

Effectiveness and Transition Readiness of ISO 21001:2018-Implemented Universities in Luzon Toward ISO 21001:2025

Reynaldo M. Dela Cruz¹, Maria Cecilia F. Santos², and Jose Antonio G. Villanueva³

¹Metro Manila, Philippines

²Zambales, Philippines

³Batangas, Philippines

Abstract— This study assessed the effectiveness of the Educational Organization Management System (EOMS) based on ISO 21001:2018 among selected universities in Luzon, Philippines, and evaluated their readiness to transition to ISO 21001:2025. Using a descriptive-evaluative research design, data were collected through a structured survey questionnaire distributed to quality management personnel, internal auditors, and academic administrators across ISO 21001:2018-certified institutions in the National Capital Region, Central Luzon, and CALABARZON. Findings indicate that EOMS implementation yielded moderate to high effectiveness in organizational context, leadership commitment, and learner satisfaction, while operational planning, internal audit, and continuous improvement practices remained areas requiring strengthening. Transition readiness toward ISO 21001:2025 was found to be preliminary, with most institutions lacking formal gap analyses against the revised standard. Key barriers include insufficient awareness of the 2025 changes, limited resources for transition planning, and the absence of climate change integration and digital learning governance provisions. The study proposes a transition framework emphasizing early gap assessment, leadership engagement, and stakeholder involvement to meet the July 2028 transition deadline.

Index Terms— Continuous improvement, educational organization management system, EOMS, ISO 21001:2018, ISO 21001:2025, quality management, transition readiness

1. Introduction

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) published ISO 21001:2018 as the first international standard specifically designed for educational organizations, providing a management system framework that supports the acquisition and development of competence through teaching, learning, and research [1]. Unlike the generic ISO 9001 quality management standard, ISO 21001 places learners and other beneficiaries at the center of the management system, emphasizing educational-specific processes such as curriculum design, learner satisfaction evaluation, and the alignment of institutional objectives with stakeholder needs [2], [3]. Since its publication, universities across the Philippines have increasingly adopted the standard to demonstrate institutional quality and enhance their competitive positioning.

In July 2025, ISO published the second edition of the standard, ISO 21001:2025, which technically revises and

replaces the 2018 edition [4]. The revised standard introduces significant changes, including the integration of climate change considerations into the organizational context, expanded vocabulary encompassing formative and summative assessment, strengthened provisions for learners with special needs, modernized digital and hybrid learning governance, and a stronger emphasis on learner well-being and mental health [5], [6]. All ISO 21001:2018-certified institutions must transition to the 2025 edition before the three-year transition deadline of approximately July 2028 [7].

Universities in Luzon, the largest and most densely populated island group in the Philippines, represent a significant concentration of ISO 21001:2018-certified educational institutions. These institutions have invested considerable resources in establishing their EOMS, conducting internal audits, and maintaining certification through surveillance audits. However, the transition to ISO 21001:2025 presents new challenges, requiring institutions to assess their current systems against revised requirements, update documentation, and implement new practices related to sustainability, digital learning, and learner well-being [5], [8].

This study sought to determine the effectiveness of ISO 21001:2018 implementation among selected universities in Luzon and to assess their readiness to transition to ISO 21001:2025. Specifically, it aimed to: (1) evaluate the perceived effectiveness of EOMS implementation across the ISO 21001:2018 clause categories, (2) identify the challenges encountered in sustaining the management system, (3) assess the level of transition readiness toward ISO 21001:2025, and (4) propose a transition framework to guide institutions in meeting the 2028 deadline.

2. Related Literature

A. ISO 21001 and Educational Quality Management

ISO 21001:2018 was developed by ISO Technical Committee ISO/TC 232 to provide educational organizations with a management system standard tailored to their unique operational context [1]. The standard is built on the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle and incorporates quality management

*Corresponding author: r.cruz2319@gmail.com

principles adapted for education, including a focus on learners and other beneficiaries, leadership commitment, process approach, and evidence-based decision making [2]. Trisnawati and Rosiawan [3] demonstrated that ISO 21001 clauses can be mapped to national accreditation requirements, suggesting that EOMS implementation supports both certification and institutional accreditation goals simultaneously.

Abu Bakar *et al.* [9] conducted a review of literature on ISO 21001:2018 in academia and found that implementation brings benefits such as improved efficiency, better educational quality, and higher stakeholder satisfaction. However, challenges including resource constraints, resistance to change, and ongoing capacity building can hinder successful adoption. Key success factors identified were strong leadership, positive organizational culture, skilled staff, and sufficient resources. These findings underscore the importance of institutional commitment at all levels for effective EOMS implementation.

B. ISO 9001 as a Precursor in Higher Education

Before ISO 21001, many educational institutions adopted ISO 9001 as their quality management framework. Kamusoko [10] analyzed the applicability of ISO 9001 in higher education institutions and concluded that the standard provides a suitable framework for quality assurance, particularly when staff demonstrate deep engagement with its processes. Ab Wahid [11] examined the sustainability of ISO 9001-based quality management systems in a large public university over 20 years, identifying four phases: initiation, internalisation, alignment, and improvement. Critical success factors included commitment from people, training, and good communication, while challenges encompassed lack of knowledge, insufficient skills, and poor communication.

In the Philippine context, Cabacang [12] surveyed total quality management practices among higher education institutions and found high adoption in top-management commitment, teaching and learning delivery, and customer satisfaction, but more modest adoption in strategic planning and data management. Studies on ISO 9001:2015 implementation among state universities and colleges in the Philippines have shown that the standard was implemented to a very great extent and was rated highly effective, though sustaining the system was assessed as moderately challenging [13]. These findings provide a baseline for understanding the landscape into which ISO 21001 was introduced.

C. Challenges in ISO 21001 Implementation

Hassan and Alsabbagh [14] assessed ISO 21001:2018 compliance at a college within a university and found an overall compliance level of only 31%, with a 69% implementation gap. The most significant deficiencies were observed in operational processes, internal audits, performance evaluation mechanisms, and continuous improvement practices. Relatively better performance was found in organizational context and stakeholder awareness. The study concluded that substantial managerial and structural improvements are required for effective EOMS adoption.

Umam and Rahman [15] examined the integration of ISO

9001:2015 and ISO 21001:2018 at a university and identified a phenomenon they termed a paper QMS, where audit findings seldom translate into actionable improvements. Documents and audits exist, but their outputs do not consistently result in measurable gains in teaching, learning, or organizational performance. This disconnect between procedural compliance and strategic quality gains represents a significant challenge for institutions seeking genuine continuous improvement.

D. Key Changes in ISO 21001:2025

ISO 21001:2025 was published on 7 July 2025 and retains the overall framework and clause structure of the 2018 edition while introducing meaningful enhancements [4]. The primary change, as stated in the standard's foreword, is that assessment-related text has been revised to reflect current best practices in educational assessment [16]. Additional changes include the addition of new terms and definitions (evaluation, formative assessment, summative assessment, and learners with special needs), the integration of climate change considerations from the 2024 amendment into the main standard text, strengthened leadership requirements for educational assurance and equity, and enhanced alignment with European quality assurance frameworks [5], [6].

The 2025 edition also modernizes provisions for digital and hybrid learning, incorporating guidance for online education delivery, digital assessment integrity, and equitable access to digital learning tools [7]. Sustainability is now consolidated into the main standard text with stronger linkage to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Quality Education [7]. All certified institutions must complete the transition before July 2028, after which ISO 21001:2018 certificates will no longer be valid [7].

3. Methodology

A. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-evaluative research design using a quantitative survey approach. The descriptive component characterized the current state of EOMS implementation, while the evaluative component assessed effectiveness and transition readiness against established criteria. This design was appropriate for assessing institutional practices across multiple organizations without manipulating variables [14].

B. Participants and Sampling

The study involved quality management personnel, internal auditors, and academic administrators from selected ISO 21001:2018-certified universities in the National Capital Region, Central Luzon, and CALABARZON. Purposive sampling was used to identify institutions with active ISO 21001:2018 certification and at least one completed surveillance audit cycle. A total of 120 respondents participated, comprising quality assurance directors, management representatives, internal auditors, and academic department heads. The institutions were not named to maintain confidentiality and focus on systemic rather than institution-specific findings.

C. Instrumentation

A structured survey questionnaire was developed based on the ISO 21001:2018 clause structure (Clauses 4 to 10) and the anticipated changes in ISO 21001:2025. The instrument comprised three sections: (1) EOMS effectiveness across seven clause categories, rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not effective) to 5 (highly effective); (2) challenges encountered in sustaining the management system, rated on a similar scale; and (3) transition readiness toward ISO 21001:2025, assessing awareness, gap analysis status, resource allocation, and planned transition activities. The questionnaire was validated by three quality management experts and pilot-tested with 15 respondents before full deployment.

D. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through both online and printed questionnaires distributed over a period of eight weeks. Responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including weighted means and standard deviations, to determine effectiveness and readiness levels. Mean scores were interpreted using the following scale: 1.00 to 1.79 (not effective), 1.80 to 2.59 (slightly effective), 2.60 to 3.39 (moderately effective), 3.40 to 4.19 (effective), and 4.20 to 5.00 (highly effective). The same scale was adapted for transition readiness assessment.

4. Results and Discussion

A. Effectiveness of EOMS Implementation

Table I presents the perceived effectiveness of ISO 21001:2018 implementation across the seven clause categories. The results indicate that organizational context ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.58$) and leadership commitment ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.62$) were rated as highly effective and effective, respectively. Respondents reported that their institutions had clearly defined missions, visions, and strategic directions aligned with stakeholder expectations, consistent with findings by Abu Bakar *et al.* [9] regarding the benefits of strong leadership in EOMS adoption.

Clause Category	Mean	SD	Interpretation
4. Organizational Context	4.21	0.58	Highly Effective
5. Leadership	4.15	0.62	Effective
6. Planning	3.48	0.69	Effective
7. Support	3.52	0.65	Effective
8. Operation	3.12	0.71	Moderately Effective
9. Performance Evaluation	3.25	0.68	Moderately Effective
10. Improvement	3.08	0.74	Moderately Effective

Table I. Perceived Effectiveness of EOMS Implementation by Clause Category

Conversely, operational planning and control ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.71$), performance evaluation ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.68$), and improvement ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.74$) were rated as only moderately effective. These findings align with the observations of Hassan and Alsabbagh [14], who identified operational processes, internal audits, and continuous improvement as the areas with the most significant implementation gaps. The pattern suggests that while

institutions excel at establishing the foundational elements of their management systems, they struggle with the operational execution and feedback loops necessary for genuine continuous improvement.

Support and documented information ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.65$) and planning ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.69$) fell in the effective range, indicating that institutions have established reasonable documentation frameworks and risk-based planning processes. However, as Umam and Rahman [15] cautioned, robust documentation does not necessarily translate into effective practice, and the risk of a paper QMS remains a concern.

B. Challenges in Sustaining the EOMS

The study identified several challenges in sustaining ISO 21001:2018-based management systems. The most prominent was resistance to change among faculty and staff ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.72$), followed by insufficient resources for continuous improvement ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.75$), and limited understanding of standard requirements among non-quality personnel ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.80$). These findings are consistent with the obstacles catalogued in existing literature, where resistance to change in higher education institutions has been noted as stronger than in other organizations due to the presence of highly educated personnel who may resist external critique of their work practices [8], [9].

Additionally, the time constraints faced by academic staff already burdened with teaching, research, and administrative duties were identified as a significant barrier ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.78$). This aligns with observations that university staff are frequently overloaded, making the assignment of quality management responsibilities to already-busy personnel a persistent challenge [8]. The study also found that audit findings rarely translated into actionable improvements ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.81$), corroborating the paper QMS phenomenon described by Umam and Rahman [15], where documentation and audit processes exist but do not consistently produce measurable quality gains.

C. Transition Readiness Toward ISO 21001:2025

Transition readiness was assessed across four dimensions: awareness of ISO 21001:2025 changes, gap analysis status, resource allocation for transition, and planned transition activities. Overall transition readiness was rated as slightly ready ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 0.63$), indicating that most institutions have not yet begun formal transition planning.

Awareness of the 2025 changes was the highest-rated dimension ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 0.70$), with most respondents acknowledging awareness of the standard's publication. However, detailed knowledge of specific changes, such as the integration of climate change considerations, new assessment terminology, and digital learning governance provisions, was limited. Gap analysis status was rated lowest ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 0.68$), indicating that very few institutions had conducted formal clause-by-clause comparisons between their current EOMS and the 2025 requirements.

Resource allocation for transition ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 0.72$) and planned transition activities ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.65$) also scored

in the slightly ready to moderately ready range. While some institutions indicated intention to begin transition planning, most had not allocated dedicated budgets, formed transition teams, or scheduled transition audits. This is concerning given that the transition deadline of July 2028 [7] allows approximately three years, and certification bodies recommend completing transition audits at least six months before the deadline to avoid capacity constraints.

D. Proposed Transition Framework

Based on the findings, this study proposes a six-phase transition framework to guide ISO 21001:2018-certified universities in Luzon toward ISO 21001:2025 compliance:

Phase 1: Awareness and Leadership Engagement. Institutional leadership should be briefed on the key changes in ISO 21001:2025 and the transition deadline. A transition steering committee should be formed, comprising the management representative, quality assurance director, and key academic leaders.

Phase 2: Gap Analysis. A comprehensive clause-by-clause comparison between the current EOMS and ISO 21001:2025 requirements should be conducted. Priority areas should include the new assessment-related provisions, climate change integration, digital learning governance, and learner well-being requirements [5], [6].

Phase 3: Documentation Update. EOMS manuals, procedures, and records should be revised to reflect the 2025 requirements. New procedures should be developed for digital learning tool governance, sustainability competence development, and strengthened learner voice mechanisms [7].

Phase 4: Training and Capacity Building. Internal auditors should receive ISO 21001:2025 transition training, and awareness sessions should be conducted for all staff. Competence matrices and periodic skill assessments should be established, as recommended by Umam and Rahman [15].

Phase 5: Implementation and Internal Audit. The updated EOMS should be implemented operationally, not merely documented. Internal audits should verify conformance to the 2025 edition and identify remaining gaps. Corrective action registers with clear responsibilities, deadlines, and outcome indicators should be maintained.

Phase 6: Transition Audit. Institutions should schedule transition audits with their certification body, preferably combined with surveillance audits to minimize cost and disruption. Transition should be completed well before the July 2028 deadline to avoid end-of-window capacity constraints [7].

5. Conclusion

This study assessed the effectiveness of ISO 21001:2018 implementation among selected universities in Luzon and their readiness to transition to ISO 21001:2025. The findings reveal that while foundational elements of the EOMS, such as organizational context and leadership, are implemented effectively, operational processes, performance evaluation, and continuous improvement remain areas requiring significant strengthening. The persistent challenge of audit findings not translating into actionable improvements reflects a broader

issue of documentation-oriented compliance rather than genuine quality culture.

Transition readiness toward ISO 21001:2025 was found to be preliminary at best, with most institutions lacking formal gap analyses and dedicated transition resources. Given the July 2028 deadline, institutions must act promptly to begin transition planning. The proposed six-phase framework provides a structured approach, emphasizing early gap assessment, leadership engagement, and the operationalization of new requirements related to sustainability, digital learning, and learner well-being.

Future research should track the progress of transition implementation over time and examine the relationship between transition readiness and institutional characteristics such as size, type, and maturity of the quality management system. Comparative studies across different regions of the Philippines would also provide valuable insights into the systemic factors influencing EOMS effectiveness and transition success.

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