PRACTICES OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN THE POLICY AND PLANNING SYSTEM

Gina D. Gumilan[1], Ronald S. Decano[2]

[1]*Graduate Student, Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Management, Davao del Norte State College*

[2]*Dean, Institute of Advanced Studies, Davao del Norte State College*

-----------------------------------**ABSTRACT**-----------------------------------
The knowledge, strategy, and skills of the school heads are the profound materials for the school's success aside from the participation of the teachers, parents, and community. This phenomenological study aimed to explore the experiences of the elementary principals in the planning and implementation of the DepEd policies in their respective schools. Data were collected from the selected principals who were more than 5 years in managing schools, acknowledged as productive and competitive in their field, and received various recognitions in managerial and leadership aspects. The analysis of data - coding, categorizing, and theming was done through Creswell Analysis. Findings revealed five (5) clustered themes: Teachers Collaboration; Community linkages; Goal Setting and Transparency; Sound Relationship Cultivation; and Teachers Empowerment. Every clustered theme expounded with emergent themes. Based on the result, it is recommended to have continuous partnership and teamwork of internal and external stakeholders in the planning process and project development; conduct continuous teachers' professional development; practice transparency; and communicate the plans. Moreover, the findings of this study would be a great tool in benchmarking the best practices in the implementation of policies and the planning process.

KEYWORDS- *policy, planning system, practices, principals*---

INTRODUCTION

Our country nowadays faces challenges more particularly in the increasing population, high demands among different sectors of the society, labor needs, the mismatch between the graduates and economic demands, lack of resources, environmental imbalances, and the scientific developments on its negative effects on human and nature. Problems such as these made our country focus more on solutions. The educational system is one of the sectors that can help develop factors that can help resolve these challenges. The current developments and the continuous complexity of the educational system have greatly affected educational planning which is an absolute necessity of the schools. The most important in the educational system is planning. This planning process becomes imperative to all school leaders as part of their managerial and leadership skills (Verma, 2020).

The attainment of the desired goals of an organization will be realized with the help of a strategic plan. Good planning and communication will result from a collaborative pursuit of stakeholders, including parents, teachers, administrators, principals, board members, and the community, to reach the goals. Effective implementation of the strategic plan results from good management of finances and resources, high-output expectation, and the consistent monitoring of all development (Ong, 2016).

Planning is an essential component of management that has a great effect on the realization of goals. It is the basis of the course to undertake, and it requires management skills (Karnataka, 2012). Moreover, it is a highly multifaceted managerial job that must be aligned to the specific condition of each school (Beach & Lindahl, 2015).

This study was taken to know the experiences of the elementary principals in implementing the policies of the Department of Education and adopted planning processes in their stations; the challenges and problems encountered, and the surviving mechanisms practiced in those challenges. These undertakings helped the researcher investigate how the elementary principals of the Panabo City Division practiced their planning skills in attaining the goals in their respective schools. Thus, according to UNESCO (2019), strong, logical policies and plans are the foundation for developing sustainable education systems in the attainment of educational development goals and effective and lifelong learning.

Related Literature

The intent of the long-term goals of an organization is the actualization of procedures and the provision of resources. These are essential for carrying out organizational goals. Salient features of good planning must be observed: 1. A forward view; 2. Establishment of targets; 3. Development of means through which the targets may be attained; and 4. Resource allocation. Cited in the study of Lockwood and Davies (1985), institutional planning in the context of higher education was defined as the unceasing and shared exercise of means in the unified process of future directions. This is also supported by another concept, which focuses on strategic planning and management: 1. A continuous process; 2. Participation and agreement; 3. The practice of judgment; 4. The utilization of different inputs to a single outcome; 5. The use of positive data; and 6. Clear outcomes and deliverables (Taylor & Miroiu, 2002).

Ineffective planning causes poor teaching and hazy preparation of a budget. Inadequate funds to procure materials needed for planning and principals' not involving the concerned staff in planning are also causes of poor planning. Government should provide periodic in-service training on planning for principals and principals should practice good communication skills (Manafa, 2019).

Effective school improvement planning does the rigid needs assessment process and provides data- based decision- making. Schools must undertake school improvement planning with a complete needs assessment to scientifically determine the most priority areas of the school. This will be initiated at the school level in the crafting, implementing, and tracking of progress. School leaders must establish laborious yet attainable to assess school improvement in student learning, demographics, school environment, and implementation fidelity. School leaders should reveal the school objectives, progress, and results to all stakeholders (Hanover Research, 2014).

Decentralization also allows school leaders to employ open communication, cooperation, and partnership with the stakeholders. The major responsibility of school leaders is mandated to develop strong networking with the collaboration of skills and resources to engage with their group, co-workers, and stakeholders (Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008).

The process of planning and evaluation aims to improve the school's need to have systematic and data-driven procedures. This is a way of determining the gaps between the current school condition and the potential for improvement. To the highest level of effectiveness, the school planning must be in dynamic procedures to engage data and people. Education experts consider the factors in the designing of school improvement planning framework. These will aid to achieve each specific development goal. The first is to set the foundation and the attainable goals to reveal the areas that need improvement and identify present challenges and causes. Second, develop an improvement culture to develop a support system in the improvement process through staff engagement in the implementation and assessment Third, act on improvement which is to respond to the progress of courses through the conduct of evaluations. This also allows administrators to react to the development and challenges and communicate these with the stakeholders with transparency (Hanover Research, 2015).

Moreover, for school improvement planning to be successful, it must involve all school partners or community. The school principal is vital and responsible in the administration. Instructional leadership is considered the ultimate skill needed for planning. Thus, the entire school community involving the principals, teachers, school councils, parents, and other community members must be involved in the process. (Cooke et al.,2002).

Theoretical Lens

This study is anchored to the theory of Bereday (1977). The theory maintains a set of decisions and preparing the decisions are elements that are evident in educational system planning. This indicates that planning involves the preparation of a set of agreed and approved decisions for execution. This theory maintains that the overall planning

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in education is a continuous and systematic process that involves the application and coordination of social research methods, principles, and techniques of education, administration, economics, and finance. It takes into consideration the participation and support of the public in education for people. The specific goals and well-structured processes are also included to allow everyone to be part and become contributors to the entire development. Bereday's theory implies that decisions should be seen as the hallmark in educational planning and educational planning must be a continuous process, systematic, and not haphazard.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research study was phenomenological because it explored the practices adopted by the school principals in the implementation of the DepEd policies and planning procedures undertaken. The approach was qualitative.

According to Creswell (2014), a qualitative research design is a process of investigating and exploring the meaning of an individual's actions and experiences or groups ascribed to social and human scenarios. The process includes questions and procedures, data predictably collected in the participant's situation, data analysis from specific to general themes, and the researcher makes interpretations of the meaning of the data. Further, this method requires the researcher to investigate more on teachers' teaching experiences by asking related questions to widen the opportunity to gather relevant ideas.

Research Locale and Sampling

The Panabo Central District of Panabo City Division was selected as the locale of the study composing of 11 elementary schools. Among 11 school heads, five (5) elementary school principals were purposely selected as informants in this study. The selection of the informants was based on the number of years of experience as school principals which is more than 5 years and identified as performing school principals for several years with several awards received. Creswell (1998) cited by Boyd (2001) considers two (2) to ten (10) participants or research subjects as sufficient to reach saturation of data in the phenomenological study.

Data Collection Procedure

In the In-Depth Interview (IDI), the informants were asked based on the guide questions. Notetaking and audio recording were done during the interview. Exact information was noted and recorded to ensure the reliability of the information from the informants.

The study was used the Creswell data analysis procedure. It was started from collecting data through an In-Depth Interview (IDI) with the five (5) selected principals as informants. After the collection of data, the qualitative analysis started. This was all initiated from the transcription of recorded data. Creswell's (2013) method in data analysis was carefully followed. The first was to organize the data. The second was reading and investigating the data. The third was starting coding all the data by using the coding process to generate descriptions and categories or themes. The fourth was reflecting on how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative. Lastly, the researcher presented the write-up to the adviser for some revisions and corrections.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In exploring the practices of school principals in Panabo Central District on the planning and implementation of the DepEd policies, findings exposed the five (5) clustered themes with emergent themes. The following clustered themes are Teachers Collaboration; Community linkages; Goal Setting and Transparency; Sound Relationship Cultivation; and Teachers Empowerment. These findings were extracted from shared insights and experiences on principals' practices in their respective schools that become the means and ways in establishing school expected outputs and achievements.

Working together for aims and goals is one of the orientations commonly inculcated and expressed in every organization. In school, this idea was present among teachers with the principals' leadership, as they revealed. The principal alone in the planning and implementation of DepEd policies can never create an expected outcome that will align with the goals and purposes. As one of the informants uttered, teachers are the maneuvers of the machine.

Tasks of Specific Program Designated to knowledgeable Teachers

Principals shared that they chose to assign the task or designate the tasks to deserving, knowledgeable, and committed teachers. They assured to have the expected outcomes and meet the goals through the help and

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leadership of these assigned/designated teachers. One of the principals' priorities is the right and consistent collaboration with the teachers in working out the set objectives of the programs.

Teachers Support Established Among Grade Level

With the leadership and initiative of the grade level heads, the schools' programs were carried out initially in every grade level. The teachers led and chaired by the grade-level head enabled them to act out and implement the tasks within their class handled or within the group. The relaying of information thru the grade level heads was the access of information and updates regarding the school activities and other important programs. The grade level heads were monitoring, coordinating, and updating the reports made by their colleagues.

Teachers Commitment Shown on the Continuity of the Program

Participation of teachers is essential in the accomplishment of DepEd policies and programs. As shared by the informants, the teachers were in the front line of the battle for the success of their school. The stability of the programs is also seen as dependent on the participation and commitment of teachers. According to them, if the teachers are not committed to taking the responsibility, no good outcomes will have happened. Thus, the programs' objectives will not be attained, and the policies will not be fully implemented.

Community Linkages

External stakeholders composed of parents, local government units, private institutions, and the like were identified as the community that surrounds schools. These sectors have a great influence too in the implementation of DepEd policies and programs. Informants said that the community's involvement created a huge success of the policies, programs, and school-based activities of their schools. Their financial support and provision of needed materials for the projects had an enormous, good effect on the programs.

Participation of external stakeholders

Participation of the external stakeholders was more in financial and material aspects. These were visible in the facility installation, learning equipment, budgetary allowances for teachers and learners, labor for sustaining cleanliness and ground weeding, and technical support such as internet installation within the location. For todays' condition, the community also established linkages in the delivery of lessons thru media. The barangays and the local government also support the learners' need, especially in the production and distribution of modules in the far-flung schools.

Program collaboration and networking of external stakeholders to Schools

Various private institutions support the schools, especially during the pandemic. Since the common problem of the school today is the learning delivery for the learners, there are initiatives and programs provided by other groups which were catering to the needs of the learners. Collaboration and networking were evident by these groups to schools. One of these was the radio station that provides and allows the school to air the updates and learning instructions for learners. The signing of the Memorandum of Agreement was executed by the owner and principal. There were also programs from another government sector that initiated the creation of an online application that will promote awareness on safety and harassment. This project was created to inform and aware the public particularly the young Filipino learners of various crimes that will affect their mental and emotional aspects.

Goal Setting and Transparency

One of the strategies of the principals in encouraging the teachers and stakeholders in participation in the DepEd policies implementation is the setting of goals or objectives. They believed that if the teachers and stakeholders learned and know the purposes of having that program or project, they are guided and directed to the right ways and procedures to undertake to have a successful end. Transparency is also a way of updating the school community in the program's current situation, be it in terms of ongoing activities, financial status, and accomplishments. These are the procedures that most of the principals are doing in their schools.

The plans are relayed and communicated

An organization needs to inform and communicate the plans and projects. One of the practices in schools is relaying a memorandum on various DepEd policies, programs, and projects to the teachers and stakeholders, particularly the parents with the Parent-Teachers Association (PTA) Officials and members. In this method, the

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background and the purpose of the programs are informed to the body in which they are guided as well as motivated to participate and support in the implementation. Moreover, if more are informed about the plans of programs and projects, many can participate and render their support. Informants shared that the relaying of information was practiced monthly through staffs' virtual meetings with the principals. DepEd memorandum was also posted on the bulletin board, posted in group chats of teachers, and on the school web page.

Job assignments are clearly defined
Another way of directing the teachers into the goals and objectives was elaborating job assignments and job descriptions. Teachers assigned to a certain task or designated as program coordinators were informed about their specific job, rationale and background, procedures, and activities to undertake to meet the objectives. In this way, the designated teachers know what to do and their job or tasks.

The data-driven approach is practiced
Employing knowing the program's status through the data gathered, the school was informed about the status of the program and the needs to do to sustain, improve, and continue the program. The data were extracted from the reports accomplished by the program coordinators through the conduct of monitoring and evaluation.

Productivity recognition is established
To ensure the participation of the teachers in various programs and sustain the spirit of enthusiasm among the group, the principals designed a program that will honor the teachers' efforts and accomplishments by giving certificates of recognition/awards. These recognitions and awards will also be used for any promotions for teachers as one of the criteria.

Sound Relationship Cultivation
The principals gave good and sound relationship among teachers and teachers to parents priority. Since the school needs the collaboration of people within the school community, good relationships must be preserved to sustain the linkages and support among teachers and parents. The informants understood that a good relationship among working members in an organization such as school can contribute greatly to the collaboration of tasks, resulting in positive outcomes.

Improve morale, mental, emotional, and physical aspects of teachers
The schools provide various programs that aim to preserve and improve the moral, mental, emotional, and physical aspects of the teachers. The schools created programs, namely: a moral recovery program, devotional program, and physical health fitness program. Aside from these, some schools created special programs which relate to
These initiatives had great results in teachers' minds especially in the current situation with the pandemic. The informants added that these means were significant and relevant as the teachers need outlets to outburst boredom and stress in their work, family situations/problems, and personal distress.

Ensure right attitude for teamwork
We cannot deny the fact that there are individuals who have difficulty in dealing with others. This situation is somehow challenging for principals in working out the plans because this will contribute to chaos within the organization. Thus, it hampers the continuity of the program or project which will fail. Teamwork in school is very important in accomplishing activities.
A grievance committee was created to act the necessary solution and investigation if there is a problem exist. This group is composed of people who can handle problem situations and mediate between two opposing parties. Aside from finding solutions to problems, the school also ensures and sustains a good relationship of teachers within the grade level group. Most of the tasks were relayed and assigned per grade level. With the leadership and supervision of the grade-level head, the teachers could accomplish the assigned tasks. Also, consistent reminders of working together following the working routines are helpful in this undertaking.

Teachers' Empowerment

Teachers' empowerment is also vital in the school. Teachers need to be uplifted in their work and the tasks assigned. The responsibilities given to them are not easy since the tasks are goal-driven, and many expect good results. Helping the teachers in enabling was the giving of authority by the principal in taking the lead. One way of acknowledging and placing it in proper was giving designation letters/appointments, assigning in the chairmanship position, sending to training and workshops, and providing technical assistance concerning his/her assignments.

Allow Professional Development

The Department of Education also intensifies professional development for many years. Various training and seminar workshops were attended by the teachers focusing on instructional and technical skills. All teachers were required to undergo such training. Indeed, more training has been given to all teachers particularly in this time of the pandemic. The training was provided online or virtual.

Another way of professional development procedure adopted by the teachers was studying in post-graduate studies. Numerous teachers graduated as full-fledged in post-graduate courses from various universities and colleges. Some are still ongoing in the courses. Some teachers availed the scholarship grants provided by the government. Selected teachers were given the opportunity on this.

Improve Instructional Skills

Teachers' teaching skills must be enhanced especially in strategies and methodologies. The main professional job of the teachers is to teach the learners effectively. Therefore, one of the most important factors considered by the principals was the improvement of teachers' teaching skills.

Department of Education mandated the principals with the help of master teachers to conduct class observations twice a year. Through this, the teachers will be assessed to what and how they teach the children and that they can be assisted by the master teachers on the practice of appropriate strategies in teaching the learners.

Another way of improving teachers' instructional skills was the conduct of Learning Action Cells (LACs) every month. This activity was one of the mandated programs for all public schools. The purpose of this is to enhance and improve the teaching strategies and learn and be updated on the latest methodologies that can be used in the delivery of learning.

CONCLUSION

In the school context, it requires effective planning in the implementation of programs and policies. The principals as school managers must possess skills in crafting plans and leading activities for attaining the goals of every program. Failure would possibly occur if the principal or the school head is deficient in planning and managerial skills. Additionally, collaboration is very critical in the planning and execution of plans. The program/project itself cannot run if there's no participation or involvement of the teachers, learners, parents, and other stakeholders. The proponents of the programs of DepEd are mainly the people within the school community.

Further, principals should also consider the capability and ability of the teachers. The organization cannot function in its role if the members themselves have no skills to use. The assigned members of the programs must know what and how to execute to continue and do the functions accordingly. Moreover, the parents, local government units, private institutions, and other stakeholders are very important in implementing the policies and programs. Their supports and participation have a huge effect on the success of the programs. They are the source of additional financial and material needs required to complete the programs/projects.

Recommendation

The study's findings have great help in the planning process and implementation of the DepEd policies and programs especially to those school leaders who are neophytes in managing and leading a school. This would become an effective tool for benchmarking to cascade the best practices of some performing school principals that would be beneficial and suited to their school's current situation.

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motivated me to continue the task given. The panel of evaluators constructively commented about my study which led to a well-structured piece. My family, especially my husband, continued to encourage and support me to pursue this undertaking despite the challenges experienced. Above all, the Almighty Father, the source of my strength and wisdom.

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