrastructure [1,2]. Successful implementation requires coordinated governance, institutional leadership, professional capacity, and sustainable investment in digital learning environments.

Higher education research often zeroes in on advanced digital ecosystems that underpin research, learner autonomy, and scholarly communication [8,9]. Basic education studies, on the other hand, focus more on equitable access to technology, curriculum support, and foundational digital competencies for using technology [5,6]. These sector-specific educational priorities are accurate reflections of the sectors' educational objectives. However, little attention has been given to the influence of differences in policy orientation on library management across educational levels.

2.3 Policy Alignment and Library Governance

Some studies have highlighted the need to align educational policies with institutional plans to strengthen library services and enhance learner support. The existing literature indicates that policy inconsistencies may take their toll on digital readiness, resource allocation, and the development of information literacy across different educational sectors.

Yet, most of the available evidence comes from studies conducted at specific institutions rather than comparisons between national policy frameworks. Thus, there is limited knowledge of how variation in regulatory expectations influences library governance, professional staffing, and the management of digital resources in the education sector. Comparative policy analysis would show how a gap can be filled by providing evidence on whether and how national policies create differences in expectations for governance before the implementation phase.

2.4 Justification and Aim of the Study

The literature has articulated three significant gaps to underpin the study. To begin with, there is little comparative evidence on digital learning and library governance among sectors of Philippine education. Second, much of what has been done in this area focuses on technological implementation and institutional practices rather than on policy frameworks that inform library management. Third, little work has brought together the Digital Divide Theory and a library-adapted TPACK framework to analyze educational policy from a library management perspective. Therefore, this paper is a qualitative comparative policy analysis of CHED and DepEd policy documents to examine how national education policies shape digital learning practices and library governance across the Philippines' educational sectors.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Comparative Approach

This study utilized a qualitative comparative policy analysis design to systematically examine digital learning and library-related governance frameworks within the Philippine education system [10,15]. Document analysis was selected as the primary research method because it enables the systematic examination of official policy documents to identify regulatory intent, institutional priorities, and

governance provisions [10]. By comparing policy instruments issued by CHED and DepEd, the study examined how each agency defines the operational roles of libraries, establishes expectations for resource allocation and staffing, and promotes technological integration across educational sectors. Building on this comparative design, the study employed complementary theoretical frameworks to interpret how policy provisions shape library governance and digital learning.

3.2 Theoretical Framework: Library-Adapted TPACK and Digital Divide

The analysis was guided by Digital Divide Theory [16] and an adaptation of the Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework [17]. While TPACK was originally developed to explain technology integration in classroom teaching, this study adapts the framework to library management because contemporary libraries increasingly perform instructional functions through information literacy programs, research support, digital resource management, and technology-enabled learning services. Consequently, the framework provides an appropriate conceptual lens for examining how policy documents position technology, instructional support, and information resources within library operations.

- **Content Knowledge (CK) in Library Management:** Redefined as the organization, curation, and structure of information resources—including institutional repositories, proprietary databases, physical collections, and metadata standards.
- **Pedagogical Knowledge (PK) in Library Management:** Redefined as the instructional strategies used by libraries to cultivate information and digital literacy, including first-year orientations, research coaching, reference services, and asynchronous learning modules.
- **Technological Knowledge (TK) in Library Management:** Redefined as the mastery of library infrastructure systems, including Integrated Library Systems (ILS), discovery layers, digital curation software, and networking protocols.

Although the adapted TPACK framework provides a structured perspective for examining instructional and technological dimensions of library management, it does not fully account for broader governance and policy processes. Accordingly, Digital Divide Theory complements the framework by providing a macro-level perspective on digital access, institutional readiness, and policy priorities across educational sectors.

3.3 Document Corpus and Selection Criteria

To ensure qualitative rigor, the researcher employed a purposive sampling strategy to select documents based on their relevance, authenticity, and authority [10]. Documents were included in the primary corpus if they met three strict criteria: they must be official regulatory instruments issued by CHED or DepEd, directly address institutional library standards or governance of digital learning, and actively shape the current operational landscape of Philippine education.

Primary Policy Corpus:

- **CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 4, s. 2020:** Guidelines on the implementation of flexible learning — the pivotal regulatory shift toward hybrid modalities [18].
- **CHED CMO No. 22, s. 2021:** Specifies updated minimum curricular and structural standards for higher education libraries [7].
- **DepEd Order (DO) No. 16, s. 2023:** Details the contemporary digital learning and technology architecture strategies for basic education [6].
- **DepEd DO No. 56, s. 2011:** Sets forth baseline policy and procedural guidelines for basic education library hubs [5].

Supporting Legislative Context:

- **Republic Act No. 10929 (Free Internet Access in Public Places Act, 2017):** Used to anchor the primary corpus within national statutory mandates on public digital connectivity [19].

Secondary scholarly literature and relevant legislative documents were consulted to contextualize the interpretation of the primary policy corpus. These sources supported the analysis but were not treated as primary units of analysis.

3.4 Coding Protocols and Trustworthiness

The corpus was analyzed using a three-phase systematic thematic coding process. This process is grounded in grounded theory principles and was adapted for document analysis [10, 20].

- **Phase 1 — Open Coding:** This involved breaking down raw policy texts line by line to extract initial, literal concepts on specific mandates (e.g., "bandwidth requirements," "librarian certifications").
- **Phase 2 — Axial Coding:** The researcher drew conceptual linkages between the open codes, organizing them into infrastructural constraints, regulatory oversight, and instructional capacity.
- **Phase 3 — Selective Coding:** These categories were systematically refined and integrated around the theoretical axes of the Digital Divide and the library-adapted TPACK frameworks.

Coding was conducted by a single researcher using a structured codebook and a constant comparative approach across two rounds of document review conducted three weeks apart. This process enhanced consistency in code application and thematic interpretation. Because the study relied on a single analyst, inter-coder reliability was not assessed; however, the systematic coding procedures and transparent analytical framework were intended to strengthen the credibility and dependability of the findings.

3.5 Limitations

This study is limited by its focus on official policy documents, which capture regulatory language, institutional priorities, and stated intent rather than the lived experiences of library staff or students. It cannot specify how directives are implemented daily or how frontline actors negotiate them. More importantly, this research omitted empirical field data such as interviews, surveys, and field observations, and therefore cannot verify the consistency of policy implementation across diverse institutional types.

The study analyzed purposively selected official policy documents and thus reflects regulatory intentions instead of policy implementation or stakeholder experiences. Therefore, the interpretations presented in the findings should be treated as evidence from policy texts rather than as direct evidence of institutional practice. It is recommended that future studies use interviews, surveys, case studies, or mixed methods to examine the implementation of these policy frameworks in educational settings.

4. Findings and Discussion

Selective coding identified three major themes that differentiate the library governance and digital learning policy frameworks of CHED and DepEd. Findings are organized by theme and interpreted using Digital Divide Theory and the library-adapted TPACK framework. The analysis centers on policy provisions from the selected documents, not implementation.

4.1 Digital Infrastructure Systems

CHED CMO No. 4, s. 2020 and CMO No. 22, s. 2021 mandate the implementation of advanced technological frameworks within higher education libraries. These policy instruments explicitly call for “flexible learning, electronic access, and interconnected resource-sharing systems” to facilitate institutional autonomy and the pursuit of high-level research [7,18]. By contrast, DepEd DO No. 56, s. 2011 and DO No. 16, s. 2023 accord greater priority to physical presence and the day-to-day delivery of

the curriculum [5, 6]. The school library media center, within this framework, is structurally defined as an accessible support space rather than as a node within a broader digital ecosystem.

For instance, CHED CMO No. 22, s. 2021 obliges higher education libraries to maintain electronic information resources and resource-sharing systems, whereas DepEd Order No. 56, s. 2011 underscores the role of school library media centers in primarily supporting curriculum delivery and promoting reading.

These policy divergences suggest that CHED and DepEd assign distinct operational expectations to libraries in accordance with their respective educational mandates. Whereas CHED prioritizes digitally integrated research environments, DepEd emphasizes equitable access and instructional support within basic education. As a result, library administrators are likely to encounter varying institutional requirements depending on the educational sector in which they operate. In addition to digital infrastructure, the policy documents reveal differences in governance mechanisms for resource allocation and professional staffing.

4.2 Resource Allocation Governance

Resource allocation and professional staffing benchmarks vary between the two agencies, resulting in markedly different micro-level operational environments.

CHED CMO No. 22, s. 2021 imposes tight administrative controls — institutions must keep written collection development policies, balance print, and electronic collections, and share resources across institutional settings [7]. DepEd DO No. 56, s. 2011 focuses on localized holdings and service-oriented access in line with school requirements [5]

Another sharp difference is seen in the criteria for professional leadership. In this sense, CHED requires licensed, graduate-prepared leadership and professionalized management capable of leading and managing complex digital curation networks [7]. This is a bit more relaxed in the DepEd framework, where the focus is on personnel allocations that optimize basic service and access at the school level [5]. These differences suggest varying governance approaches to resource management and professional staffing across educational sectors. For example, institutions of higher education are using targeted funding mechanisms to develop data-driven ecosystems, such as CHED CMO No. 9, s.2020, and the cooperative framework between DICT and CHED Smart Campus [22, 23] for basic education libraries; there is no such integrated macro-funding pipeline; therefore, they remain tied to localized and resource-constrained budgets.

4.3 Digital Literacy Capacity

In addition to governance structures, the policy documents differ in how they conceptualize digital literacy and learner preparedness. From the perspective of Digital Divide Theory [16] and the library-adapted TPACK framework [17], the incongruity in policy text results in a marked transition gap in user readiness as students advance from basic to higher education.

CHED's regulatory expectations assume that incoming students are already equipped with a high level of information literacy, advanced digital skills, and competence in independent research [7]. However, DepEd's library framework focuses on technology either as basic hardware acquisition or as a passive tool for instructional delivery [5, 6].

The policy documents suggest that students may encounter differing expectations for digital and information literacy as they transition from basic to higher education. However, because this study analyzed policy documents rather than learner outcomes, this interpretation should be regarded as an inference requiring empirical verification in future research. These findings suggest that academic library

administrators may consider strengthening first-year information literacy initiatives and digital orientation programs to support students entering higher education.

4.4 Comparative Policy Summary

The structural variations uncovered during Phase 3 selective coding are cross-referenced in Table 1:

Table 1. Comparative Analysis Matrix of CHED and DepEd Frameworks.

Policy Dimension	CHED Framework (CMO No. 22, s. 2021 / CMO No. 4, s. 2020)	DepEd Framework (DO No. 56, s. 2011 / DO No. 16, s. 2023)
Core Policy Focus	Professionally managed, digitally responsive, and autonomous academic units.	Accessible, locally grounded support spaces for basic education delivery.
Collection Orientation	Mandated written collection development policies; balanced print/electronic resource sharing.	Localized holdings and service-oriented access are strictly aligned with school needs.
Digital Emphasis	High-level ICT integration, flexible learning support, and connected access networks.	Limited digital orientation, centered primarily on hardware availability and basic access.
Staffing & Leadership	Licensed, graduate-prepared professionals with specialized systems competencies.	Personnel allocated for basic day-to-day supervision and school-level operational access.
Service Model	Networked, research-oriented, and integrated into the national scholarly infrastructure.	Localized, school-bound, and tied directly to basic equity agendas.
Management Imperative	Requires strategic planning, electronic database curation, and inter-campus coordination.	Requires consistent physical access, routine maintenance, and classroom support.

Overall, the comparative analysis demonstrates that the policies of both institutions align with their respective mandates. Rather than representing opposing policy trends, the findings indicate distinct areas of emphasis regarding library management and digital governance.

4.5 Theoretical and Global Contextualization

In Van Dijk's Digital Divide Theory, the CHED-DepEd policy gap can be considered a critical transition from first-degree digital divide (spatial access) to second-degree digital divide (skills and strategic research competence) [16]. The DepEd framework is designed to enhance the first-degree divide. This means most of its effort is directed toward ensuring the existence of a physical learning space [5]. On the other hand, the CHED framework assumes that the second-degree divide has already been breached because it requires highly advanced digital infrastructure [7].

This systemic friction becomes more evident when the findings are mapped onto the library-adapted TPACK framework [17]. Within the DepEd ecosystem, Technological Knowledge (TK) is an isolated, external treatment intended to establish a baseline for Content Knowledge (CK) [5,6]. On the other hand, CHED expects a tightly integrated version of library-TPACK, in which TK is directly embedded in complex information organization (CK) and active information literacy instruction (PK) [7].

Globally, the transition from secondary to post-secondary education remains a documented source of conflict with libraries. International literature indicates that when national education strategies fail to articulate a single information literacy pipeline, academic libraries shift from specialized research spaces to remedial training sites [12]. One study conducted in Latin America and Southeast Asia shows that fragmented mandates lead to what is called "academic shock," due to excessive workloads for freshmen caused by proprietary databases [9]. On the other hand, most freshmen in developed educational systems are less likely to experience academic shock because national qualifications frameworks prevent cognitive overload by providing a step-by-step description of student competencies [24]. This example shows how increased coordination among educational sectors can benefit both digital education and the development of information literacy.

5. Managerial Implications

The findings of this study have practical implications for library administrators, educational leaders, and policymakers responsible for implementing digital learning initiatives across the Philippine education system. For higher education institutions, the analysis highlights the importance of aligning library planning with CHED requirements for digital infrastructure, electronic resource management, professionally qualified personnel, and research support. Academic library administrators may use these policy provisions to guide strategic planning, collection development, and institutional digital transformation initiatives.

The results underscore the renewed relevance of enhancing school library services to align with the curriculum, promote reading, and ensure equitable access to digital learning resources. This may be achieved through more sustained enforcement of DepEd policy provisions to enhance access to instructional materials and technology-enabled learning opportunities.

Comparative analysis at the policy level suggests that better coordination between CHED and DepEd would help strengthen continuity in library services and digital learning across the education sector. Since this study does not assess policy implementation, the identified policy differences can serve as a solid basis for future discussions on strengthening digital readiness, developing information literacy, and improving library governance during the transition of learners from basic to higher education.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study performed a qualitative comparative policy analysis of CHED and DepEd policies to see how national education frameworks influence digital learning and library management in the Philippines. The results show that the two agencies take similar but different approaches to digital infrastructure, resource governance, professional staffing, and information literacy. This reflects their different educational mandates.

The paper interprets, using Digital Divide Theory and a library-adapted TPACK framework, the conceptual relationship between policy priorities and the expectations they create for library management across different educational sectors. Instead of assessing policy implementation, the findings present the regulatory intentions as expressed in official policy documents and the resultant planning at the institutional level.

This study will contribute to the library and information science literature by providing a comparative analysis of national policy frameworks for digital learning and libraries. Results may help library

administrators and other policymakers understand the specific sectoral expectations of policies, thereby laying a foundation for further empirical research.

Since the study is limited to document analysis, it is recommended that further research be conducted on the implementation of these policy frameworks in educational institutions through interviews, surveys, case studies, or mixed-methods approaches. Such studies would provide empirical evidence on how policy intentions influence library practice, digital readiness, and learner outcomes across educational sectors.

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