Lived Experiences of School Heads in the Change and Reforms in The Educational Landscape: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

School leaders face increasing challenges in adapting to rapid educational reforms, requiring resilience, strategic planning, and stakeholder collaboration. This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of fourteen public school heads, selected through purposive sampling, to understand how they navigate these changes. Through in-depth interviews and focus groups, findings reveal that school heads encounter teacher resistance, funding constraints, and technological adaptation but respond by employing mentorship programs, policy advocacy, and community engagement. Using thematic analysis, the study identifies patterns of adaptive leadership, reinforcing concepts from adaptive theory. School heads perceive these challenges as opportunities for growth, enhancing their leadership styles to become more flexible and proactive. The study recommends further research on evaluating school heads' competencies in managing educational change, particularly in decision-making, resource allocation, and teacher development.

Keywords: Lived Experiences, School Leadership, Educational Reforms, Adaptive Leadership, Phenomenological Study

INTRODUCTION

The evolving educational landscape is marked by continuous changes and reforms to improve teaching and learning outcomes. Many school heads struggle with this educational landscape, as some find it challenging to shift from traditional methods to innovative teaching approaches aligned with reform policies (Konakli, 2022). School heads often face significant challenges in implementing these reforms and changes effectively.

Pennsylvania faces troubling challenges in curriculum and instructional gaps, mainly due to the need for standardized and updated curricula that align with modern educational demands. While their school leaders invest in assessment tools to continuously evaluate and refine educational reforms, they still struggle with issues like curriculum modernization in enhancing curriculum alignment with future-ready skills and competency-based learning. School heads play a crucial role in implementing these reforms, yet they often encounter challenges impacting their leadership experiences and practices (Smith & Jones, 2023).

Meanwhile, the problem perpetuated in the Philippines is that school heads face challenges in the education system, particularly significant reforms, including implementing the K to 12 curriculum and learning continuity plans in response to crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. While these reforms aim to enhance educational quality, school heads face multiple challenges in their implementation, such as insufficient resources, curriculum alignment, and resistance to change (Bautista et al., 2023).

Additionally, school leaders are facing the ever-changing landscape of education and need education reform, especially during the implementation of the new curriculum, which is the MATATAG program. School heads are struggling with the preparation for education reform and assessment and implementation monitoring, as well as a lack of proper preparation and readiness since the abrupt changes in the curriculum may leave schools, teachers, and learners unprepared. Moreover, school heads struggling to measure the new curriculum's effectiveness require reliable assessment tools, but standardized tests may not yet be aligned with the revised

competencies. The curriculum sets a new direction for the agency and stakeholders in resolving basic education challenges (Manila Bulletin, 2023).

It cannot be denied that school leaders are tested in times of uncertainty based on the unprecedented magnitude of adaptive challenges brought by educational change and reform for school systems throughout the state of the educational system. This gap underscores the importance of school leaders who play a significant role in education reform and change as they work to close the academic achievement gap in education. Likewise, as a researcher, I feel the urgent reason to establish a study highlighting the lived experiences of school heads as adaptive leaders who continuously experience challenges and just need to find ways to cope with change and reforms in the educational landscape, as these will inspire present andfuture school heads.
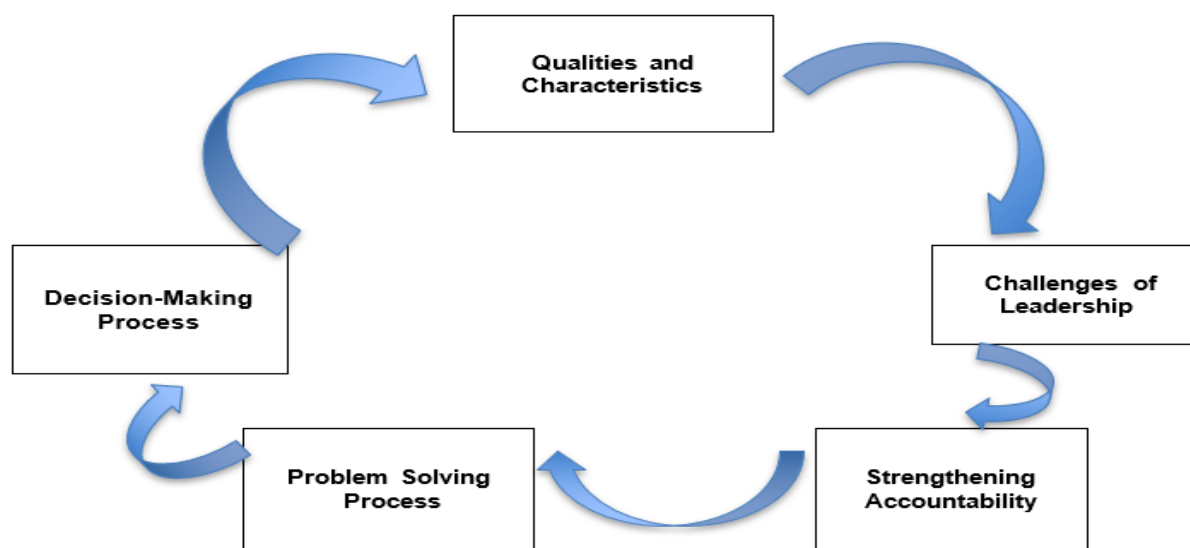

Figure 1: Conceptual Paradigm of the Study

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides information about the research methods that the researcher used to attain the objectives of the study. This includes the research design, participants and sampling, research instrument, ethical considerations, role of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, and the trustworthiness of the study.

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design using a phenomenological study approach. Descriptive phenomenology describes the public-school heads' lived experiences, perceptions, and insights as adaptive leaders in the change and reforms of the educational landscape. The in-depth understanding in qualitative research occurs through listening, interpreting, and retelling participants' accounts in a meaningful manner (Glesne, 2019), along with using and triangulating multiple data sources, prolonged stay in the field, and performing various types of verification, which will be discussed later.

In this study, the participants recounted their experiences with the change in the educational landscape. Since these participants were the direct recipients of such educational change, offering them a meaningful face-to-face interview to describe their perceptions allowed the researcher to retell the participants' stories through a shared experience of meaning-making. As such, a single case study is a qualitative research method that is used to explore how a single leader or organization navigates complex challenges, demonstrating flexibility, resilience, and responsiveness in changing environments. It allows the researcher to deeply analyze real-world leadership behaviors, decision-making processes, and contextual influences that shape adaptive leadership.

In addition, this method is the most appropriate since I am looking into understanding the phenomenon of adaptive leadership of school heads in the change and reforms of the educational landscape. As a researcher, I wanted to find out and describe the lived experiences of school heads in the change in the educational landscape. Also, I wanted to discover their coping mechanisms and gain insights as they experienced these. Guided by this design, I hope to discover the experiences of the school heads in the change of educational landscape through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The effect and impact of these experiences on their professional and personal lives were disclosed in this study.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in the four public school districts in Davao City, under the municipality of Davao del Sur, Region XI. The four districts are among the city's big schools, where the school heads experience change and reforms in the educational landscape. The first district has a total population of 2,021, the second district has a population of 1,894, the third district has a population of 1,901, and the fourth district has a population of 1,767.

Sample and Sampling

The participants of this study were fourteen (14) purposively chosen individuals from Davao City. Seven of those fourteen underwent an in-depth interview (IDI), and another seven participated in a focus group discussion (FGD) to gather detailed information and ensure the accuracy and validity of responses. They are public school heads in Davao City from different districts who have experience handling a school.

Moreover, in this study, the participants' interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached, meaning no new themes, patterns, or insights emerged from additional interviews. Saturation was assessed through thematic analysis, where data were continuously reviewed after each interview. Based on this, data collection was concluded from 14 participants, as saturation had been achieved.

The researcher utilized purposive sampling to choose participants for the study. This sampling procedure is purposely intended for the individuals qualified to participate in the study based on their qualifications. According to McCombes (2019), purposive sampling involves the researcher using their expertise to select the most helpful sample for the research.

Interview Guide Questions

The instrument that I used in this study is an interview guide based on the context of the research objectives. According to Creswell (1998), an interview guide lists the high-level themes and questions that the researcher wishes to address throughout the interview. The interview guide underwent a series of validations through the selected internal and external validators and the Holy Cross of Davao College's Research and Ethics Committee (REC). The first validator gave 86.6 percent, the second 90 percent, the third 80 percent, and the last 90 percent, with an average validation rating of 86.65 percent.

A semi-structured interview guide question, as discussed by Galleta (2019), is a set of questions out of the main research questions the researcher is focusing on to generate data. The questions that I asked gave a general idea of the study. There were also probing questions that I prepared to add to the concept of the questions for the participants. Probing questions clarified the questions, especially when the participants were misled in getting the point of the questions. I considered the questions in the semi-structured interview guide to be open-ended questions that would provoke discussion with the participants. These questions are not only answerable by affirming or debunking but there were also a series of clarifications of the concepts or ideas mentioned in the answer.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data-gathering process for this study adhered to a systematic approach aimed at ensuring research reliability and ethical integrity. This study was conducted within the Division of Davao City. The study's participants were public school heads. Prior to the actual data gathering, the researcher procured a Research

Ethics Committee (REC) Certificate, signifying that the study has undergone ethical screening and has passed the standards set by HCDC. In addition, I secured consent from the dean before conducting a qualitative data-gathering procedure. The following steps and procedures were used to gather the data for the study.

First, I underwent content validation as experts validated the constructed questionnaires. Second, after the validation process, I submitted the research protocol packages to the Holy Cross of Davao College's Research and Ethics Committee (REC) to check the ethical considerations of the research undertakings. Third, after the approval, a written permit was given to the different concerned offices and to the participants. I then requested permission from the office of the Schools Division Superintendent of the Division of Davao City to conduct a study on the seven public school heads of the chosen school districts of the Division. The approved letter of endorsement must be accommodated to conduct the in-depth interview and focus group discussion with the study participants. Fourth, upon the approval of the letter, it was forwarded to the public-school supervisors with the consent letter of the participants. Fifth, after selecting research participants, I conducted an individual virtual orientation to the study participants regarding the information found in the informed consent before the actual data collection. Sixth, after the participants confirmed their voluntary participation in the study, I allocated and made a scheduled date for the agreed conduct of the virtual focus group discussion and in-depth interview in consensus to the participant's availability.

As the researcher, I personally conducted the interview, and another teacher conducted the focus group discussion for triangulation purposes. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews and virtual platforms were conducted using a prepared interview guide. Boyce and Neale (2019) defined in-depth interviewing as a qualitative research technique involving intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation.

Thus, I utilized a semi-structured interview guide to gather data from the participants during the interview. Participants were encouraged to talk freely and tell stories in their own words. Each interview lasted from 30 - 45 minutes. The focus was the participants' points of view and perspectives with regard to the challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights they experienced in the change of the educational landscape. I used an audio-recording manner on a virtual platform such as Google Meet, of course, with permission from the interviewees. Finally, I decoded the responses of the participants according to their general themes. The results were presented, interpreted, and analyzed in the succeeding chapters.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic coding, revealing patterns in leadership adaptation and stakeholder engagement. I used a single-case approach to go through the responses, which gave me the opportunity to analyze the data gathered and draw insights. This study used a qualitative phenomenological study approach, as described by Yin (2019), to gain an in-depth understanding of leadership adaptability in a specific school setting. A single case study is appropriate when the research focuses on a unique or exemplary case that provides insights into broader theoretical concepts. Then, I used the transcribed interviews for data analysis to attain the research objectives. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) defined qualitative data analysis as working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others.

I read the transcriptions several times. After reading, I noted the statements that the participants have repeatedly stated. I compared the statements every time I read the transcript to familiarize myself with the participants' responses. This stage guided me in exploring the participants' thoughts, feelings, ideas, concepts, worries, and sentiments. I then analyzed the significant statements, words, and phrases to define the participants' experiences. I extracted and coded these statements, words, and phrases related to the problem under study. The purpose of this coding is to focus and emphasize important aspects related to the study's objectives.

Afterward, I arranged and coded the interview statements into themes. This preliminary analysis led me to immerse myself in the data and develop a sense of the text's flavor and functions. After I coded the data, I examined the structure of the documents' texts. Then, I collected and examined all statements with a specific

code. This collection of statements allowed me to map out the authenticity and validity of the text established on each major topic.

Then, the data were analyzed and interpreted. In this step, I was very much aware that any preconceptions could possibly affect the credibility of the study. Thus, I carefully and thoroughly review the statements of the participants. I also discussed the transcripts with my adviser in order to regulate such possibilities. In such a manner, preconceptions are minimized.

Finally, I sequenced the participants' critical periods of life, which allowed me to understand the phenomenon of public-school heads in the change of educational landscape with a sense of beginning, middle, and end. In analyzing their critical lived experiences, the beginning, middle, and end periods began to take shape into broad plots depicting the participants' shared experiences. The three plots then covered the participants' journey, depicting the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms they experienced as school heads.
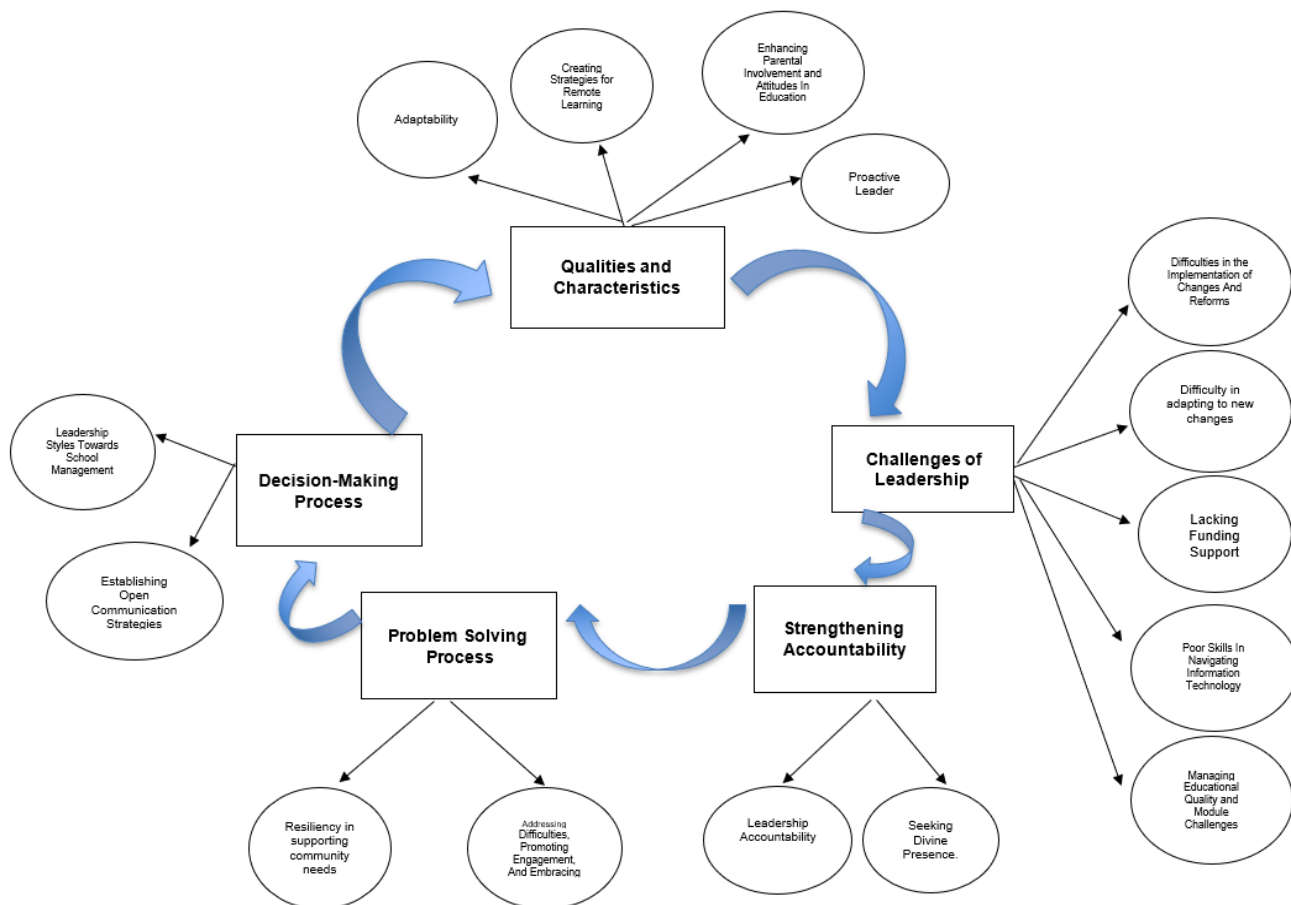
RESULTS

Figure 2. The Paradigm of the Study

The narratives of school heads in the change and reforms of the educational landscape involve examining the qualities and characteristics of school heads who manage a school. Likewise, adopted leaders quickly adopt these qualities through the lens of theory in leadership. It possesses the following qualities and characteristics such as conducting collaborative strategies for effective school management, establishing open communication strategies, and adapting by leveraging current resources (Ganon-Shilon, Schechter, & Qadach, 2021). Thus, adaptive work requires determining what currently requires change while rethinking how organizations will adapt and thrive in a new environment.

Adaptability. Adapting to new school culture, leadership challenges, communication, and educational norms. As educational institutions evolve, school heads face the ongoing challenge of adapting to new school cultures, leadership expectations, communication methods, and educational norms. The role of a school head today is

more complex than ever, as it requires managing day-to-day operations and leading transformations that reflect changes in society, technology, and pedagogy.

Enhancing Parental Involvement and Attitudes in Education. Parental involvement is a cornerstone of a student's academic success. School heads play a pivotal role in fostering this engagement, especially when adapting to new educational challenges, such as remote learning or shifting societal expectations. This narrative examines the strategies and experiences of school heads in enhancing parental involvement and shaping positive attitudes toward education.

Proactive Leader. Proactive leaders are forward-thinking and solution-oriented. They do not wait for problems to arise but instead anticipate potential obstacles and take measures to address them in advance. By fostering a culture of resilience, collaboration, and progress, they contribute significantly to the overall improvement of the education system and the success of future generations.

Challenges of Leadership

The narratives of school heads in the change and reforms of the educational landscape involve examining the challenges of the leadership of school heads who manage a school. Thus, adopted leaders quickly adopt these qualities through the lens of theory in leadership. It possesses the following qualities and characteristics such as conducting collaborative strategies for effective school management, establishing open communication strategies, and adapting leveraging on current resources. Thus, adaptive work requires determining what currently requires change while rethinking how organizations will adapt and thrive in a new environment.

Implementation Challenges. The narratives of school heads in the change and reforms of the educational landscape involve examining the experiences and challenges individuals face, particularly as school heads who manage a school. School leaders quickly shifted their teams to adapt to the urgency. They faced intense pressure to transition swiftly to make on-the-spot decisions to execute central directives and keep their schools operating. Thus, adaptive work requires determining what currently requires change while rethinking how organizations will adapt and thrive in a new environment.

Difficulties in the Implementation of Changes and Reforms. School heads play a crucial role in guiding their institutions through changes and reforms in education. Indeed, implementing changes and reforms in educational settings is a multifaceted challenge that school heads face regularly. While school leaders are tasked with driving innovation and improvement, they often encounter significant resistance and difficulties, particularly from teachers. Understanding these difficulties is essential for developing strategies to support school leaders and improve outcomes for both staff and students.

Difficulty in Adapting to New Changes. School heads often face significant challenges when adapting to new institutional changes. They reflect on how navigating challenges has led to personal and professional growth. They often develop resilience and adaptability as they face and overcome challenges. However, successful leaders often seek to negotiate compromises that accommodate teachers' concerns while still advancing necessary changes. They experienced challenges in the implementation of change and resolving teacher complaints.

Lacking Funding Support. School Heads who experience the change and reforms of the educational landscape often find themselves in a position where financial decision-making unintentionally impacts marginalized student groups. In the education landscape, funding is critical to successful reforms and changes. Many educational reforms require ongoing financial commitment to sustain their impact. When insufficient funding, innovative programs may be short-lived, leading to a lack of continuity in educational practices. This inconsistency can hinder the overall effectiveness of reforms and create instability within the school community.

Poor Skills in Navigating Information Technology. As educational systems evolve to incorporate more technology, school heads are at the forefront of integrating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into teaching and learning. However, implementing these reforms is not without its challenges, and school

heads may also encounter obstacles.

Managing Educational Quality and Module Challenges. As in-person classes became infeasible, school heads had to oversee the creation of printed learning modules, which became a crucial mode of instruction, especially in areas with limited internet access. The shift to modular learning required school heads to collaborate closely with teachers and curriculum specialists to develop clear, engaging materials that aligned with learning objectives. School heads, as the leaders within educational systems, played a critical role in ensuring continuity and quality of education amidst a landscape of uncertainty.

The narratives of school heads in the change and reforms of the educational landscape involve strengthening accountability in leadership, which emphasizes the educational leadership style and mechanism. It also explores the accountability of being a leader, especially in the educational system. Thus, it leads school leaders to examine the need for a better decision in strengthening the accountability of leadership in the school organization and educational system in the assessment of real-time response to learning.

Leadership Accountability. Effective leaders are tasked with setting high standards, achieving goals, and providing the emotional and practical support that makes those goals attainable. This dual obligation has always been challenging, but recent years have heightened the pressures on school leaders to balance accountability with empathy. One of the most significant challenges faced by school heads during periods of reform is the need to balance comfort and accountability.

Seeking Divine Presence. The experiences of school heads in seeking divine guidance and cultivating heart-centered education are particularly relevant in the context of educational reforms. These leaders often turn to spiritual practices or values to provide a moral and ethical framework for managing the challenges that come with change. In the face of educational reforms, especially those that require difficult transitions or transformations in how learning is delivered, many school heads rely on their faith for guidance. This often manifests in moments of reflection, prayer, or seeking wisdom from religious or spiritual practices. The narratives of school heads in the change and reforms of the educational landscape involve problem-solving in leadership. Problem-solving process in leadership attempts to influence the belief in the causes and nature of the problem and how to solve the issues in the process of leadership. School heads impose alternative solutions to problems and generate problem-solving procedures considering the ideal solution for educational enhancement.

Resiliency In Supporting School Community Needs. The role of school heads in fostering resiliency and supporting their school community's needs is vital, particularly during times of crisis or change. These leaders demonstrate adaptive, forward-thinking. A participant shared in their narratives in IDI interviews that leadership and a commitment to the well-being of both students and staff. Their experiences often highlight how essential it is to balance academic leadership with emotional and community support to ensure that schools remain resilient in the face of challenges.

Addressing Difficulties, Promoting Engagement, and Embracing Change. School heads face a wide range of challenges in addressing difficulties, promoting engagement, and embracing change. Their experiences often involve managing both the technical aspects of education, such as curricula and resources, and the adaptive challenges that require deep reflection and continuous adjustment.

The narratives of school heads in the change and reforms of the educational landscape involve the decision-making process of a school leader. The decision-making process in leadership provides ethical leadership performance, especially in the educational setting and system mechanism. It enhances the performance of the educational leaders and behavior in the school. It provides decision making attitude and knowledge in the contribution of the performance of educational leadership systems and setting mechanisms.

Leadership Styles Towards School Managements. School heads play a crucial role in shaping schools' management, including addressing students' needs in special education. Their leadership styles directly influence the success of inclusive programs, teacher morale, and overall school effectiveness.

Establishing Open Communication Strategies. The evolving educational landscape presents both opportunities and challenges for school heads. Their critical responsibility is establishing open communication strategies to ensure effective implementation and sustained success. This narrative explores the experiences of school heads in fostering transparent, inclusive, and productive communication channels amidst educational reforms.

Elaboration of the Themes and Sub-Themes

In this chapter, I discussed the emerging sub-themes of the themes stated in the theory that this study is anchored. I based my discussions on the stories revealed to me by my study participants, my personal impressions and views related to their stories, and the relevant reading I encountered, which I used to support the stories and my viewpoints in order to come up with strong assertions. I organized my discussions from the qualities and characteristics of the school heads, how this led to the challenges of their leadership resulting to the strengthening of their accountability. From this area, I proceeded to the experiences of my study participants on how their accountabilities strengths helped them able to solved problems in their field. Lastly, I discussed the decision-making pricess that my study participants underwent. This entire cycle goes back to the qualities and characteristics I have seen and heard from my study participants.

Qualities and Characteristics

Under the qualities and characteristics theme, I found four sub-themes emerging. These sub-themes are adaptability, creating strategies for remote learning, enhancing parental involvement and attitudes, and proactive leader.

On Adaptability. As a researcher exploring the complex landscape of school leadership, I recognize that the ability to adapt is one of the most critical qualities a school leader must possess. Through my observations and analysis, I have found that adaptability allows school heads to respond effectively to the ever-changing educational environment. Schools face a multitude of challenges, from shifting policies to unforeseen crises, and it is in these moments that a leader's flexibility becomes paramount. Eze (2024) argued that school leaders who adjust their leadership styles based on emerging needs create a more supportive and productive learning environment. From my experience, I have seen how adaptable leaders foster resilience among teachers and students, ensuring that learning continues despite challenges.

On Creating Strategies for Remote Learning. Effective school heads must proactively develop strategies to improve school management and student learning outcomes. Goldring (2023) emphasizes that a well-defined vision and clear goals are essential in driving school improvement. I have witnessed firsthand how leaders who engage in thoughtful planning can mitigate the adverse effects of educational challenges, ensuring that both students and teachers have a structured path to success. By crafting and implementing well-defined strategies, leaders can navigate complex educational challenges and drive school improvement.

On Enhancing Parental involvement and Attitudes. This is another factor that I have found to significantly impact a school's ability to overcome obstacles. In my interactions with educators and parents, I have observed that when school leaders actively encourage parental engagement, students benefit greatly. Yulianti et al. (2020) asserted that fostering a strong home-school partnership is essential for improving student performance. I have seen this in practice when parents feel welcomed and valued, they are more likely to support their children's education, creating a collaborative school community where students thrive.

On Proactive Leader. Finally, I have realized the crucial role of proactive leadership in addressing challenges before they escalate. As someone deeply engaged in the field of education, I have come to understand that leaders who anticipate and prepare for potential issues maintain a more stable and resilient institution. Reyes (2024) highlights the importance of strategic vigilance, transparent communication, and ethical decision-making in sustaining school operations during uncertain times. My own reflections on leadership reinforce this idea school heads who take a proactive approach can navigate crises more effectively, ensuring continuity in education and fostering a culture of preparedness.

Through my exploration of these leadership qualities, I have come to the conclusion that adaptability, creating strategies, parental involvement, and proactive leadership are fundamental to addressing the challenges faced in education. These insights, supported by research, align with my own experiences and observations, reinforcing the idea that effective school leadership is an ongoing process of learning, adjustment, and engagement.

Challenges of Leadership

Under the challenges of leadership theme, I found five sub-themes emerging. These sub-themes are difficulties in the implementation of changes and reforms, difficulty in adapting to new changes, lacking funding support, poor skills in navigating information technology and managing educational quality and module challenges.

On Difficulties in Implementing Changes and Reforms. Implementing changes and reforms in educational institutions is often met with resistance from various stakeholders. This resistance can stem from entrenched organizational cultures and a reluctance to deviate from established practices. In my experience, even well-intentioned reforms can falter without a strategic approach that considers the institution's intellectual, structural, and cultural dimensions. The process involved observing teaching practices, gathering feedback through questionnaires and interviews, and offering professional development seminars. This comprehensive approach led to improved student satisfaction, demonstrating the importance of addressing multiple facets of change (Gandolfi & Tran, 2025).

On Difficulty in Adapting to New Changes. One significant hurdle is the deeply rooted resistance to change within educational institutions. This resistance often stems from established routines and cultural norms that are difficult to alter.

As Hinde (2020) articulated that change initiatives frequently encounter opposition because they clash with the existing culture of the institution. Reflecting on this, I recognize that as a school leader, initiating change requires not only strategic planning but also a profound understanding of the school's cultural dynamics to anticipate and mitigate resistance effectively. In my experience, I have seen how teachers who have been accustomed to a certain way of teaching struggle to accept new methodologies. Patience, persistence, and clear communication have been crucial in helping them transition.

On Lack of Funding Support. Securing sufficient funding is a persistent hurdle in the realm of educational leadership. Financial constraints can severely limit the scope of potential reforms and innovations. Reflecting on my own research, I have observed that institutions often struggle to balance the need for improvement with the reality of limited budgets. Investing in leadership development has been essential, as effective school leadership supports high-quality instruction, strategic staffing, and positive school culture. Despite tight budgets, prioritizing leadership development has led to sustained school improvements (Beaumont Enterprise, 2025).

On Poor Skills in Navigating Information Technology. The rapid evolution of information technology presents a significant challenge for educational leaders, particularly those who may lack proficiency in this area. My observations indicate that a deficit in IT skills can hinder the effective integration of technology into educational practices. These challenges led to significant delays and errors, impacting millions of students and highlighting the necessity for strong IT competencies in managing educational technologies (Politico, 2024).

On Managing Educational and Module Challenges. Designing and managing educational modules that meet diverse student needs is a complex task. In my research, I have found that creating effective curricula requires a nuanced understanding of both content and pedagogy. The process involved observing current teaching methods, providing feedback, and offering professional development seminars. This approach led to improved student satisfaction, underscoring the importance of comprehensive strategies in managing educational challenges (Gandolfi & Tran, 2025).

In conclusion, addressing these leadership challenges necessitates a comprehensive approach that includes strategic planning, professional development, and a willingness to adapt to changing circumstances. By

confronting these issues head-on, educational leaders can foster environments that are both innovative and responsive to the needs of their communities. School heads reported that teacher resistance often stemmed from a lack of training, leading them to implement mentorship programs to ease the transition

Strengthening Accountability

Under the strengthening accountability theme, I found two sub-themes emerging. These sub-themes are leadership accountability and seeking divine presence.

On Leadership Accountability. I have found that leadership accountability is crucial in fostering a school culture of trust, responsibility, and shared commitment. Leadership accountability goes beyond merely complying with policies; it requires a deep sense of ethical responsibility and a proactive stance in addressing the needs of teachers, students, and parents. According to Mausethagen et al. (2020), intelligent accountability, which emphasizes professional discretion and collaborative knowledge-building, strengthens school leadership by fostering a more transparent and trust-based environment. I have seen this firsthand when engaging teachers in discussions about curriculum reforms and governance decisions, ensuring that their voices are heard and their concerns are addressed.

Another key lesson I have learned is that accountability is not just about holding others responsible—it starts with me as the leader. I make it a point to reflect on my decisions, seek feedback from teachers and parents, and remain open to continuous improvement. The principle of intelligent accountability, as discussed by Mausethagen et al. (2020), has helped me shape a leadership approach that is adaptive, transparent, and responsive to the evolving needs of my school.

On Seeking Divine Presence. In my leadership journey, I have witnessed the power of seeking divine presence in decision-making and problem-solving. In the context of the Philippines, faith is deeply embedded in our educational and leadership practices. Many school heads, including myself, begin meetings with prayers, seeking divine guidance in navigating complex challenges. This aligns with the findings of Miller (2021), who highlights that Filipino school leaders often intertwine faith and leadership, reinforcing their accountability to both their institutions and their moral values. In my school, this practice has fostered a sense of unity and shared purpose, allowing us to work towards our goals with a deeper sense of mission.

In conclusion, my personal experiences have reinforced my belief that leadership accountability, when coupled with seeking divine presence, leads to a more effective and ethical school leadership practice. Strengthening accountability requires not just policy compliance but also moral and spiritual integrity, collaborative decision-making, and a deep commitment to the well-being of the school community. By integrating these elements, I have been able to navigate the complexities of school leadership with confidence and purpose, ensuring that education and learning continue despite the challenges we face.

Problem-Solving Process

Under the problem-solving process theme, I found two sub-themes emerging. These sub-themes are resiliency in supporting community needs, addressing difficulties, promoting engagement, and embracing change.

On Resiliency in Supporting Community Needs. In exploring the problem-solving processes of school heads, I find that their resilience in supporting community needs is paramount. These leaders exhibit unique characteristics such as resource management and optimization, hierarchical communication, and strategic delegation. These traits enable them to navigate complex stakeholder environments and foster resilience amidst bureaucratic challenges. For instance, one school head emphasized the importance of structured decision-making processes and professional support networks to cope with adversities, highlighting the critical role of resilience in educational leadership Galorio and Bauyot (2024).

On Addressing Difficulties, Promoting Engagement, and Embracing Change. Addressing difficulties and promoting engagement are also integral to effective school leadership. Richardson (2024) discussed how educational leaders can enhance student engagement and learning outcomes by fostering supportive

environments and enabling teacher collaboration. The article emphasizes that strong leaders establish high expectations, promote a positive school culture, and leverage data-driven decision-making to address diverse student needs. For example, by implementing programs that address social-emotional needs and celebrate diversity, leaders can create inclusive learning communities that motivate students and improve academic performance. This approach underscores the multifaceted role of educational leadership in motivating students and improving instructional quality.

In summary, the resilience of school heads is a cornerstone in addressing community needs and overcoming challenges within educational settings. By cultivating personal resilience and implementing strategic leadership practices, they can effectively promote engagement and foster positive outcomes for both students and the broader community.

Decision-Making Process

Under the problem-solving process theme, I found two sub-themes emerging. These sub-themes are leadership styles toward school management and establishing open communication strategies.

On Leadership Styles towards School Management. In exploring the decision-making processes of school heads, it's evident that leadership styles significantly influence school management. Reflecting on these findings, I recognize the critical role that a principal's leadership style plays in shaping the decision-making culture within a school. The research by Guillergan (2024) further emphasized this point, revealing that school heads predominantly exhibit a 'Planner' decision-making style, characterized by careful analysis and systematic planning. This approach not only enhances educational leadership but also positively influences the overall school culture, creating an environment conducive to learning and collaboration.

On Establishing Open Communication Strategies. It is integral to the decision-making processes of school heads. Establishing transparent channels of communication ensures that all stakeholders, including teachers, students, and parents, are informed and involved in the decision-making process. This collaborative approach not only enhances the quality of decisions made but also promotes a sense of community and shared responsibility within the school.

In conclusion, the interplay between leadership styles and decision-making processes is significant in effective school management. Adopting a transformational or servant leadership style, characterized by proactive engagement and a focus on serving the school community, leads to more rational and inclusive decision-making. Coupled with open communication strategies, these leadership approaches cultivate a positive school culture and drive educational success.

Future Directions

From the implications drawn, this section identifies and presents future directions for the study. Adaptive leadership theory emphasizes the importance of leaders guiding organizations through complex, changing environments by encouraging innovation and adaptability. In the context of education, this theory is particularly relevant as school heads navigate the evolving educational landscape (New Leaders Article, 2025).

Further research should develop assessment tools to evaluate school heads' competencies in strategic planning, teacher engagement, and resource allocation during educational transitions.

Emerging theoretical perspectives suggest that school heads must adopt adaptive leadership strategies in response to rapid educational changes. Recent insights highlight the importance of emotional intelligence,

distributed leadership, and community engagement in sustaining reforms. Additionally, incorporating perspectives on digital transformation and technology integration in education adds a modern dimension to understanding school heads' lived experiences. New frameworks may also consider the intersectionality of leadership challenges, including cultural, economic, and institutional factors affecting reform success (Berrocal, 2021).

Further, school heads often find themselves at the forefront of such expansions, integrating modern pedagogical theories, technological advancements, and inclusive education policies. For instance, the shift from traditional face-to-face learning to blended and online learning requires re-examining teaching methodologies, assessment strategies, and student engagement techniques. In this regard, school leaders expand their theoretical knowledge by incorporating digital literacy, student-centered learning, and differentiated instruction into their leadership approaches (Basar et al., 2021).

Through the process of implementing change and reforms, school heads gain new insights that reshape their understanding of educational leadership. One significant insight is the importance of adaptive leadership. Traditional leadership theories emphasize control and directive authority, but contemporary experiences highlight the need for flexibility, collaboration, and empathy (Day, 2020).

Another insight is the critical role of community engagement in successful reform implementation. School heads learn that policies and reforms cannot be effectively implemented without the cooperation of teachers, students, and parents. Communication, trust-building, and shared decision-making become essential components of leadership. Additionally, school heads recognize that change must be gradual and contextualized. A one-size-fits-all approach to reform often fails, as schools have unique cultures, challenges, and strengths. New theoretical insights suggest that change should be adaptive, responsive, and reflective of the specific needs of the school community (Popov, 2021).

The experiences of school heads in implementing educational change and reforms demonstrate the dynamic nature of leadership in education. Moreover, new insights gained from these experiences shape more effective and responsive leadership approaches. By balancing these elements, school heads can successfully navigate the complexities of educational reform, ultimately fostering meaningful and sustainable improvements in learning environments.

Moreover, this study expands on adaptive leadership theory by providing empirical evidence of how school heads implement change strategies in real-world settings.

Challenges

School heads play a crucial role in steering their institutions through the complexities of educational change and reforms. Their experiences, challenges, and successes provide valuable insights that can shape the future of leadership practices, policy-making, and reform implementation. To address the evolving demands of education, future research, and actions must focus on deepening understanding and providing actionable solutions to enhance their effectiveness.

Exploration of Emotional and Mental Health. The emotional and mental toll of managing change is a significant yet underexplored aspect of school leadership. Future research could investigate the emotional intelligence of school heads, their stress management strategies, and the psychological support systems they require to maintain resilience. Moreover, school leaders often experience high levels of stress, leading to adverse mental health outcomes such as burnout and depression (International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 2019).

Preparing for Future Crises. The World Health Organization (2021) established emergency preparedness plans, flexible learning systems, and rapid response teams. The strengthening rapid education response toolkit was developed to enhance emergency preparedness in educational settings. This toolkit provides comprehensive guidance on creating effective preparedness plans, emphasizing the importance of flexible learning systems and the establishment of rapid response teams to address sudden-onset emergencies in every school. It includes practical tools and checklists to assist educational institutions in developing robust strategies for crisis situations.

Advocating for Policy and Resource Support. National Association of Secondary School Principals (2021), emphasized the importance of school leaders advocating for resources and opportunities that support student social-emotional well-being. This includes behavior support practices and creating a supportive, equitable,

culturally responsive, and inclusive school culture. These initiatives underscore the vital role of school heads in engaging with government agencies and NGOs to secure funding, infrastructure, and materials necessary for enhancing educational quality and resilience. This involves strong advocacy, building relationships, and effectively communicating the school's needs and goals to external parties.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study illuminate the complex and dynamic role of school heads in navigating educational reforms. Their lived experiences highlight the resilience, adaptability, and strategic thinking required to manage challenges such as teacher resistance, financial limitations, and the evolving demands of technology. Through mentorship, policy advocacy, and community collaboration, they transform obstacles into opportunities for growth, reinforcing the principles of adaptive leadership.

This study highlights that educational change is not merely a structural or procedural shift but a deeply human process that requires empathy, patience, and a commitment to collective progress. School heads, as frontliners in implementing reforms, cultivate leadership that is both flexible and proactive grounded in reflective practice and continuous learning. Their ability to balance competing priorities while fostering an inclusive school culture speaks to the evolving nature of educational leadership in today's fast-changing landscape.

As education continues to transform, this study suggests the need for further research on school heads' competencies in decision-making, resource management, and teacher development. Understanding these dimensions more deeply will contribute to shaping policies and training programs that support school leaders in effectively managing change. Ultimately, their experiences remind us that leadership in education is not just about guiding institutions it is about empowering people and shaping the future of learning.

Moving forward, further exploration into school heads' decision-making, resource allocation, and teacher development strategies will provide valuable insights into strengthening educational leadership. By equipping school heads with the necessary tools and support, institutions can create more sustainable and inclusive approaches to managing change, ultimately enhancing the quality of education for all stakeholders.

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