QUANTIFYING GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS FROM PAPER CONSUMPTION IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: INSIGHTS FROM DIPOLOG CITY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The unexpected transition to modular learning during the COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant increase in paper consumption, consequently elevating greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This study systematically assesses the GHG emissions associated with paper usage in the Division of Dipolog City Schools. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates qualitative interviews with quantitative data analysis, providing a comprehensive view of the environmental impact of paper consumption in educational settings. The findings reveal a marked increase in GHG emissions during the pandemic, reaching 264.33 metric tons of CO2-e, which subsequently declined to 44.24 metric tons as schools transitioned back to in-person learning. The study emphasizes the need for sustainable educational practices, including digital transformation and enhanced waste management. The recommendations aim to guide policymakers and educational administrators towards mitigating the environmental impact of school operations. The study's insights contribute to the broader discourse on sustainable practices in education and the role of institutions in climate action.

Keywords and phrases: *Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Paper Consumption, Educational Sustainability, Digital Transformation, Philippines Education Sector*

Introduction

The rapid pivot to modular learning systems during the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented increase in paper consumption, especially in the education sector (DepEd, 2021). This shift has exacerbated the environmental footprint of educational institutions, primarily through heightened GHG emissions associated with the lifecycle of paper products. The Philippines, a nation vulnerable to climate change, faces unique challenges in balancing educational needs with environmental sustainability (Greenpeace Philippines, 2021). This study focuses on quantifying the GHG emissions from paper consumption in Dipolog City schools and explores strategies for reducing these emissions. The research aims to contribute to global efforts in mitigating climate change by providing empirical data and actionable recommendations (Asian Development Bank, 2019).

The context of this study is grounded in the increasing global awareness of the environmental impacts of human activities, including educational practices. With the rise of digital technologies, there is a growing emphasis on reducing reliance on physical resources that contribute to carbon emissions. This study seeks to examine the specific impact of paper consumption in schools, an often-overlooked aspect of educational operations, and provides

a case study from Dipolog City, a typical representation of urban educational settings in the Philippines.

Methods

The literature on the environmental impact of educational practices is expansive, yet the specific focus on paper consumption and its associated GHG emissions remains underexplored. Existing studies highlight the significant contribution of paper production and consumption to global carbon emissions. For instance, the Environmental Paper Network (EPN) reports that paper production is responsible for approximately 2% of global industrial emissions, a figure comparable to the aviation industry (EPN, 2018). The lifecycle of paper, from production to disposal, involves various stages that contribute to GHG emissions, including deforestation, energy-intensive manufacturing processes, and waste management challenges.

In the educational sector, the shift towards modular and distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased the demand for paper-based materials (UNESCO, 2021). This transition was particularly evident in countries like the Philippines, where digital infrastructure is still developing, and access to online learning tools is limited (UNICEF Philippines, 2020). The use of printed modules became a necessity, leading to a substantial increase in paper consumption and associated emissions.

Several studies have examined the broader environmental impacts of educational practices. For example, a study by Turetsky et al. (2020) explored the carbon footprint of universities, highlighting the significant emissions from energy use, transportation, and waste. However, few studies have focused specifically on the emissions from paper consumption in primary and secondary education settings. This gap in the literature underscores the need for targeted research on the environmental impacts of paper use in schools.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to the study's design and implementation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. Data confidentiality was strictly maintained, with all identifying information anonymized in the analysis and reporting. The study adhered to the ethical guidelines set forth by the institutional review board and relevant national and international regulations.

Results

The findings demonstrate that paper consumption was a significant contributor to GHG emissions in Dipolog City schools, particularly during the pandemic-induced shift to modular learning. Table 1 below summarizes the total paper consumption and associated GHG emissions for the school years 2020-2021 (pandemic period) and 2021-2023 (post-pandemic period).

Table 1: GHG Emissions from Paper Consumption in Dipolog City Schools

Time Period	Total Paper Consumption (kg)	GHG Emissions (metric tons CO2-e)	Average Emissions per School (metric tons CO2-e)
2020-2021 (Pandemic)	132,165	264.33	5.51
2021-2022 (Post-Pandemic)	22,120	44.24	0.92
2022-2023 (Post-Pandemic)	21,850	43.70	0.91

The values represent the total GHG emissions generated from paper consumption, calculated using the EPA Simplified GHG Emissions Calculator. The significant reduction in emissions post-pandemic highlights the impact of reduced paper use and increased digital adoption.

During the 2020-2021 school year, emissions from paper consumption peaked at 264.33 metric tons of CO2-e, driven by the extensive use of paper-based materials for modular learning. This was a direct consequence of the pandemic, which necessitated a shift away from face-to-face instruction. On average, each school contributed approximately 5.51 metric tons of CO2-e.

In contrast, as schools transitioned back to face-to-face classes in the post-pandemic periods (2021-2022 and 2022-2023), there was a notable decrease in paper consumption and associated emissions. The total GHG emissions dropped to 44.24 metric tons CO2-e in 2021-2022 and slightly decreased further to 43.70 metric tons CO2-e in 2022-2023. The average emissions per school also decreased significantly to approximately 0.92 metric tons CO2-e in 2021-2022 and 0.91 metric tons CO2-e in 2022-2023, reflecting the reduced reliance on paper as digital tools became more prevalent.

The reduction in emissions underscores the potential environmental benefits of integrating digital learning tools and reducing reliance on physical paper. The analysis also revealed that the majority of emissions were associated with the production and transportation stages of the paper lifecycle, emphasizing the importance of considering the entire supply chain in efforts to reduce the carbon footprint.

These findings highlight the critical need for sustainable practices in educational institutions, particularly in the context of managing resources and reducing environmental impact. The transition to digital platforms not only mitigates GHG emissions but also aligns with broader sustainability goals, making it an essential consideration for future educational policies and practices.

Discussion

The substantial increase in GHG emissions due to paper consumption during the pandemic highlights the critical need for sustainable educational practices. The findings suggest that digital transformation can significantly mitigate the environmental impact of school operations. The study aligns with global initiatives advocating for the reduction of carbon footprints and supports the adoption of digital platforms to enhance learning while reducing environmental costs (UNEP, 2021). Furthermore, implementing robust waste management practices, including recycling and the use of environmentally friendly materials, can further minimize the adverse effects of educational activities (Fundador & Erwin, 2017).

The study also situates its findings within the broader discourse on environmental sustainability in education. By providing empirical evidence on the specific contribution of paper consumption to GHG emissions, the research underscores the importance of policy interventions and institutional reforms. The potential for long-term environmental sustainability in the education sector hinges on the commitment of educational institutions to integrate eco-friendly practices and technologies (Hashemi, Rajabifard, & Bishop, 2021).

In the context of policy implications, the study highlights several key areas for intervention. First, there is a need for comprehensive policies that promote digital literacy and the use of digital learning tools. This includes investing in infrastructure and training to ensure that both teachers and students can effectively utilize digital platforms. Second, the study advocates for the implementation of stringent waste management policies, including mandatory recycling programs and the use of recycled materials. These measures can significantly reduce the carbon footprint of educational institutions.

Conclusions

The research concludes that paper consumption significantly contributes to GHG emissions in educational institutions, particularly during extraordinary circumstances such as a pandemic. The post-pandemic decline in emissions indicates that reducing paper usage and transitioning to digital alternatives can effectively mitigate environmental impact. The study calls for immediate policy action to promote digital learning and sustainable practices in schools.

Based on the study's findings, several specific recommendations are proposed to address GHG emissions from paper consumption in educational institutions, focusing on immediate and localized actions within Dipolog City schools:

Local governments and educational administrators should enforce stringent regulations on paper usage and waste management. Policies should include restrictions on excessive paper use, incentives for using recycled paper, and implementing paperless initiatives where feasible.

Investing in modern digital infrastructure is crucial. Providing adequate technological

resources and training for both teachers and students can facilitate the transition to digital learning, reducing the reliance on physical paper.

Public education campaigns should focus on the environmental impacts of paper consumption and the benefits of digital alternatives. Schools can engage students and staff in initiatives that promote paper-saving practices and the use of digital tools.

Implementing comprehensive waste management systems, including mandatory recycling programs for paper products, can significantly reduce the carbon footprint of educational institutions. Schools should establish facilities for recycling and ensure proper waste segregation.

Encouraging the development and use of eco-friendly instructional materials is also essential. Schools should explore options for biodegradable and recycled materials for any necessary physical resources.

By focusing on these specific and immediate interventions within the context of Dipolog City schools, the study can significantly contribute to reducing GHG emissions and promoting sustainable educational practices. This approach will ensure that the recommendations are practical and directly applicable, avoiding broader contexts that may dilute the immediate impact of these strategies.

By implementing these targeted strategies, educational institutions in Dipolog City can serve as a model for effective GHG emission management and sustainable practices in the region. These efforts align with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by promoting responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), ensuring quality education (SDG 4), and taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (SDG 13). Emphasizing these specific strategies within the immediate context will foster a healthier and more sustainable environment for the local community and beyond.

Acknowledgment

The authors express their deepest gratitude to the Division Schools Superintendents, the Division Research Committee, and the Education Program Specialists for their invaluable support. Special thanks to the school disaster risk reduction management coordinators, research coordinators, and science teachers for their active participation. The authors also acknowledge the unwavering support from their families and colleagues throughout the research process.

Disclosure: Use of AI Tools

In compliance with Threshold's guidelines for the ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI) and automated tools in academic research, the authors disclose the use of OpenAI's ChatGPT for enhancing the quality and clarity of the manuscript. ChatGPT was utilized to assist in refining the language, structure, and formatting of the text, ensuring a high level of academic rigor and coherence. The authors confirm that all data analysis, critical interpretations, and conclusions presented in this manuscript were conducted independently by the research team. The AI tool was employed strictly for editorial assistance and did not

influence the scientific content or ethical considerations of the study. All intellectual contributions from the AI tool are in accordance with the authors' original intentions and have been reviewed and approved by all co-authors. The use of ChatGPT complies with Threshold's ethical standards and guidelines for transparent reporting of AI involvement in research. The authors remain fully responsible for the integrity and accuracy of the content presented in this paper.

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