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Comparative Analysis of Cash Management Internal Controls in the Selected DepEd Schools Division in the Province of Albay, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

The research sought to evaluate and strengthen the Cash Management Internal Controls (CMICs) within the Department of Education (DepEd) Region V. Using a descriptive-evaluative, explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the study evaluated financial practices, regulatory compliance, and operational challenges across selected school division offices and implementing units. Findings revealed a highly effective and consistently compliant internal control environment, characterized by strong clerical performance and strict adherence to national standards such as UACS coding. Core strengths included clear authorization hierarchies and pre-audit functions, which achieved near-perfect evaluative scores. However, a significant infrastructure–process gap emerged: While bookkeeping was accurate, the organization remained operationally exposed due to inadequate physical safeguards, including the lack of fireproof vaults and secure transport vehicles. The study also identified a digital-infrastructure paradox wherein high staff competency was undermined by external systemic risks, including poor internet connectivity, delays in the release of Notices of Cash Allocation (NCAs), and administrative capacity gaps that led to process fatigue. These bottlenecks correlate with the receipt of Audit Observation Memoranda (AOMs) received. Recommendations focused on shifting from primarily administrative training to capital investment. Key proposals included procuring secure logistics and fireproof storage, hiring additional administrative support, and fully transitioning to the Budget and Treasury

Management System (BTMS) to automate reconciliations and enhance long-term financial efficiency.

Keywords
Administrative Capacity
Audit Observations
Digital Infrastructure
Financial Controls
Public Sector Finance

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Introduction

The governance of public financial resources globally hinges on strong Cash Management Internal Controls (CMICs), which comprise the integrated policies and procedures that safeguard liquid assets, maintain accurate financial information, and ensure the authorized and efficient use of public funds [1],[2]. CMICs mitigate risks such as fraud, error, and unauthorized transactions across public operations [1]. Defining internal control as an ongoing process, the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission (COSO) Internal Control–Integrated Framework is the globally recognized standard for designing and assessing these systems, providing reasonable assurance of achieving operational, reporting, and compliance objectives [3]. Crucially, the establishment of strong CMICs are directly linked to Financial Efficiency (FE) in the public sector, understood as the optimal use of allocated resources to achieve intended service outcomes [4]. Academic literature, including contemporary Philippine studies, consistently demonstrate that effective internal control systems support sound Public Financial Management (PFM) and financial stability by reducing irregularities [5],[6].

In the Philippine regulatory context, CMICs are mandated and structured through the national budget system. The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) enforces cash controls across the four phases of the budget cycle [7]. After Budget Legislation and the enactment of the General Appropriations Act (GAA), the Budget Execution phase operationalizes controls governing the flow of funds from the National Treasury to line agencies such as the Department of Education (DepEd). DBM separates the authority to incur financial commitments (Allotment) from the authority to disburse cash (the Disbursement), issuing allotments based on approved financial plans and subsequently authorizing withdrawals through Notices of Cash Allocation (NCAs), often aligned with agencies' Monthly Disbursement Programs [7]. NCAs provide the explicit authority to draw cash from the Treasury, ensuring spending with liquidity and enabling the sub allocation of resources to

regional offices and Schools Division Offices (SDOs) and, in the case of implementing units, directly to secondary schools with complete financial staff.

National reform efforts reinforce this control environment. The DBM Public Financial Management (PFM) Reforms Roadmap (2024–2028) identifies improved cash management and operational efficiency as strategic priorities [4],[7]. Diagnostic tools such as the 2025 Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) Assessment confirm broad alignment of the Philippine PFM system with international good practices while emphasizing the need for further strengthening of expenditure controls and digitalization [7]-[9]. Leveraging technology to further support these aims, the DBM is accelerating the adoption of the Budget and Treasury Management System (BTMS), a digital platform designed to standardize workflows, centralize data, and enforce segregation of duties in budget execution [10],[11]. Parallel to these national initiatives, international development partners such as the World Bank promote digitalization to reduce leakage and strengthen accountability at the delivery level. The Second Digital Transformation Development Policy Loan, approved in 2023, seeks to create trackable, auditable payment streams and reduce the risks associated with manual cash handling, a concern underscored by global evidence that education funds often "do not reach schools or are not used for their intended purpose" [12]-[14].

Within DepEd, institutional guidelines translate these mandates into concrete rules for managing school finances. The Department's issuances and the Government Accounting Manual delineate the responsibilities and procedures for the release, utilization, and liquidation of Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE), Personnel Services (PS), and Capital Outlay (CO) [2],[15],[16]. MOOE covers routine operational needs such as utilities and supplies, while PS supports standardized disbursement of salaries, wages, and benefits that sustain qualified teaching and administrative staff [15]. Meanwhile, CO provides the basis for investing in long term assets such as buildings, land improvements, and laboratory equipment that modernize the learning environment [16]. By harmonizing these three budgetary pillars, the framework aims to ensure that each governance level remains accountable for the financial resources required to meet both immediate educational demands and long term institutional development [4],[15],[16]. Despite this robust regulatory architecture, persistent audit findings suggest a gap between mandated policy and executed practice.

Annual Audit Reports (AARs) from 2019 to 2023 have documented chronic weaknesses in DepEd's cash management, including material misstatements and long outstanding checks, indicating systemic failures in performing the required procedures (AAR, 2019–2023). These deficiencies imply a breakdown in the procedural and accountability interface between custodians of funds and recording personnel, as they directly impair FE by

freezing working capital that could otherwise be used to support core educational activities [4],[17]. At the same time, global and national literature stress that internal controls should not only prevent fraud but also function as enabling mechanisms that support timely, efficient service delivery [12],18]-[20].

Within this context, the present study focused on the operational reality of CMICs in decentralized educational units. It evaluated the state of cash controls in selected DepEd Region V Schools Division Offices and implementing units, assessed compliance with regulatory standards across collection and deposits, disbursements, and financial reporting, and identified the challenges encountered in each functional area. The study ultimately aimed to generate evidence based recommendations to strengthen CMICs, enhancing financial efficiency, and supporting the uninterrupted and accountable use of public funds in support of basic education across the region.

This study aimed to assess and strengthen cash management internal controls in DepEd Region V by evaluating its existing financial practices, identifying the challenges, and proposing improvements. Specifically, it sought to do the following:

- To determine the current state of cash management internal controls in DepEd Region V by examining the practices in selected school division offices and implementing units/secondary schools;
- Assess compliance with regulatory standards along with collection and deposits, disbursements, and financial reports;
- To identify the challenges encountered along collection and deposit, disbursement, and financial report; and
- To propose recommendations to strengthen the cash management internal controls, improve financial efficiency, and compliance within the institutions.

Literature Review

A. Theoretical Framework of the Study

Fig. 1 presents the theoretical paradigm of the study. This study is anchored on Stewardship Theory, Agency Theory, Systems Theory, Resource-Based Theory (RBT), and the COSO Internal Control Framework to analyze cash management internal controls (CMICs) and financial efficiency (FE) in DepEd Region V [3],[21]-[23]. Stewardship and Agency theories together frame the balance between the intrinsic motivation of school officials to act as faithful stewards of public resources and the principal–agent monitoring required to address information asymmetry and potential agency costs [22]-[25]. Systems Theory and RBT position CMICs within an interdependent regional network that relies on valuable human and technological capabilities to safeguard funds and sustain performance [21],[26]-[28]. The

COSO framework provides the practical internal control model, specifying the core components needed to design and assess effective public sector controls [3],[29].

Applied to DepEd Region V, this paradigm contextualizes how strong CMICs depend simultaneously on ethical commitment, effective oversight, coherent system linkages, and adequate capabilities. Stewardship and Agency theories justify the study's focus on both capacity building and monitoring mechanisms—such as audits, segregation of duties, and digital dashboards—to strengthen compliance in collection, disbursement, and reporting [22]-[25]. Systems Theory and RBT guide the interpretation of control weaknesses as systemic and capability gaps rather than isolated procedural lapses, motivating recommendations for integrated information flows and investments in financial management skills and technologies [21],[26]-[28]. COSO serves as the diagnostic scaffold for the survey, interviews, and gap analysis, enabling the identification of deficiencies in risk assessment, control activities, and monitoring, particularly in issues such as unliquidated cash advances and long outstanding checks [3],[29].

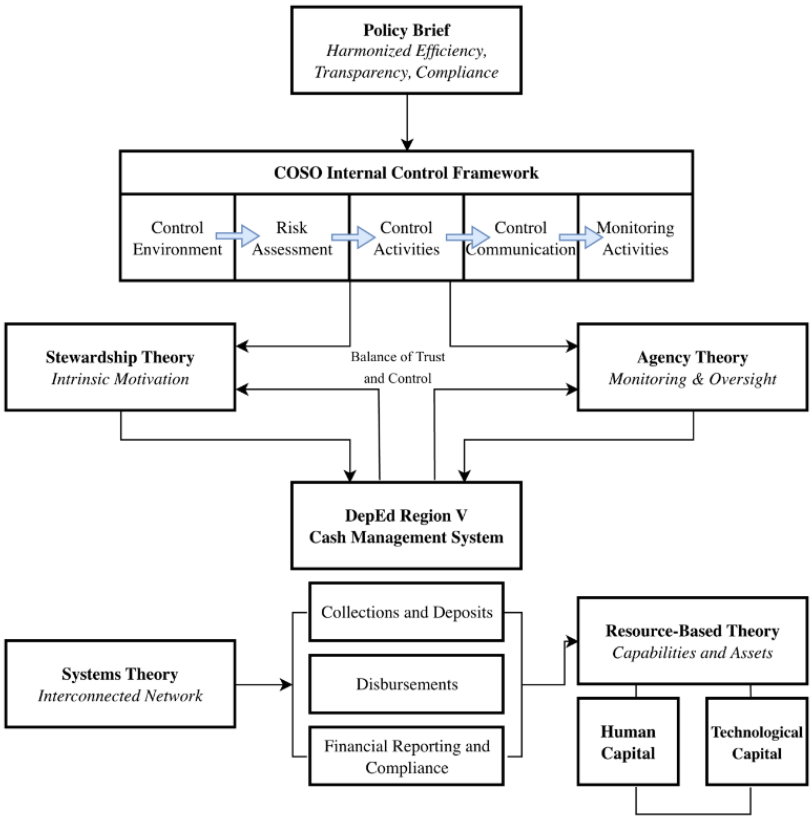


Fig. 1. Theoretical Framework of the Study

B. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Fig. 2 presents the conceptual framework of the study. The study adopts an Input–Process–Output (IPO) conceptual paradigm to translate the theories into a concrete research design for cash management in DepEd Region V. The framework views cash management as a system

where behavioral factors (trust and accountability), structural arrangements (roles and procedures), and regulatory requirements interact across the cash handling cycle.

In the Input phase, the model includes the current state of internal controls, levels of regulatory compliance, and existing challenges in collection and deposits, disbursements, and financial reporting. The Process phase covers the explanatory sequential mixed methods design, where the COSO framework guides the diagnostic tools—surveys, key informant interviews, and thematic analysis—to assess control design and operation. The Output phase consists of a policy brief and set of recommendations for strengthened cash management internal controls, aimed at enhancing institutional capabilities and operational efficiency in Schools Division Offices and implementing units.

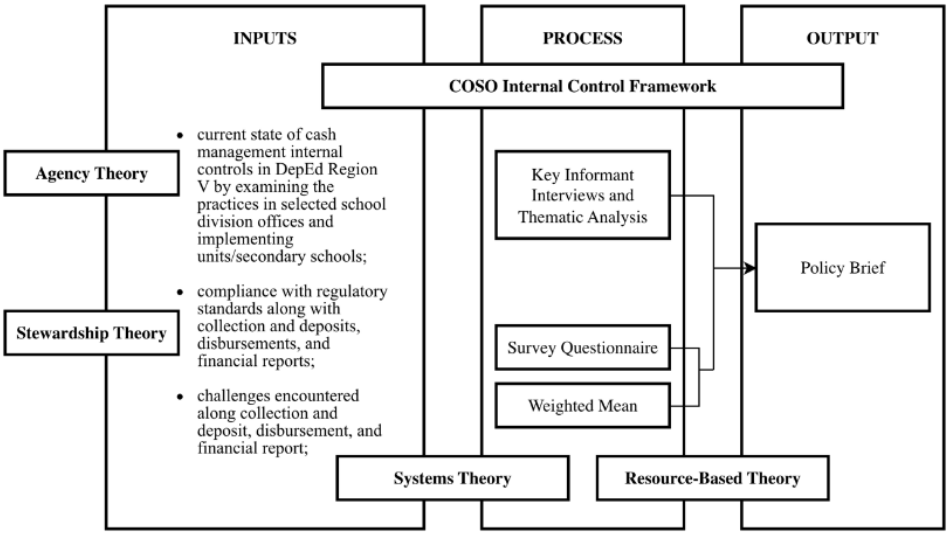


Fig. 2. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Material and Methods

This study used a descriptive evaluative design with an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach to examine cash management internal controls (CMICs) in DepEd Region V. The quantitative phase first assessed the state of internal controls and compliance in collections and deposits, disbursements, and financial reporting using structured questionnaires, addressing the first two objectives. The qualitative phase then explored reasons for observed gaps through semi structured interviews with key financial personnel, explaining the quantitative results and informing recommendations to strengthen CMICs and financial efficiency [30],[31].

The primary instrument used was a Likert type survey for the quantitative phase, measuring compliance with regulatory standards across the three CMIC domains. It was administered to accountants, bookkeepers, cashiers, and disbursing officers in selected Schools Division Offices (SDOs) and implementing secondary schools. For the qualitative phase, an interview guide was used with school heads and other key informants to probe institutional

hurdles and operational bottlenecks identified from the survey. Draft instruments underwent expert review by specialists in public finance and educational, followed by a pilot test with non participating school financial officers to refine wording and ensure clarity.

The setting comprised three SDOs: Albay, Legazpi City, and Tabaco City, including their implementing secondary schools. In total, 159 entities, including the three division offices and their secondary schools, participated in the survey, providing a broad picture of division and school level cash management practices. A purposive subset of respondents representing different offices and risk profiles, based on the quantitative results, was then interviewed to obtain deeper explanations of specific weaknesses in collection, disbursement, and reporting processes.

Data collection proceeded sequentially. Survey questionnaires were distributed and retrieved through the SDOs, and responses were encoded for quantitative analysis. Weighted mean was used to determine the level of compliance per CMIC indicator and per functional area, while frequency counts and rankings summarized the most common challenges and highlighted priority control weaknesses. Qualitative interviews were conducted next, recorded with consent, and thematically analyzed to explain patterns observed in the quantitative data and to generate detailed suggestions for improving procedures and controls [30],[32].

Ethical safeguards were strictly observed throughout the study. Formal approval was secured from the DepEd Region V Regional Office and the concerned Schools Division Superintendents. All participants received informed consent forms explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. To protect confidentiality, offices and respondents were assigned codes, and all survey and interview data were stored in password protected files accessible only to the researcher. Findings were reported in aggregate and used solely to support institutional development, not to assign blame or sanctions.

Results and Discussions

A. Current State of Cash Management Internal Controls

1. Collections and Deposits

Table 1 shows that cash management internal controls for collections and deposits are generally Highly Effective (M = 4.63). The highest rated activities involve reconciliation and record keeping, particularly ensuring that the total amount of daily deposits equals the corresponding deposit slips (M = 4.97) and maintaining updated Cash Receipts Records based on official receipts and validated deposit slips (M = 4.96). These findings align with Wijaya and Al Faruq [33], who emphasize that coordinated methodologies for recording accounting data are essential for safeguarding assets and promoting management policy compliance. The very high rating for maintaining monthly inventories of accountable forms

(M = 4.94) further supports Hanafi and Halim's [34] assertion that a primary function of internal control is to maintain the reliability of financial information through structured organizational activities.

Despite this clerical strength, the availability of a government service vehicle for daily transport of collections received only a "Moderately Effective" rating (M =2.67), making it the lowest scoring indicator within this functional area. This points to a critical physical risk; as Stage Security [35] notes, transporting cash carries inherent risks such as theft and human error, necessitating professional security protocols and specialized equipment to minimize exposure. Although segregation of collection and disbursement duties is rated "Highly Effective" (M = 4.54), it ranks below several clerical tasks. This echoes the New Jersey Society of CPAs' [36] concern that no single individual should control an entire transaction process to prevent fraud. Overall, the organization appears "accounting perfect but operationally exposed": documentation and reconciliation are strong, but physical safeguards and structural segregation require targeted investment to ensure that the "Highly Effective" status is durable against external threats.

2. Disbursements

Disbursement controls, also summarized in Table 1, show an overall rating of Highly Effective (M = 4.90). Parameters related to authorization and pre audit, such as the use of diverse disbursement modes (checks, ADA, TRA, working fund, direct payment), pre auditing all vouchers and payrolls, and requiring authorized signatures on vouchers, payrolls, and checks, are nearly perfect (M ≈ 4.96 to 4.97). These results demonstrate a rigid gatekeeping mechanism that aligns with Wijaya and Al Faruq's [33] conclusion that rigorous pre payment verification is essential for management policy compliance and for preventing unauthorized expenditures. The consistent bonding of bank signatories and enrollment of accounts in electronic systems further indicate a strong preventive control environment.

However, some "back end" processes lag behind these front-end strengths. The timely liquidation of cash advances is rated only "Effective" (M = 3.97), while the preparation of ACIC reports and adjustments for over- or understated disbursements obtained slightly lower mean scores compared with authorization-related functions. These findings indicate that although the organization has developed strong mechanisms for payment authorization and fund release, certain weaknesses remain in the areas of financial closure, reconciliation, and reporting accuracy. New Jersey Society of CPAs [36] emphasize that effective internal control systems require a clear segregation of duties to ensure that no single individual has complete control over the entire financial transaction cycle, including liquidation and reconciliation. Weaknesses in these post-disbursement processes may

reduce transparency, delay financial reporting, and increase the likelihood of undetected discrepancies or errors. Therefore, strengthening liquidation monitoring systems, accelerating reconciliation procedures, and enhancing accountability mechanisms would help sustain and expand the organization's "Highly Effective" performance across the entire disbursement management process.

Table 1. Current State of Cash Management Internal Controls of Selected DepEd School Divisions

Parameters	Mean	Rank	Int.
Collections & deposits			
1. Collection and disbursement duties/functions are segregated.	4.54	9	HE
2. Service vehicle available daily to transport cash/checks to authorized bank.	2.67	10	ME
3. All issued official receipts supported with Order of Payment from Accounting/BAC.	4.88	5	HE
4. 100% of fund deposits from CO, RO, and other offices acknowledged with official receipts.	4.88	6	HE
5. All collections deposited daily as evidenced by validated deposit slips attached to RCD.	4.89	4	HE
6. Total amount of daily deposits equals corresponding deposit slip.	4.97	1	HE
7. Validated deposit slips recorded immediately upon retrieval from servicing bank.	4.82	7	HE
8. Cash Receipts Record updated based on issued ORs and validated deposit slips.	4.96	2	HE
9. Booklets of blank ORs and checks safeguarded in a secured vault.	4.72	8	HE
10. Monthly inventory of accountable forms (checks and ORs) properly maintained.	4.94	3	HE
Overall mean – Collections & Deposits	4.63		HE
Disbursements			
1. Modes of disbursement include checks, ADA, TRA, working fund (CDC), and direct payment	4.99	1.5	HE
2. All DVs and payrolls with supporting documents pre-audited by Accountant/Bookkeeper before payment.	4.98	6	HE
3. All LDDAP-ADA and SLIIE properly prepared and signed by authorized signatories.	4.98	6	HE
4. Issued checks pre-numbered and signed by authorized signatories.	4.96	12	HE
5. DVs and payrolls with complete supporting documents signed by authorized signatories.	4.99	1.5	HE
6. All authorized bank signatories covered by fidelity bond.	4.93	17.5	HE
7. All bank accounts enrolled in eMDS and WeAccess LBP facilities.	4.97	8.5	HE
8. Payees' bank accounts enrolled in eMDS before payment.	4.96	10.5	HE
9. Mandatory and salary deductions remitted on or before due dates to PLIs and oversight agencies.	4.94	16	HE
10. Utility expenditures (water, energy, internet) paid on or before due dates.	4.97	8.5	HE
11. Cash advances liquidated on time.	3.97	23	E
12. Refunds or excess cash advances remitted to Bureau of the Treasury.	4.99	3.5	HE
13. Adjustments to overstated/understated disbursements made immediately with Accounting Office.	4.83	21	HE
14. ACIC reports prepared accurately and uploaded to eMDS/WeAccess without delay.	4.76	22	HE
15. Blank checks for all bank accounts kept in a secured vault.	4.88	20	HE
16. Checks monitored by serial number (beginning balance, issuance, ending balance).	4.94	14	HE

Parameters	Mean	Rank	Int.
Collections & deposits			
17. All voided checks cancelled and reported with complete supporting documents.	4.93	17.5	HE
18. Payments charged to different bank accounts made only when sufficient balances are available.	4.99	3.5	HE
19. Checks ready for release given only to payees/authorized claimants after identity verification.	4.96	10.5	HE
20. Disbursements on checks and ADA recorded in CkDADRec by bank account; balances determined same day.	4.94	14	HE
21. Petty cash payments and liquidation monitored via Petty Cash Fund Record and Report on Paid Petty Cash Voucher.	4.91	19	HE
22. Creditors required to issue ORs or sales invoices for payments via LDDAP-ADA or checks.	4.94	14	HE
23. DVs and payrolls with attached LDDAP-ADA and SLIIE signed by Head of Agency and other authorized signatories.	4.98	6	HE
Overall mean – Disbursements	4.9		HE
Reporting			
1. Financial reports prepared and submitted to Accounting and Auditor's Office by 10th of following month with complete documents.	4.84	6	HE
2. Report of Bank Accounts Maintained, Opened and Closed submitted quarterly to Bureau of Treasury.	4.82	7	HE
3. Financial report templates used are in accordance with required government forms.	4.99	1	HE
4. Government forms for financial reports signed only by authorized signatories.	4.98	2	HE
5. Accounting Office provided with bank certification and supporting documents for each closed account.	4.55	8	HE
6. Purchased accountable forms (ORs and checks) inspected by COA-authorized Accountant.	4.9	5	HE
7. Financial reports submitted with cover letter signed by Chief of Functional Division/Section Head.	4.93	4	HE
8. File folders containing current-year financial reports regularly updated for future reference.	4.97	3	HE
Overall mean – Reporting	4.87		HE

Note. 1.00-1.50 Not Effective (NE); 1.51-2.49 Somehow Effective (SE); 2.50-3.49 Moderately Effective (ME); 3.50 - 4.49 Effective (E); 4.50-5.00 Highly Effective (HE)

9. Reporting

Reporting controls are likewise rated Highly Effective (M = 4.87) in Table 1. The highest-ranked parameter is the use of government-mandated templates (M = 4.99), followed closely by the requirement that financial reports be signed only by authorized signatories (M = 4.98). These results align with Hanafi and Halim's [34] view that internal control's primary function is to maintain the reliability of financial information through structured activities and clear authorization lines. Regular updating of file folders containing current year financial reports (M = 4.97) further underscores a strong commitment to audit readiness and administrative transparency. Nonetheless, certain aspects of external reconciliation are relatively weaker. Submission of reports to the Accounting Section and Auditor's Office on or before the 10th of the following month has a slightly lower mean (M = 4.84), and provision of bank certifications for closed accounts

scores lowest within this set (M = 4.55). Although these values remain within the "Highly Effective" range, they indicate that while internal report quality is excellent, the speed of external confirmations and specific bank related requirements could be improved. The New Jersey Society of CPAs [36] argue that institutional resilience depends on the continuous evolution of both preventive and detective controls; thus, enhancing bank coordination and documentation for closed accounts would help close these residual gaps.

B. Assessment of Compliance to Regulatory Standards

1. Collections and Deposits

Table 2 shows that compliance with regulatory standards for collections and deposits is Always Compliant, with an overall (M = 4.83). The highest ranked parameter is the use of the National Collecting Officer (NCO) code and Unified Accounts Code Structure (UACS) for deposits to the Bureau of the Treasury (M = 5.00), indicating perfect adherence to national coding requirements. This finding supports Abushiba and Al Abbas's [37] claim that the adoption of standardized accounting codes is fundamental for ensuring comparability and reliability of public sector financial data. High scores for the use of clearing accounts, daily deposits to authorized government depository banks, and maintenance of cash receipts records (M ≈ 4.88 to 4.96) validate Oladimeji's [38] assertion that rigorous monitoring of cash receipts is a primary deterrent against misappropriation of public funds.

However, compliance is relatively weaker for reconciling monthly statements and submitting discrepancies to the BTr NCAD within 30 days (M = 4.60), and for ensuring that local treasurers or collecting officers are available during examinations (M = 4.55). The Association of Government Accountants [39] emphasize that the presence of key personnel during audits is as vital as the documents themselves, as it facilitates immediate clarification and helps prevent misinterpretation of data. These lower means suggest that while internal recording and coding are excellent, coordination and timeliness in interactions with external oversight bodies represent areas for procedural optimization.

2. Disbursement

For disbursement processes, Table 2 reports an overall compliance mean of 4.95, interpreted as Always Compliant. The certification of Disbursement Vouchers by the Chief Accountant and the restriction of special-purpose cash advances to duly authorized accountable officers both obtained the highest mean scores (M = 4.98). These findings support the argument of A. M. A. Abushiba and M. Al Abbas [37] that certification procedures are essential for ensuring financial reporting quality in public sector institutions. Similarly, M. S. Oladimeji [38] emphasizes that strict compliance with internal control policies strengthens institutional accountability and reduces financial

irregularities. High compliance means for supporting letter requests to the BTr and adherence to BTr Letter Circular No. 3-2018 for LDDAP-ADA submissions further demonstrate the institution's strong commitment to fiscal discipline, regulatory alignment, and transparent public financial management practices.

3. Reporting

Reporting compliance, summarized in Table 2, has an overall mean of 4.93, indicating an Always Compliant status. Preparation and forwarding of ACIC to the Government Servicing Bank achieved the highest mean (M = 4.99), reflecting a proactive approach to preventing unauthorized check payments. High scores for review and signing of the Report of Checks Issued (RCI) and for distribution of RCI and RADAI to COA with complete supporting documents (M ≈ 4.93 to 4.97) suggest that the organization is well prepared for external oversight. These results are consistent with Hanafi and Halim's [34] view that structured reporting maintains the reliability of financial information and supports audit transparency. Relatively lower means occur in quarterly submissions of the Report of Accounts Maintained, Opened, and Closed to the Bureau of the Treasury (M = 4.81), and in submission of certified photocopies of the Cash Disbursement Register during liquidation of cash advances (M = 4.89). The Association of Government Accountants [39] note that maintaining "Always Compliant" status across all timeframes requires treating quarterly and liquidation deadlines with the same urgency as daily check issuance. The New Jersey Society of CPAs [36] likewise warn that gaps in detective controls, such as delayed liquidation documentation, can allow errors to persist. Strengthening scheduling and automated reminders for periodic reports would help maintain uniform compliance throughout the fiscal year.

Table 2. Assessment of Compliance to Regulatory Standards of Selected DepEd School Divisions

Parameters	Mean	Rank	Int.
Collections & Deposits			
1. Use three major clearing accounts per fund type for national collections (Regular Fund, IATF, other-than-IATF).	4.96	4	AC
2. Use specific clearing accounts for SAGF remittances and online/electronic collections.	4.88	6	AC
3. Use NCO code and UACS organization code when depositing national collections to BTr.	5	1	AC
4. Reconcile monthly statements of deposited collections/remittances and disbursements and submit discrepancies to BTr-NCAD within 30 days.	4.6	8	AC
5. Deposit daily collections to assigned BTr clearing account with AGDB per Treasury Circular No. 02-2022.	4.89	5	AC
6. Ensure total daily deposits equal corresponding deposit slips.	4.98	2	AC
7. Local treasurers/collecting officers are available during BTr examinations of books of accounts.	4.55	9	AC
8. Maintain Cash Receipts Record to monitor accountability.	4.96	3	AC

Parameters	Mean	Rank	Int.
9. Record all financial transactions immediately and extract undeposited balances.	4.82	7	AC
Overall mean – Collections & Deposits	4.83		AC
Disbursements			
1. Letter request to BTr Regional Office is supported by information in Request for Authority to Open Bank Account (BTr Form 1).	4.97	3	AC
2. Head of agency/authorized representative executes and submits Waiver of Confidentiality (BTr Form 3) for each bank account.	4.9	18	AC
3. ACIC for approval of Head of Office and crediting to enrolled payee accounts in eMDS is uploaded within one day.	4.95	9	AC
4. Duly signed LDDAP-ADA and covering SLIIE (equivalent ACIC) are submitted to MDS-GSBs per BTr Letter Circular No. 3-2018.	4.96	5	AC
5. Creditors issue ORs or sales invoices as evidence of receipt of payment through LDDAP-ADA, SLIIE, or MDS checks.	4.95	9	AC
6. DVs processed and certified correct by Chief Accountant and approved by authorized signatory are attached to LDDAP-ADA.	4.98	1.5	AC
7. Public officers serving as bank signatories, issuers of checks/ADA, approvers of DVs, and custodians are bonded.	4.95	11	AC
8. Bond amount is based on total accountability (cash, property, accountable forms) of accountable officer.	4.95	9	AC
9. Modes of disbursement include MDS/commercial checks, cash from authorized cash advances, ADA, TRA, working fund/CDC, and direct payment.	4.96	5	AC
10. Two types of checks (MDS and commercial) are issued in accordance with GSB and AGDB rules.	4.93	15	AC
11. Completeness of signatures in four copies of DVs and three ORS, with supporting documents, is verified.	4.9	16.5	AC
12. Copies of checks, DVs, and supporting documents are retrieved and completeness of signatures on checks is verified.	4.9	16.5	AC
13. Cash advances for special, time-bound undertakings are granted only to duly authorized accountable/disbursing officers.	4.98	1.5	AC
14. CkDADRec is maintained by disbursing/accountable officers by fund cluster.	4.96	5	AC
15. Requests for MDS check re-order, with RAAFs and estimates of non-ADA transactions, are submitted to BTr for clearance.	4.96	7	AC
16. Remittances are made on or before the 10th day of the month following the applicable period.	4.93	14	AC
17. GSIS contributions (employee and government share) are remitted within the first 10 days of the month following the applicable period.	4.93	13	AC
18. Remittance of GSIS contributions takes priority over other obligations, except salaries and wages.	4.94	12	AC
Overall mean – Disbursements	4.95		AC
Reporting			
1. ACIC prepared in accordance with rules and forwarded to Government Servicing Bank (GSB).	4.99	1	AC
2. Copies of checks, DVs, ORS, and supporting documents retrieved and RCI in four copies prepared.	4.95	3.5	AC
3. RCI reviewed and signed by authorized signatory.	4.97	2	AC
4. Original RCI and RADAI with complete supporting documents submitted to COA through Accounting Unit; duplicate copy retained by Accounting.	4.93	5	AC
5. Completeness of signatures and agreement of LDDAP-ADA amounts with DVs and supporting documents reviewed; "ADA" portion signed.	4.95	3.5	AC
6. RADAIs reviewed and "Certification" portion signed before forwarding to Accounting Section.	4.92	6	AC

Parameters	Mean	Rank	Int.
7. Certified photocopy of CDReg with complete supporting documents submitted to Accounting Section for each liquidation of cash advances.	4.89	7	AC
8. Quarterly report of accounts maintained, opened, and closed submitted to BTr on or before the 10th day of the month following the reference quarter.	4.81	8	AC
Overall mean – Reporting	4.93		AC

Note. 1.00-1.50 Not Compliant (NC); 1.51-2.49 Rarely Complies (RC); 2.50-3.49 Sometimes Compliant (SC); 3.50 - 4.49 Mostly Compliant (MC); 4.50-5.00 Always Compliant (AC)

C. Challenges Encountered in terms of Collection and Deposit

1. Collections and Deposits

As shown in Table 3, the most frequently cited challenges in collections and deposits concern physical infrastructure and administrative transitions. The lack of an available government service vehicle and the absence of a fireproof vault for accountable forms and blank checks both received 94 affirmative responses and shared the top rank. Vona [40] argues that the absence of physical safeguards such as fireproof storage not only risks accidental loss but also increases the opportunity for internal fraud and theft, by creating gaps in the custodial chain. The immediate transfer of authorized signatories, which garnered 91 affirmative responses and ranked third, likewise threatens continuity in collections and deposit related transactions, especially when succession planning is weak. Such personnel changes, if not supported by strong transition policies, can undermine internal control resilience.

Other challenges, such as non updating of postings in the cash registry and delays due to errors in deposit slips, were ranked lower, indicating that clerical errors and registry delays are less frequent than infrastructure related issues. This suggests that personnel generally possess the technical competency to handle documentation, and that the organization's primary vulnerabilities are external and structural rather than rooted in accounting knowledge. In line with this, Arwinge [41] and Vona [40] emphasize that the "last mile" of cash management, the physical transfer to the bank, often represents the weakest link in public sector internal control systems. The findings therefore imply that additional policies or training alone will yield diminishing returns unless accompanied by capital investments in secure storage and transport, as well as formalized transition protocols for signatories.

2. Disbursement

For disbursements, the data reveal a "digital infrastructure paradox." Poor internet connectivity ranked as the primary operational bottleneck, with 97 affirmative responses. This confirms the World Bank's [14] observation that weak broadband is often the primary binding constraint preventing public entities from fully realizing the benefits of digital financial management systems. Likewise, delays in the crediting of NCAs and slow

replenishment of the Petty Cash Fund both ranked high, highlighting vulnerabilities in liquidity management and the timely availability of spending authority. DBM [42] has similarly identified timing gaps in exchequer cash releases as a major contributor to underspending.

Other external dependencies, such as problems with banks' servers and late submission of billings and supporting documents by partners, also ranked prominently, indicating that the "procure to pay" cycle is frequently stalled at the final stages of electronic fund transfers or due to third party negligence. In contrast to those results, internal human factors like lack of orientation or training and errors in voucher preparation ranked lower, suggesting that staff capability is not the main constraint. Echoing this, Volopay [43] warns that when petty cash replenishment cycles are slow, employees may resort to using personal funds for official business, leading to "shadow accounting" that bypasses internal controls and creates audit risks. The findings thus underscore the need to prioritize ICT resilience and improved NCA forecasting over additional training alone.

3. Reporting

In reporting, Table 3 highlights an "administrative capacity gap," with the shortage of staff to assist in sorting supporting documents ranked as the most critical challenge (134 affirmative responses). Hanafi and Halim [34] emphasize that the reliability of financial information depends on structured organizational activities, which become difficult to sustain without adequate personnel. Additionally, Audit Observation Memoranda (AOMs) from the Audit Team ranked second (100 responses), and delays in the liquidation of cash advances ranked third (92 responses), suggesting that resource constraints may be contributing directly to audit findings. Vona [40] notes that when staff are overwhelmed, detective controls intended to catch errors often fail, leading to increased external oversight and administrative friction.

Table 3. Challenges Encountered in Cash Management Internal Controls

Parameters	FC	
	Freq.	Rank
Collections & Deposits		
1. Lack of available government service vehicle hinders timely cash transfer and compromises security.	94	1.5
2. Non-updating of cash registry postings risks inaccurate records and weak accountability.	75	4
3. Lack of fireproof vault for accountable forms and blank checks increases risk of loss, theft, and non-compliance.	94	1.5
4. Immediate transfer of authorized signatories disrupts collections and deposits transactions.	91	3
5. Delays in transaction verification occur due to errors in deposit slip entries.	73	5
Disbursements		

Parameters	FC	
	Freq.	Rank
1. Poor internet connectivity hampers timely uploading of ACIC and delays payments.	97	1
2. Understatements/overstatements in disbursements lead to cash flow issues and audit scrutiny.	82	6.5
3. Monitoring tools for cash management are not fully digitized.	20	8
4. Delays in payment of obligations occur when authorized bank signatories are unavailable.	87	4.5
5. Delays in crediting NCAs affect payment of obligations.	93	2
6. Late deposit of "Due to Regional Office" funds slows voucher processing and check preparation for payroll remittances.	87	4.5
7. Reconciling disbursements is hindered by many outstanding checks due to delayed payee acknowledgments.	82	6.5
8. Petty cash fund replenishment is delayed by late submission of supporting documents from claimants.	90	3
Reporting		
1. Delays in liquidation of cash advances disrupt operations and affect financial reports.	92	3
2. Immediate transfer of Administrative Assistant II/Disbursing Officers due to promotion affects cash section performance.	90	5
3. Audit Observation Memoranda (AOMs) issued by the Audit Team are frequent.	100	2
4. Surprise cash examinations by the COA Audit Team are challenging.	82	6
5. Lack of staff to sort supporting documents for financial reports.	134	1
6. Lack of office equipment such as photocopiers, computers, and paper shredders.	91	4

Note. FC = Frequency count for those who agreed the item is a challenge.

Lack of office equipment such as photocopiers and computers and the immediate transfer of Administrative Assistants due to promotion were also flagged, though with lower ranks, indicating that both human and material resource shortages compound the reporting burden. Surprise cash examinations by the COA Audit Team ranked lowest, implying that external oversight is less disruptive than internal capacity limitations. The Association of Government Accountants [39] stresses that audit readiness is not only a matter of policy but of having sufficient "processing power," both human and technological, to manage documentation. Addressing these foundational gaps is therefore essential to sustain the "Highly Effective" and "Always Compliant" reporting status documented earlier.

D. Thematic Analysis on School Head's Assessment of the State of Cash Management Internal Controls

The thematic analysis of interviews with school heads and the Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) reveals emerging themes focusing on a control system heavily anchored in "Documentary Compliance," and constrained by competency–capacity strain. The first main theme on Structural Compliance & Documentation aligns with control activities, featuring sub-themes such as Evidence-based reporting and Audit readiness. The second main theme Human Resource Limitations aligns with control environment, featuring sub-themes of Segregation of duties and Technical skill gaps. The third theme, Proactive Risk Management aligns with risk

assessment, having the sub-themes such as Anticipating gaps and Systemic vs. Reactive. Following this, the theme Communication & Oversight aligns toward Information & Communication, with sub-themes of Top-down guidance and Monitoring loops. Finally, the last theme of Resource Adequacy aligns with Monitoring Activities, focusing on sub-themes of Fiscal constraints and MOOE utilization.

School heads consistently framed internal control in terms of producing Means of Verification (MOVs) and complying with COA rules, often equating the liquidation process with the entirety of the control system. This orientation indicates a detective control culture, where errors are detected after transactions through documentation rather than prevented through risk based planning. As one School Head noted regarding their practice, "Transparency and accountability in all financial transactions... providing the MOVs [Means of Verification] for every transaction," serves as the primary safeguard.

The SDS, however, provided a more systemic perspective, suggesting that while documentation is present, the transition from reactive "error-catching" to proactive "risk management" remains a challenge. The ultimate purpose of internal control emphasized was to ensure that “the resources of the government are protected against waste, fraud, and inefficiency,” underscoring the need to move from mere checklist compliance toward proactive risk management. A critical sub theme is the erosion of segregation of duties. Many school heads reported a “lack of bookkeepers or designated personnel,” resulting in situations where they serve as both initiator and approver of financial transactions. This configuration directly contradicts the principle that no single individual should control an entire transaction, a cornerstone of both COSO and broader internal control theory. While division level technical assistance and monitoring provide some corrective oversight, the interviews suggest that these measures are reactive and cannot fully compensate for the absence of dedicated fiscal staff at the school level. The result is a control environment that is ethically strong but structurally fragile: Internal control exists more as a “paper requirement” than as a fully embedded management tool.

E. Development of Policy Brief to Strengthen Cash Management Internal Controls

The synthesis of quantitative findings and thematic insights led to the development of a policy brief titled “From Reactive Compliance to Proactive Stewardship: A Strategic Framework” for use by division leadership, school heads, and financial auditors. The brief identifies a “Compliance-Capacity Paradox,” where strong control environment and documented compliance coexist with systematic weaknesses: failure of segregation of duties at the school level, over-reliance on manual documentation, and information asymmetry between schools and the division office. These issues correspond to the COSO components of control activities, information and communication, and monitoring, indicating that formal

structures exist but are not fully supported by adequate human and technological resources. To address these vulnerabilities, the policy brief advances three targeted recommendations.

F. Evidence and Analysis: The Triple Bottleneck

The first bottleneck is a segregation of duties failure. School heads repeatedly reported a lack of bookkeepers or designated fiscal staff, forcing them to initiate, process, and approve the same transactions. In internal control theory, this configuration is inherently high risk because it increases the probability of undetected errors or fraud when no independent check exists. The second bottleneck is a "paperwork versus protection" gap. The data show a strong preoccupation with means of verification and checklists, which satisfies basic audit requirements but results in predominantly detective controls, where errors are found only after funds have been spent. The SDS stressed that the goal should be to protect resources from waste and inefficiency, which requires preventive controls that are not yet fully developed at school level. The third bottleneck is information asymmetry. Communication between schools and the division office is often top down and episodic, focused on technical assistance after problems arise rather than on a continuous feedback loop that would allow risks to be anticipated and addressed proactively.

G. Targeted Policy Recommendations

In response to these bottlenecks, the policy brief proposes three complementary interventions aimed at shifting CMICs from reactive compliance toward proactive stewardship. The first recommendation is the implementation of Shared Service Centers (SSCs) through fiscal clustering. Instead of pursuing a "one-school-one-clerk" model that is fiscally unrealistic for small schools, the brief recommends grouping three to five small schools into a cluster served by a mobile senior bookkeeper. This model restores segregation of duties by ensuring that a professional third party handles the ledger and technical accounting work, while the school head retains approval authority, aligning day-to-day practice with internal control principles on independent checks and balances.

The policy brief concludes that the current status of internal control in DepEd Region V is functional but fragile. It relies heavily on the personal integrity and effort of school heads and frontline staff, and insufficiently on institutionalized systems and shared technical capacity. By decentralizing specialized fiscal support through shared service centers, digitizing oversight via an integrated financial management system, and adopting risk-based monitoring, the Department can move from "catching errors" after the fact to cultivating excellence in cash management and financial stewardship across schools in the region.

Conclusion

The study concludes that internal control efficacy is tethered more to technological infrastructure than to personnel competence. While human compliance is high, poor internet

connectivity and delayed fund releases act as systemic "choke points" that undermine the timeliness of the entire fiscal cycle. There is a significant disconnect between the "paper-perfect" administrative environment and the reality of physical asset protection. While record-keeping is "Highly Effective," the lack of fireproof vaults and secure transport represents a high-risk gap in the safeguarding of government resources. The fundamental internal control principle of "Segregation of Duties" is functionally compromised. Due to a shortage of specialized fiscal staff, School Heads are forced into a dual role as both initiator and final approver, creating an inherent risk of "management override" and administrative fatigue. Second, the current internal control environment is primarily "detective" (focused on catching errors during liquidation) rather than "preventive" (focused on mitigating risk before it occurs). This reactive posture limits the strategic value of internal audits. Third, the organization is currently in a state of "hybrid friction," where digital reporting requirements (UACS/NCO) are being met using manual, labor-intensive ledger systems, resulting in an unsustainable administrative burden on school-level personnel. The study concludes that the agency has successfully institutionalized national accounting standards. The near-perfect scores in the use of mandated codes and forms indicate a high level of technical literacy and a strong culture of regulatory compliance. Efficiency is highest at the "front-end" (authorization and certification) but deteriorates at the "back-end" (liquidation and reconciliation). This suggests that while spending is well-controlled, the accountability loop is often delayed by documentation backlogs. Lastly, the current system's stability is overly dependent on the individual integrity and stamina of School Heads rather than a strong, automated institutional framework. This creates a "single point of failure" risk for the organization. A significant portion of internal control "failure" (such as delayed payments) is attributable to external agencies, including bank response times and the unpredictability of Notice of Cash Allocation (NCA) releases from the DBM. The findings lead to the conclusion that centralizing technical assistance at the Division level is insufficient. Without embedded technical personnel (Bookkeepers) at the school level, the internal control system remains functionally fragile despite high clerical ratings.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Department implement a "Shared Service" model where small schools are grouped into clusters served by a mobile Senior Bookkeeper to restore the Segregation of Duties and professionalize ledger management. Furthermore, the Division Office should adopt an RBM framework, profiling schools based on past audit performance and enrollment size to prioritize intensive support for high-risk units while granting "light-touch" autonomy to high-performing ones. The agency should transition from manual ledgers to a

cloud-based, real-time tracking portal. This would allow for "Continuous Auditing" and provide the Schools Division Superintendent with a real-time dashboard of fiscal health.

Immediate budget priority should also be given to the procurement of fireproof vaults and the provision of dedicated government vehicles for the secure transport of collections and accountable forms. To eliminate the primary bottleneck identified by the data, schools must be provided with redundant internet service providers and modernized hardware (scanners and high-speed computers) specifically for fiscal reporting. The Department should move beyond "Technical Assistance" and advocate for the permanent hiring of Administrative Assistants or Fiscal Clerks to alleviate the "administrative fatigue" currently borne by School Heads. Finally, training programs for School Heads should shift focus from "procedural liquidation" (how to fill forms) to "strategic risk assessment" (identifying and mitigating fiscal vulnerabilities). It is recommended that the Division Office synchronize liquidation deadlines with replenishment cycles to ensure that the "Highly Effective" status of disbursements is matched by timely accountability. To mitigate the risks associated with personnel transitions and physical document loss, the agency should implement digital signature protocols and a centralized digital archive for all supporting documents.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research.

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