Challenges, Solutions, and Political Influences in Academic Policymaking in Local Colleges of Davao De Oro, Philippines

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Abstract— Amid resource constraints and shifting local politics, this qualitative single-case study examined the challenges, adaptive solutions, and political influences that shape academic policymaking in three local colleges of Davao de Oro, Philippines. Guided by Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework, nine in-depth interviews with vice-presidents, deans, and program heads were thematically analysed. Findings reveal five interlocking constraint domains—funding shortfalls, capacity gaps, weak stakeholder engagement, politicised governance, and operational instability—each impeding policy implementation. Colleges respond through external-grant mobilisation, workforce professionalisation, participatory communication drives, formalised LGU compacts, and streamlined workflows. Political currents—mayoral control, discretionary budgets, patronage pressures, and electoral volatility—permeate every stage, alternately accelerating and stalling reforms. Together, these insights demonstrate how evidence-based ambition is continuously recalibrated by resource realities and local politics, offering actionable lessons for similarly situated Local Universities and Colleges.

Keywords— academic policymaking, local colleges, Davao de Oro, curriculum development.

INTRODUCTION

Academic policymaking is a foundational process in education systems, aligning institutional functions with evolving socio-economic demands while upholding quality and relevance. According to McLaughlin and West (2016), sound academic policies are central to effective governance, while Altbach (2016) highlights their role in sustaining stability and continuous improvement. Patel (2020) further emphasized the importance of adaptive policies in response to rapid technological and labor market changes. Globally, institutions seek international accreditation to build credibility, but this often compromises local autonomy, leading to mismatches between national standards and regional needs (OECD, 2023; Altbach & de Wit, 2022). The Global Partnership for Education (2022) also highlights the challenge of aligning international expectations with diverse educational contexts.

In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), created by Republic Act No. 7722, oversees academic policymaking in higher education, including local colleges. CHED issues guidelines via Memorandum Orders (CMOs) such as CMO 32 s. 2006, which mandates participatory decision-making through governing boards, and CMO 4 s. 2007, which details academic program accreditation standards. More recent policies, such as the CMO 18 Series. 2022 addresses

flexible learning in resource-limited settings. These frameworks shape academic governance nationwide, including in Davao de Oro.

However, systemic challenges persist. Limited funding and political interference hinder effective policymaking (Santos, 2023), as noted by CHED (2021), which cites unequal resource distribution and regional disparities. Local colleges, especially in economically dependent areas like Davao de Oro, face added pressure from Local Government Units (LGUs) that control funding and sometimes influence decisions to serve short-term interests (Reyes, 2021; Torres, 2020; Anas, Sirozi, & Sumanti, 2024). The province's policymaking is further shaped by its unique socio-political and cultural landscape. Its diverse communities and challenging topography demand inclusive, locally relevant, and feasibility-driven policies (Martinez, 2019; Davao de Oro Provincial Government, 2023).

Within this complex setting, academic leaders—vice presidents for academic affairs, deans, and program heads—from Kolehiyo ng Pantukan, Monkayo College of Arts, Sciences, and Technology, and Maco de Oro College play central roles. Yet, the voices of faculty, students, and the community remain underexplored in policy development (Patel et al., 2022). While faculty often emphasize pedagogy, students experience the

impact of policies firsthand, and local leaders articulate community needs. However, political dynamics usually limit their participation, reinforcing hierarchical decision-making.

Effective policies are essential for improving curriculum relevance, ensuring quality, and promoting equitable access—particularly in underserved regions like Davao de Oro (Johnson & Smith, 2023; Gonzalez, 2022). Despite growing academic interest in policymaking, gaps remain, particularly regarding the local experiences and challenges faced by community-rooted colleges (Lee & Kim, 2023; Freeman et al., 2021). No published studies have yet explored how national policy, political pressures, and stakeholder dynamics interact in the policymaking processes of Davao de Oro's local colleges. This study aims to fill that gap.

This qualitative single-case study examines academic policymaking in local colleges of Davao de Oro, with a focus on curriculum development. It explores the challenges, proposed solutions, and the influence of political dynamics, particularly the involvement of LGUs, on policy decision-making. Framed by the Multiple Streams Framework (Kingdon, 1984) and the Stages Heuristic Model (Lasswell, 1956; Anderson, 2014; Howlett & Ramesh, 2003), the study analyzes how institutional challenges, policy solutions, and political factors intersect to shape outcomes. The MSF informs the analysis of challenges, solutions, and political influence, while the Stages Heuristic provides a structured lens to interpret policy development, implementation, and evaluation. Emergent themes drawn from qualitative data offer a grounded account of policymaking realities.

Curriculum-related policies inform the study in three local colleges. It is limited to the views of senior academic leaders with at least two years of experience in policymaking. Broader domains such as faculty management or student affairs were excluded from in-depth analysis. While findings are context-specific and not broadly generalizable, they offer valuable insights into policy practices within a decentralized, politically nuanced environment.

This research holds practical significance for various stakeholders. Students benefit from more relevant and inclusive curriculum policies; faculty gain clarity on how these policies shape their work; and institutional leaders are equipped with evidence-based strategies for strengthening governance. Local governments and accrediting bodies can use the findings to refine their support and oversight mechanisms. Moreover, the study contributes to scholarly discourse by documenting localized policymaking experiences in underserved regions, providing a foundation for future research on institutional governance, stakeholder participation, and educational reform in similar contexts. Ultimately, this research aims to inform policy innovation and promote equitable, high-quality education across local colleges in the Philippines. This study directly supports SDG 4 – Quality Education, particularly Targets 4.3 and 4.5, by identifying governance practices that advance inclusive, equitable, and high-quality higher-education opportunities in resource-constrained settings.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A qualitative single-case study design was adopted to probe the complex landscape of academic policymaking across Davao de Oro's three LGU-supported colleges. This approach yielded rich, context-laden narratives through in-depth interviews, illuminating how institutional actors negotiate constraints, craft solutions, and navigate shifting political currents. Anchored in a constructivist paradigm, it recognises that policy realities are co-constructed through the lived experiences of vice-presidents, deans, and program heads—making the design well-suited to reveal their interpretations of curriculum-related challenges, responses, and governance dynamics (Creswell, 2023).

Research Locale

The study was conducted in Davao de Oro, a province located in the Davao Region of Mindanao, Philippines, known for its socio-economic and cultural diversity. The local colleges in this area serve a heterogeneous population comprising Indigenous peoples and migrant communities and often contend with limited faculty development, resource constraints, and politicized administrative environments. Davao de Oro was selected as the research site because of its growing network of LGU-supported colleges, its alignment with national goals for expanding access to tertiary education, and its representation of policy complexity influenced by local governance, economic precarity, and demographic diversity.

Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was applied to identify participants with direct involvement in academic policymaking (Campbell et al., 2020). Eligibility requires at least two years of experience in policymaking and active

participation in curriculum design, institutional governance, or faculty development. Key informants included three Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs, three Deans, and three Program Heads from the three local colleges in the province: Kolehiyo ng Pantukan, Maco de Oro College, and Monkayo College of Arts, Sciences, and Technology. Participants were also selected based on their experience under different institutional leaderships, particularly those influenced by transitions resulting from changes in LGU administration. Interviewee identifiers were anonymized using coded labels (e.g., IDI_1 to IDI_9) to ensure role-based representation across institutions.

Data Collection Procedures
Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method, allowing participants to elaborate on their lived experiences related to curriculum policymaking (Deterding & Waters, 2021). The interview guide was validated by experts in higher education and qualitative research and included open-ended questions about policy processes, challenges, and institutional responses. After securing ethical clearance and institutional permissions, interviews were scheduled at the participant's convenience and conducted either face-to-face or online, with recordings made with the participant's consent. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Transcripts were prepared verbatim to support systematic analysis.

Data Analysis
Transcripts were analysed using Creswell's six-step thematic procedure. Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) guided coding: barriers and enablers were mapped to the problem, policy, and politics streams, clarifying how their (mis)alignment opened or narrowed policy windows.

Establishing Trustworthiness
To ensure rigor, strategies were employed that aligned with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for validity. Credibility was established through member checking, iterative questioning, and clarification prompts during interviews. Dependability was supported by maintaining a detailed audit trail of all methodological steps, interview notes, and coding decisions. Triangulation was achieved by cross-verifying data across participants and institutional roles, while confirmability was enhanced through peer review and reflexive documentation of researcher biases. Transferability was strengthened by providing thick descriptions of context,

enabling applicability to similar institutions in other provinces.

Ethical Considerations
The study adhered to ethical protocols as outlined by Creswell (2023), with particular attention to informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Participants were fully briefed about the study's aims and assured of their right to withdraw at any time. Personal identifiers were removed from transcripts, and all digital files were securely stored.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Davao del Norte State College (IRB No.: 2025-022-INT.-JBL) prior to data collection. All participants reviewed and approved the preliminary findings for accuracy and fidelity to their perspectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Challenges Encountered in Academic Policymaking among Local Colleges in Davao de Oro
Academic policymakers in Davao de Oro's local colleges face a complex web of constraints that encompasses finance, human resources, stakeholder relations, politics, and operational stability. These pressures do not arise in isolation; instead, they intersect to slow decision cycles, weaken implementation fidelity, and expose reforms to sudden reversal. The themes below outline how each category of challenge manifests in practice and how, collectively, they challenge the resilience of community-based institutions that already operate on limited budgets and complex governance mandates.

Funding Challenges and Infrastructure Limitations in Policy Implementation. Recurrent lags in subsidy releases, strict municipal oversight of supplemental budgets, and board-approved fee caps leave administrators with unpredictable resources and underdeveloped monitoring systems. Compounded by limited AudioVisual-equipped rooms, unstable internet, and student device shortages, fiscal shortfalls cascade into missed timelines for curriculum reviews, training programs, and technology upgrades. As one vice president confirmed:

"UNIFAST has not given us any funds … so that is the barrier for us at this time." (IDI 1)

Addressing Capacity Gaps and Enhancing Inclusivity in Academic Policy Governance. Thin plantilla allocations force a small cadre of full-time staff to juggle instruction, administration, and policy drafting, while

contractual faculty—often closest to frontline realities—are excluded from committees. The resulting workload hampers consultation rounds and dilutes expertise, undercutting the promise of inclusive, data-rich policymaking.

Fostering Trust and Engagement amidst Resistance in Academic Policymaking. Late involvement and fear of additional workload generate skepticism that stalls rollouts and forces repeated orientations. Although students hold board seats, their participation often becomes complaint-driven, and fear of retaliation mutes honest feedback in focus groups. Durable trust, therefore, hinges on transparent information flows, early co-design, and safe spaces for dissent.

Aligning Academic Policies with Political and Governance Structures. Even technically sound drafts remain vulnerable to external gatekeepers. Final approval depends on mayors who may shelve or alter policies to fit shifting priorities, while limited political backing can delay the mobilization of resources. Success thus rests on alliance-building that secures consistent LGU endorsement and buffers reforms from partisan swings.

Ensuring Policy Stability amidst External and Internal Disruptions. Externally mandated activities disrupt academic calendars, while fragmented unity and unclear internal directives erode momentum and morale. Organizational resilience depends on streamlined communication, contingency protocols, and leadership that reconciles external demands with internal coherence.

The constellation of obstacles documented here confirms national analyses showing that delayed public subsidies, under-investment in digital infrastructure, and staffing shortages collectively widen the gap between well-crafted policy and effective delivery (Albert et al., 2021; Orbeta & Vargas, 2024). These findings also reflect grassroots evidence that chronic connectivity gaps and device scarcity continue to undermine digital reforms in provincial HEIs (Kunjiapu, Sinnappan, Anor Salim, & Kunasegaran, 2024). Similarly, Junsay and Lagura (2024) emphasize that flexible learning remains hampered by persistent issues such as unreliable internet connectivity, frequent power interruptions, and device-related risks—further reinforcing the systemic nature of these challenges. By linking funding deficits to real-time implementation lags, this study underscores how financial and infrastructural constraints function not as

isolated or sequential issues but as deeply intertwined barriers—an insight often overlooked in macro-level evaluations. This dynamic is further illustrated by faculty surveys indicating that unstable internet access has forced instructors to abandon planned instructional innovations (Moralista & Oducado, 2020). In the same vein, capacity gaps align with Bustos-Orosa and Symaco's (2024) assertion that ad-hoc personnel arrangements hinder organizational learning, while the exclusion of contractual faculty lends credence to Castulo's (2024) advocacy for more inclusive governance structures.

At the political frontier, findings align with Asirit and Hua's (2024) observation that partisan mediation can dilute or derail locally driven reforms; however, they extend that critique by tracing how frequent LGU-mandated events and unclear internal processes erode policy stability on a day-to-day basis. Viewed through Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework, chronic funding bottlenecks and staff shortages clog the problem stream, limited solution sets stall the policy stream, and fluctuating LGU support constricts the politics stream, leaving policy windows narrow and fleeting. Addressing these layered challenges, therefore, requires stream-aligned strategies: multi-year phased budgeting to stabilize resources, professionalization and inclusion initiatives to widen solution space, and structured academic–political liaison mechanisms to keep the window open long enough for evidence-based reforms to take root.

Policy Solutions in Academic Policymaking among Local Colleges in Davao de Oro

Local colleges in Davao de Oro have addressed recurring fiscal, human resources, and governance challenges by developing a suite of adaptive, stakeholder-centered solutions. These initiatives encompass external resource mobilization, internal capacity building, participatory awareness drives, formalized partnerships with LGUs, and process optimization—together signaling a shift from reactive fixes to proactive, systems-oriented governance that blends autonomy with accountability.

External Funding Generation and Funding-Process Streamlining. Administrators now aggressively court outside funders, file formal grant requests and embed quarterly coordination meetings in new Memoranda of Agreement (MOAs) LGUs to shorten approval lead times. Joint budget committees distribute decision power, while performance-linked disbursements reduce

idle periods between appropriation and release, allowing instructional upgrades and monitoring tools to launch on schedule even when national subsidies arrive late. As one administrator emphasized:

"We will follow up with UNIFAST for funding and submit an official request to CHED."(IDI 4)

Building Capacity and Innovating Academic Policies. Building Capacity and Innovating Academic Policies. To close workforce gaps, key contractual posts are converted to plantilla status, and each program head is supported by a dedicated program coordinator. Faculty-development workshops and online micro-credential modules expand expertise without draining limited travel budgets. Cross-functional drafting teams and incentive schemes—such as the Academic Workforce Advancement toward Curriculum Harmony (WATCH) Award—embed a culture of shared responsibility, ensuring policy reform does not outpace implementers' capacity.

Enhancing Policy Awareness and Collaborative Development. Regular orientation drives, live demonstrations, plain-language handbooks, and infographic blasts democratize access to new guidelines. Focus-group consultations with veteran and junior faculty surface granular feedback, while student and staff representatives co-present policies at faculty assemblies, turning compliance from a mandate into a shared commitment.

Enhancing Local Government Collaboration and Transparent Policy Formulation. Recognizing the leverage of LGUs, local colleges are now institutionalizing approval processes through signed MOAs and establishing joint oversight committees to review reforms in real time. Public hearings invite community scrutiny, while time-bound written feedback keeps deliberations on track—transforming political gatekeeping into partnership and insulating policies from ad-hoc interventions.

Streamlining Academic Policy Processes. A unified policy calendar synchronizes committee sessions and deadlines while clarified leadership roles assign explicit stewardship for each stage. Standard templates and monthly inter-office huddles consolidate documentation, reduce duplication, and enable rapid pivots when external conditions shift.

The solutions above corroborate Masatoshi's (2023) claim that diversified revenue streams and alliances with LGUs underpin fiscal resilience. They extend that analysis by demonstrating how MOA-linked fund releases can neutralize subsidy lags in a provincial setting (see also Mores, Lee, & Bae, 2019, who found that structured LGU–university compacts in CALABARZON accelerated budget flows to partner campuses). Capacity-building initiatives echo Bustos-Orosa and Symaco's (2024) call for plantilla expansion but add evidence that online micro-credentialing can stretch scarce training budgets without compromising quality (McGreal & Olcott, 2022). Likewise, the communication toolkit mirrors Groeneveld et al.'s (2021) finding that clarity drives compliance. Yet, it innovates by embedding visual media in policy rollout—a tactic reinforced by a recent scoping review, which shows that infographics significantly boost student engagement and comprehension in university settings (Jaleniauskiene & Kasperiuniene, 2022).

Viewed through Kingdon's Multiple Streams lens, external funding tactics widen the solution stream, inclusive drafting teams amplify the problem stream's legitimacy, and codified LGU partnerships stabilize the politics stream, collectively prising open longer policy windows. The convergence of these streams signals that local colleges can convert chronic constraints into engines of adaptive governance when financial ingenuity, human capital investment, participatory design, and procedural discipline advance in tandem.

Political Streams Shaping Academic Policymaking in Local Colleges in Davao de Oro

Academic policymaking in Davao de Oro's local colleges unfolds within a highly politicized governance arena, where mayoral authority, budget discretion, and shifting alliances frequently dictate the pace and direction of policy. While proximity to the LGU delivers swift access to funds and infrastructure, it also exposes campuses to leadership turnovers, patronage demands, and election-cycle volatility. The four sub-themes below outline how political currents alternately accelerate and hinder academic initiatives, compelling administrators to strike a balance between institutional autonomy and pragmatic engagement.

LGU Leadership Control. Administrative authority begins with mayor-appointed executives, which accelerates decision-making while concentrating power in a single office. Leadership reshuffles after elections can force colleges to restart projects and rebuild institutional memory—underscoring the need for fixed-

term appointments and independent search committees. As one participant noted:

"The mayor can immediately decide when selecting the College President." (IDI 1)

Political Resource Allocation. Budget flows hinge on executive discretion: laboratory upgrades or equipment purchases are only approved after a mayor's approval, but gains may be lost when political priorities shift. To buffer these swings, local colleges pursue multi-year MOAs and joint LGU–Local college budget committees that stabilize cash streams and insulate mission-critical spending from election-cycle shocks.

Political Pressures. At times, elected officials may exert influence on grading or admissions decisions, potentially compromising institutional integrity and affecting staff morale. In response, campuses are implementing transparent protocols, establishing secure appeal mechanisms, and equipping staff with training to navigate external pressures—marking a shift from ad-hoc accommodations to a more consistent, rules-based approach to governance.

Dynamic Political Climate. Where municipal leaders champion the college, annual budgets, and provincial classrooms flow readily; elsewhere, leadership changes stall initiatives. Local colleges now institutionalize joint oversight bodies and cross-cycle MOUs to anchor commitments beyond individual terms, thereby transforming volatile political tides into predictable policy rhythms.

These findings support Aldaba et al.'s (2024) view that LUCs must continually renegotiate autonomy with local officials, and they extend Punongbayan's (2025) "political budget cycle" thesis by demonstrating how patronage both accelerates and jeopardizes campus projects within a single term. They also resonate with Saguin's (2023) system-level analysis of Philippine "de-privatization," which links shifting public-private balances to the same partisan incentives that reshape local higher-education budgets. Leadership turnover echoes Ogunbanjo's (2024) warning that politicized appointments depress morale. Yet, Davao de Oro's push for fixed-term contracts and independent search panels indicates a pragmatic adaptation rather than passive acceptance.

Framed through Kingdon's Multiple Streams, sudden executive reshuffles, discretionary funding, and patronage interventions crowd the problem stream; reforms such as bipartisan budget committees and transparent admissions enlarge the policy stream; and cross-cycle MOAs) stabilize the politics stream, widening the temporal window for action. This three-stream realignment is consistent with qualitative evidence from Zamboanga City, where clientelist exchanges between LGUs and voters reinforce cyclical budget shifts (Anastacio & Morandarte, 2023), and with international findings that decentralized university systems can curb politicization when robust community-oversight mechanisms are in place (Adhikari, Upadhyay, & Bhattarai, 2023). By aligning structural safeguards with the very currents that threaten them, local colleges demonstrate how decentralized institutions can harness—rather than merely endure—the flux of Philippine local politics.

IMPLICATION

Academic policymaking in Davao de Oro's local colleges unfolds as a continuous, adaptive cycle whose effectiveness depends on how well leaders synchronise Kingdon's problem, policy, and politics streams. Evidence shows that persistent funding delays, thin staffing, and politicised approvals repeatedly loosen this alignment, stalling even well-designed initiatives. Nevertheless, the colleges demonstrate that incremental, mutually reinforcing actions—such as external-grant drives, plantilla conversions, and formal LGU compacts—can widen policy windows and gradually build momentum. None of these strategies resolves every constraint in isolation, but together they extend the lifespan of reforms and create space for successive rounds of improvement. Crucially, the routine use of dashboards and participatory consultations lends legitimacy to action by making problems visible, grounding solutions in real-time data, and holding political actors accountable. In effect, short budget cycles and electoral calendars become opportunities for targeted gains rather than insurmountable barriers.

For practitioners, these findings imply that college administrators should institutionalise regular data reviews that pair expenditure dashboards with stakeholder feedback, ensuring emergent issues are quickly channelled into the problem stream. CHED regional offices can accelerate the policy stream by distributing template memoranda of agreement and micro-credential modules that standardise participatory drafting and monitoring. Meanwhile, LGUs strengthen the politics stream when they adopt medium-term budget frameworks and embed joint oversight

committees capable of withstanding leadership turnover.

The lessons also open avenues for future research. Longitudinal studies tracking stream-bridging tactics—such as multi-year LGU-college agreements or phased micro-credential roll-outs—would clarify which combinations most effectively sustain policy gains across electoral cycles. Comparative work that includes State Universities and Colleges could test whether the adaptive strategies identified here transfer to more autonomous or better-resourced contexts.

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