



EXPLORING THE LEADERSHIP OF SCHOOL HEADS ASSIGNED IN LAST MILE SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study aimed to explore and understand the leadership practices of school heads assigned in last mile schools. This study was rooted on the theory of Bush (2015) that articulated the concept of instructional leadership, also the theory of Bandura (2006) that reflects the significance of self-efficacy, and the theory of Groom (2002) that highlights the importance of distributive leadership. In collecting rich and diverse information, this study utilized purposive sampling technique that enable the ten (10) school heads assigned in last mile schools in Talaingod District, Division of Davao del Norte to share their lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights in leading and managing their respective schools. The identified school heads participated in-depth face to face interview upholding the safety health and protocols mandated by the IATF. Applying the thematic analysis, core ideas and major themes were extracted from the verbatim responses. As to the lived experiences of the school heads in last mile schools, five (5) themes were derived: establish community partnership, insufficiency of resources, cultivating leadership strategies, leadership opportunities, challenges to accessibility and safety going to the station. Meanwhile, on the coping mechanisms and strategies of the school heads in last mile schools, five (5) themes were generated: establish good communication among stakeholders, collaborated with stakeholders, giving rewards and recognition, managing the school effectively, and having safety procedures going to the station. Moreover, the school heads shared their insights and realizations which gave light to seven (7) themes such as: relevance of possessing positive attributes of a good school head, providing evidence of leadership, necessity of assistance from colleagues, importance of effective mechanism in leading schools, prioritizing access on resources, extending help and service to the community, and concentrating on student literacy. The results are deemed valuable and significant to the school heads, teachers, DepEd officials, and other researchers. The lived experiences and stories of the school heads were the primary the source of the derived transcriptions and emerged themes. Based on the results of the study, the school heads showed their commitment and dedication in performing their duties and responsibilities as leaders in last mile schools. They shared their unwavering sacrifice and love for the disadvantaged learners to have access to quality education. With the continuous assistance of the Department of Education, the government, the LGUs, NGOs, and other internal and external stakeholders, it is my great hope that the experiences of the participants will be heard and addressed.

Keywords: leadership, school heads, last mile schools, qualitative, phenomenological, Talaingod District, Davao del Norte

INTRODUCTION

Leadership skills reinforced the effectiveness and improvement of the school. Leaders serve as the captain of the ship who leads its constituents towards excellence and delivering quality education. In fact, leadership of a school head/principal helps a lot in identifying the pre-determined goals of the school and encapsulate it by crafting and implementing the School Improvement Plan (SIP). Despite of their assigned school, they ensure to devote their time and effort to address the need of the school and provide the best facilities to supplement the teaching-learning process. It is truly a challenge to lead and manage the school especially in the context of the last-mile schools wherein adversities are overwhelming. Schools located in the last-mile schools are evidently remote and experienced scarcity of human and physical resources.

Likewise, in one of the remote regions in Bhutan, the school principals and teachers encountered challenges in teaching the last mile. The problems that they experienced are concerns relating to the environment, concern relating to teaching, and concerns relating to the administration. In fact,

it is evident that in Indonesia, there is a huge challenge in education especially on schools located in geographical areas. These settlers in far flung areas of Indonesia have varying income and gender. Due to this, educational leaders faced tremendous challenges in leading schools in geographical areas. Meanwhile, in Pakistan lacks many civic amenities due to its status as a developing nation. Though lacking in necessities like education, its remote areas still exist because of the number of students that in need of basic education. Then, the government ensures to address their problem in education by establishing last mile schools. Even of limited resources at hand, education in basic education is made possible (Deema, 2021).

Meanwhile, in a study conducted in the Philippines, particularly in the Schools Division of La Union, teachers who are assigned in last mile schools are living examples of their vital role in providing educational services to those who are most in need. They revealed that they experienced both rewarding and frustrating encounters that put their commitment to test especially in delivering quality education. Being assigned in geographically remote area with evident scarce of resources is truly a challenge for teachers as well as



for their school leaders. School leaders and teachers initiate different strategies and programs in ensuring the accessibility of the students with the resources and the education that they deserve (Directo & Damaco, 2020).

Likewise, in the district of Talaingod, Division of Davao del Norte, it composed of school that are considered as last mile schools because it is geographically isolated, no electricity, schools are mostly makeshift rooms out of native materials, and most students belong in Ata Manobo tribe. School heads display evident scarce of human resources and financial support. With these tremendous challenges, the leadership practices and initiatives of a school leader is vital in making the school cope with the demands of our educational system given the limited resources at hand. They also spearhead the conduciveness of the learning environment among learners and maintain the motivational level of the teachers, parents, and other stakeholders.

Moreover, related studies of Brillantes and Nebria (2021) reveals one of the encountered experiences of the teachers assigned in remote areas is that they were very challenged in arriving at their workstation for it is located in top of the mountains. Meanwhile, the study of Hipolito (2022) also reveals the challenges encountered by the novice teachers in teaching in an overwhelming circumstance. These studies, however, concentrated more on the teachers' experiences in last mile school setting, whereas very few studies have on exploring the leadership of school leaders assigned in last mile schools.

Further, it is a necessity that this research work is conceived in response to seeing the different perspective on our educational system. This study will provide narrative and literature that will benefit the school heads, school administrators, DepEd officials and future researchers. School heads can share their best practices in planning and implementing programs, and other school heads will also learn the context of last mile school leaders. Further, this study will also benefit the school administrators and DepEd officials in providing appropriate and relevant programs and interventions that will help the thriving of last mile schools. Then, this endeavor will provide data and recommendation among future researchers in pursuing relevant research context. Besides, this urged me to create a research inquiry to provide new facts about the leadership challenges of school leaders assigned in last mile school and their coping mechanisms given the limited resources as well as the distance travelled from their home to school.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this phenomenological study delved on the lived experiences, coping mechanisms and insights encountered by the school heads assigned in last mile schools in Talaingod District, Davao del Norte. This study provided an avenue for school leaders unveiled and shared their practices and narratives on their struggles and strategies in leading and managing last mile schools.

At this stage of research, the leadership of the school heads in last mile schools, generally defined as the situations and challenges experienced and encountered as they lead and managing the students, teachers, parents and stakeholders in last mile schools. The shared responses and experiences of the school heads were properly documented and highlighted.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. What are the lived experiences of school heads assigned in last mile schools?
2. How do school heads cope with the challenges they encountered as leaders in last mile schools?
3. What are the insights to be drawn from the experiences of school heads as leaders assigned in the last mile schools?

METHODS

This qualitative research adopted the phenomenological approach of Polkinghorne (1989) as mentioned in the study of Alasae (2017) advised that 5–10 participants who had similar struggles be interviewed by phenomenological researchers. In relation, there were ten (10) participants in this study who were public school heads assigned in last mile of Talaingod District, Division of Davao del Norte.

Moreover, the following inclusion criteria were used by the researcher to identify and choose the study participants: (a) school head of public elementary or primary schools within Talaingod District; (b) school head who have at least six (6) months of experience in leading and managing last mile schools; and (c) school head of multigrade classes. Meanwhile, the following were the exclusion criteria of the study: (a) reassigned school head from last mile school to more accessible schools; and (b) newly designated school head with less than six (6) months of service.

Prior to the conduct of the study, I submitted first the protocol to the Research Ethics Committee of Saint Mary's College of Tagum, Inc. to review the study to ensure that it met the requirements of accepted practice and ethical guidelines. Then, I sought endorsement from the Dean of the Graduate School for permission to conduct this research. Next, I submitted a letter to the office of our Schools Division Superintendent and asked permission to conduct my study. Then, I obtained permission from the office of Public School District Supervisor of Talaingod District. Finally, I ensured that the data obtained from my participants' responses were helpful in deriving results, I utilized iterative questioning during the in-depth interview. After the completion of thematic analysis, the formulation of core ideas was conducted. Following the extraction and formulation of the various core ideas, clustering of essential ideas was followed to arrive at a theme. The themes with core ideas then became the study's findings.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Importance of Leadership among School Heads

A highly developed accountability framework holds school heads accountable for school performance. Each school is given specific goals to work toward as part of this framework.



In fact, in the process of school improvement, the school heads must strengthen his transformational leadership. School heads must foster an environment that boosts school spirit by allowing different students to feel motivated, respected, and trusted at different times, increasing satisfaction, and gradually coming to an understanding of the school's overarching goals. School heads must attain the aim of school development which is the development of the students (Hallinger, 2018; Cansoy & Parlar, 2018).

Likewise, effective school heads give the school a clear vision and sense of direction. Leaders at the school make sure that improvement areas are identified and eventually serve as the foundation for improvement plans. They prevent initiatives that do not have a significant impact on the students' work from diverting and distracting staff from what is important by keeping their focus on that. They understand what takes place in their classrooms. Consequently, the school heads can determine the gains, problems, and the room for improvements of its subordinates. Creation of staff development program targets to overcome the needs of the school and its functioning bodies (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin 2012; Begum et al., 2021).

Leadership of the School Heads Assigned in Last Mile Schools

Populations that are geographically isolated are typically disadvantaged. The context of these isolated are scarce in various fundamental areas such as they are experiencing poverty, and their parents or guardians have limited to no educational background. Also, the issues encountered in last mile schools are lack of learning resources, scarcity in power such as electricity and internet connection, outdated learning contents, lesson activities are repetitive, limited scaffolding of teachers and deficit in having peer collaboration. These unfortunate situations can directly or indirectly the leadership and management of the school heads (Rotas & Cahapay, 2020; Brilliantes & Nebria, 2021; Barcena, 2018).

On the other hand, the physical aspect, or location, of a remote school is one of the most challenging aspects of running one. The majority of school heads and teachers working in these regions undoubtedly reside in or close to cities, making travel to remote schools difficult for them, especially if they must cross numerous rivers and mountains to get there. Additionally, due to a lack of available instructional materials, these public school heads had to make purchases for the institution using their own funds. In the context of public school system, school heads need to endure and strategize solution in the problems such as lack of instructional materials, facilities, and classrooms (Begum et al., 2021; Navales, Flora, and Estremera 2017).

Strategies in Addressing the Challenges in Leadership

The responsibility of a school head is huge especially in leading and managing last mile schools. The planning process and decisions of the school depend on the ability and skills of the school heads. They can also enrich their knowledge and skills in leading and managing last mile school by studying the different polies and guidelines mandated by the department. Public policy helps the school to craft different plans, programs, and projects of the school. The different statutory policies were revised and contextualized by the department so that the school heads will have detailed instructions in planning and implementing the different policies and program of the school. The various goals and objectives of the school are mainly anchored on the regulations, laws, and other instruments that help them in implementing and attaining their objectives (Chavez & Doromal, 2018; Sanieel, Particutilo & Mariquit 2022).

In addition, trust plays an integral role for the success of the implementation of the plans and goals of the school. Trust is the core of the schools heads ability to lead and manage school that he gain from the students, teachers, parents, and its stakeholders. With public trust, school heads can earn the support from the different people that can contribute change and success to the school. Communication and relationship with the public is essential in leading and managing schools. Through communication it supports and help the schools understand the wants and needs of the community, teachers and especially the students (Day, Sammons & Gorgen, 2020; Moore, Gallegher, & Bagin 2020).

Realization in Leading Schools

It is truly a challenge to facilitate, manage and lead schools that are in last miles. School heads needed to come out from their comfort zones as they strategically solve the challenges that they encountered in the service. In the same manner, despite the struggles and challenges encountered by the school heads, they need to provide quality basic education among the learners and ensure that they are not left behind with the trends of education (Gallego 2022; Whang 2021).

In addition, school heads in remote area possess attributes that enable them to exert their enormous effort to serve beyond the call of profession. They also performed their duties and responsibilities in their assigned schools diligently, faithfully, and wholeheartedly. The different experiences and stories of triumph encountered by the school heads in last mile schools contribute to their wisdom and growth as a person and a leader. It was also emphasized in the study that both personal and professional development aids the school heads in defining and making sense of their leadership practices (Gallego, 2022; Eslaban, Garcia & Amada, 2022).



RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1

Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Lived Experiences of School Heads Assigned In Last Mile Schools

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Establishing Community Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • challenges in facilitating the school issues • bringing education to the community • tapping the participation of the parents • establishing linkage on different partnered agencies • using different avenues of communication such as social media sites, and other forms of communication to network support from stakeholders
Insufficiency of Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • experiencing leading a school without MOOE • insufficient number of teachers • lack of concrete classroom that can affect the teaching-learning process • lack of internet access • insufficient financial resources • limited technical assistance
Cultivating Leadership Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inadequate parents' understanding on education • needing to balance giving favors to the teachers • having a leader who is firm to show that you are in authority in serving the community • cultivating a positive mindset so that one will not get discouraged • having the challenge to motivate the teachers to teach in the last mile schools
Leadership Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being one of the IP teachers that understands the language • recommendation from superiors • becoming a leader to give services to the community • grabbing the opportunity to be a school head • being a school head because of the need
Challenges to Accessibility and Safety Going to the Station	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • finding it difficult to travel due to landslides and other calamities • experiencing "pangayaw" in far-flung areas • hiking for a couple of hours to reach the school • encountering obstacles like crossing the river on the way to the school • accessibility to the school

Establishing Community Partnerships

I encountered challenges in the community because they have close mind in supporting the programs of the school. IDI_01

In terms of community involvement, we had difficulty in tapping the participation of the parents. IDI_03
So, social media plays a great role that I was able to link different private and public institutions that gave donations that helped our learners. IDI-05

In the research finding of Malone (2017) agrees that parents who lack understanding on the purpose of education display less visible and active levels of parental involvement to schools. The parents' lack or limited knowledge placed them in an additional advantage because of the unfamiliarity of with the procedures of providing for their child's academic progress.

Further, in the study of Diaz (2015) confirms that school heads in remote area value the community they served by maintaining respect on them as they also give respect and value to the teachers serving in the remote community. In fact, the community will help the school in implementing the

target plans and goals of the school, especially when the school is situated in last mile.

Insufficiency of Resources

I experienced managing a school without MOOE so it means that it lacks resources and there is no fund coming from DepEd. IDI-02

The most unforgettable experience I had encountered is handling multigrade students from Kindergarten to Grade 6 for the first month and first quarter of the school year. IDI_09
My memorable experience as a school when I arrived in my designated school there are no classrooms. IDI-05

In the above finding Rotas and Cahapay (2020) agrees that the issues encountered in last mile schools are lack of learning resources, scarcity in power such as electricity and internet connection, outdated learning contents, lesson activities are repetitive, limited scaffolding of teachers and deficit in having peer collaboration.

Similarly, the inquiry of Navales, Flora, and Estremera (2017) confirms that the basic education in the Philippines faces perennial problems like shortage of textbooks, facilities, and classrooms particularly in the public school system. The



challenge in resources is evident in the schools with limited to no financial support from the government.

Cultivating Leadership Strategies

It is truly a challenge leading last mile schools especially when the parents are not fully educated on the systems of education. IDI-07

I encountered challenges especially in making decisions. The context of last mile schools, it is inevitable that teachers are asking favors especially on their time of attendance. IDI-05

I observe that in the last mile school if you're not strong enough in giving instructions, if you are just lenient then they will not take any actions. IDI-01

In the research conducted by Masters (2018) agrees that school leadership is a complex and demanding role as they are expected to lead school to excellence at the same time performing the needed paper works and tasks mandated by the department .

In addition, Whang (2021) confirms that school heads performed diverse areas of responsibilities including human resources, financial resources, educational activities of the students and teachers, external relations, well-being of students and teachers and even teaching students.

Leadership Opportunities

I decided to become a leader in the last mile school because it is important to have a leader who understands the IP learners especially their language. IDI-04

Actually ma'am, it was not my choice to be assigned in last mile school, it was a recommendation coming from our division supervisor. IDI-03

It was very unfortunate that there are children who do not receive education. This situation serves as my goal in extending my help to them through leading last mile schools. IDI-07

Arrieta and Ancho (2020) confirm that the shift from teaching in the classroom to leadership responsibilities in the

school is typically not a simple one. Teaching in the classroom and school administration are two distinct but related fields of study.

In addition, Passy and Ovenden-Hope (2020) agree that the service of the school heads are beyond questions despite of absence of research, publications, innovations, and other documents which will merit their services. Giving services to under resourced communities requires sacrifices which includes the transporting from their residence going to their respective schools.

Challenges to Accessibility and Safety Going to the Station

The most challenging part being assigned in last mile school is landslide. When heavy rains occur, there is a big chance of landslides in our area. IDI-03

I need to walked for almost seven (7) hours to be in my station performing my career as a leader, so it is very hard. IDI-02

In going to our station, we experienced crossing rivers and even encountered vehicular accidents. IDI-06

The study conducted by Equipado & Guibas (2021) agrees that the experiences of the school heads assigned in far flung areas is indeed challenging. They revealed that they do not have a comfortable means of transportation. They need to hire and ride habal-habal and overcome the rough and muddy roads just to reach their assigned stations. Unfortunately, for teachers and school heads who do not own a motorcycle, they need to hire and ride a habal-habal which is a local dialect for a motorcycle for hire.

Also, the research results of Quejada & Orale (2018) magnified the situations of the school heads and teachers assigned in remote areas. The put their lives at stake by walking for kilometers under the heat just to attend and deliver class to the students. During rainy days, it makes the hike and the travel of the school heads and teachers more challenging.

Table 2

Major Themes and Core Ideas in Coping with the Challenges of School Heads Assigned in the Last Mile Schools

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Establishing Good Communication with Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • connecting with the community to know the problems and concerns of the parents • communicating with family to make them understand the situations of school head in last mile schools • opening communication and rapport with the teachers • connecting with the students by greeting them or cracking a joke • learning the language or dialect of the students • utilizing social media for networking support from people and groups
Collaborated with the Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overcoming the challenges through the support and participation of the stakeholders • being united with the stakeholders who are very eager to help the school • extending support to the school by providing the basic needs of the students • connecting with the community through the support of the tribal Datu for parents' meetings and other school activities • tapping the support and help of the barangay, and LGU, and taking time to attend sessions and communicate with them
Giving Rewards and Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rewarding the teachers to motivate and remind them that their efforts are known and recognized by the government • appreciating the parents on what they can offer



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> giving rewards and recognition to stakeholders recognizing and appreciating the initiatives of the teachers in making the school better
Managing the School Effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> doing a variety of tasks handling multi-grade students updating the teachers and making schedules establishing strong time management and effective strategy to manage the school creating work schedules in advance allocating enough time and mitigating the challenges between home and school having a well-planned activity to help prioritize and focus on accomplishing the task effectively
Having Transportation Safety Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> needing to have a travel buddy in times of accident or emergencies taking time to enjoy travelling to our station then ensure to have a convoy and feel that we are family needing for teachers to cope with traveling the distance to the station

Establishing Good Communication with Stakeholders

In performing my duties and tasks as a school head is I always connect with the community. IDI-03

In serving our school and family it must be balanced. We need to communicate well to our family so that they will understand our situation. IDI-08

Of course, we cannot perform the tasks and duties of a leader without knowing the heart and minds of the teachers. IDI-06

Day, Sammons & Gorgen (2020) agrees that trust plays an integral role for the success of the implementation of the plans and goals of the school. Trust is the core of the schools heads ability to lead and manage school that he gain from the students, teachers, parents, and its stakeholders.

In addition, the inquiry of Moore, Gallegher, & Bagin (2020) confirms that the school heads communication and relationship with the public is essential in leading and managing schools. In implementing positive and effective communication with the stakeholders, the school head needs to understand the importance of public relations and its impact to the schools' development.

Collaborated with Stakeholders

There are various ways I had done especially in networking connection among stakeholders. It is essential that we know someone in LGU and especially in barangay. IDI-02

I think that one of the best practices that we have with the stakeholders is unity IDI-06

In my experience, it is really important to find and pursue stakeholders who will truly extend their help. IDI-07

The study of Jamon et al. (2020) confirms that collaboration is one of the most important skills that must be practiced by the school heads. With the advent of technology, collaborating with other teachers, stakeholders, students, and school administrator is easier .

Furthermore, in the inquiry conducted by Kilag et al. (2024) confirms that community involvement and support is essential in promoting effective instructional leadership practices. The community serves as the vital stakeholders that helps the schools with the access of learning materials needed for teaching-learning process.

Give Rewards and Recognition

In terms of our parents, they are very kind. My strategy is to appreciate them, even small or big things. IDI-05

I implement win-win solutions. If there are times when you give rewards among stakeholders, I give them an award. IDI-01

I practiced the giving of rewards and appreciation among my teachers so that they are more eager and motivated to work. IDI-08

The study of Renata, Wardial and Kristiawan (2018) confirms that work motivation positively affects and influence the performance of the teachers. In their inquiry they proved that regular supervision and motivation contribute a positive influence to the teachers' performance. Regardless of the context, giving appreciation

Further, the inquiry of Cansoy (2019) agrees that the administrators' leadership style, attitudes, and behaviors affect the motivation and performance of the employees positively. When leaders have mechanisms on organization, school culture and climate, and students' achievement they tend to reduce stress, burnout and many organizational negative behaviors.

Managing the School Effectively

You need to perform a variety of task and it is very hard because it needs to be delegated to others. IDI-02

I always update them to follow the instructions which is to come to school early, and always remind of the official time. IDI-04

When there is a well-organized plan on your business and whereabouts you will overcome the challenges in handling last mile schools. IDI-08

The research of Chavez & Doromal (2018) agrees that the responsibility of the school head is huge especially in leading and managing last mile schools. The planning process and decisions of the school depends on the ability and skills of the school heads. They can also enrich their knowledge and skills in leading and managing last mile school by studying the different polies and guidelines mandated by the department.

Also, it was elaborated in the inquiry of Sanie, Particulito and Mariquit (2022) that the public policy helps the school to craft different plans, programs, and projects of the school.



The different statutory policies were revised and contextualized by the department so that the school heads will have detailed instructions in planning and implementing the different policies and program of the school. The various goals and objectives of the school are mainly anchored on the regulations, laws, and other instruments that help them in implementing and attaining their objectives.

Having Transportation and Safety Procedures

It is necessary for last mile school personnel to have a travel buddy. IDI-01

In terms of distance, we never think that it is far or tiring.

Instead, we just enjoy our company, and we think that it is just nearby. IDI-03

Despite of the distance of the school, we always inculcate in our mind the tagline of our district that we should be happy all the time. IDI-06

The inquiry of Gallego (2022) agrees that in travelling to the station of teachers and school heads in far flung schools, they utilized a “buddy system”. This travel mechanism is a type of safety management practice in which individuals are paired or teamed to be responsible for each other’s welfare and safety.

Likewise, the research findings of Equipado & Guilbas (2021) confirms that the teachers and school heads assigned in far flung areas are able to reach their station by means of habal-habal. This mode of transportation is a local dialect for motorcycle for hire especially for teachers who do not own a motorcycle or cannot afford to pay for special tricycle rides.

Table 3
Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Insights of School Heads Assigned in the Last Mile Schools

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Relevance of Possessing Positive Attributes of a Good School Head	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • excellence in making the school presentable and organized • extend help to my fellow Ata Manobo • exhibiting adaptability in adjusting plans and strategies • necessitate integrity, competence and diligence of services in managing last mile school • honesty and dedication be the first in doing one’s job • make sacrifices in the path that one has chosen • willingness to help the school and the community • learn together and enjoy the pressure • display of leadership skills especially on overcoming challenges • do your best in your job
Provide Evidence of Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • source out and make effort to find ways with the scarcity of budget • need to teach the students because of the lack of the teachers • commit and help others • invest time and relationship among teachers • perform accountability and responsibility as school head • continue being a school head in last mile school
Necessity of Assistance from Colleagues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • necessitate mentoring and assistance in the implementation of school programs and activities • relevance of collaboration with the experienced school heads to make decision and perform the task • openness and communication with the previous school heads
Importance of Effective Mechanism in Leading School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure up-to-date submission of reports • adaptation of the programs of previous leader • set schedules and advance reading and planning of memos before going to the designated station • have the structuring of the campus • continue the projects under the School Improvement Plan especially the projects not implemented yet
Prioritize Access on Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implement innovations despite scarcity of resources • be resourceful and innovative in finding the solutions • purchase television so that the teachers can use it for demonstration or PowerPoint presentations • open the access like having electricity, concrete road, potable water system and learning facility
Extend Help and Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continue to help the learners • understand the situation of the students in the last mile schools • accept the situation of the community their attitudes, and culture



to the Community	
Concentrate on the Literacy of the Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • need for the learners to receive remedial instruction especially in terms of reading • make way to innovate and teach the students read • strengthen the literacy and numeracy on the improvement of our learners

Relevance of Possessing Positive Attributes of a Good School Head

Based on my realization, it is important to possess excellence in leading schools because you will work hard in making the school better and provide its needs. IDI-02

By performing my tasks and responsibilities as a school head, I am able to extend my help a lot to my fellow Ata Manobo situated in far flung areas. IDI-04

In my experience, I realize that it is important to demonstrate integrity, competence, and diligence in performing our services because we will be able to analyze situations and make sound decisions. IDI-07

In the inquiry of Moore, Gallegher, and Bagin (2020) emphasized that the positive qualities and attributes of the school in leadership is essential to gain the trust of the community and its stakeholders. Those who trust school leadership believed that when they have been dealt with honesty and ethically they may be more open to school engagements, initiatives, and collaboration.

Also, in the works of Esaban, Garcia, and Amada (2022) mentioned that when a school head possessed good qualities and committed to their work, the teachers will also reflect the same energy in performing their duties and responsibilities. The school head's beliefs and attitudes can ultimately impact the teacher's as well as the students' growth. The experiences gained in overcoming the challenges in leading and managing schools it helped their career in dealing with their administrative and instructional duties that molded them to be effective leaders.

Providing Evidence of Leadership

Being a leader in last mile school is difficult. I realized that it is not easy to work with a school with limited budget. IDI-05

As a leader situated in the last mile, I realized that it is truly challenging. A leader necessitates commitment that in performing your duties and responsibilities. IDI-08

In my leadership experience, i realize that leadership strategies are important especially in finding ways in solving all of the challenges encountered in the last mile schools. IDI-09

School heads are considered as instructional leaders who are responsible for teaching and learning as a core responsibility of a school. They are needed to ensure to uphold and attain the school's vision and educational goals and promote positive and supportive school climate. (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018)

In addition, the inquiry of Cabigao (2019) confirms that practices and mechanisms of the school heads/principals can serve as one of the success indicators of the school. When a school is led by a competent school head, it enable the school to achieve their target goals and performance which promote

positive and conducive learning environment. In fact, school heads are empowered in for planning, implementation, and evaluation pf all the school projects and activities for a particular school year.

Necessity for Assistance from Colleagues

At times when confused and don't know what to do, it is best to receive assistance and mentorship from other school heads. IDI_02

My realization in managing our school in last mile is that the different experienced school heads had a great contribution to fulfill my emptiness that sometimes I find it hard to absorb written instructions. IDI-04

My message to my other school heads that are assigned in low land is that I am thankful for their help and assistance. IDI-04

The study of Whang (2021) agrees that school heads performed diverse areas of responsibilities including human resources, financial resources, educational activities of the students and teachers, external relations, well-being of students and teachers and even teaching students. As the prime mover of education, school heads need to be equipped and familiar with different tasks and duties so that they will be updated with the different reports needed by the department.

Likewise, in the research conducted by Masters (2018) confirms that school leadership is a complex and demanding role as they are expected to lead school to excellence at the same time performing the needed paper works and tasks mandated by the department. In navigating changes during uncertain times bring more hardship on the part of the school heads as they needed to be open for learning and adaptable to change and required to create difficult decisions.

Importance of Effective Mechanism in Leading Schools

As a school head, I realized that it is adaptation of the programs of the previous school head is important. It will ensure the continuity of the program. IDI-07

Creating schedules had a great impact in managing my time as the school head, I realized that I can do more and I am productive when I create a schedule every week. IDI-09

As to my practices, the projects under the School Improvement Plan must be continue especially the projects that was not implemented. IDI-08

Wieczorek & Manard (2018) affirms that school heads are also responsible in evaluating the performance of the teachers and track the progress of the students in attaining the different competencies and the status of the implementation of the programs mandated by the government. School heads need to monitor the status of teaching-learning process of the school so that he can develop the capacities of his teachers by building on their strengths and reducing their weaknesses.



In addition, the practices and mechanisms of the school heads can serve as one of the success indicators of the school. The planned activities are included in their Annual Improvement Plan (AIP) taken from the School Improvement Plan (SIP) good for three years. Also, the implementation of different programs of the school are reflected in the School Based Management (SBM) that allow the school performance of the school heads to be assessed, evaluated, and monitored (Cabigao, 2019).

Prioritize Access on Resources

The setting affects my leadership practices and methods, so the last mile schools often operate with limited resources including infrastructure, learning materials and technology. IDI-10

Our plan is to purchase television so that we can utilize it during demonstration of the teachers that involves the use of PowerPoint. IDI-03

My plan is to make last mile school be able to have opportunities and resources available in lowland. IDI-04

Schools that are remotely located faces scarcity of teaching resources which contribute to their challenge in delivering quality basic education. The school heads who lead with this problem, they innovated and improvised instructional materials available in their area in order to aid in delivering the classes to the students. Through innovation, the educators can present much more meaningful learning experiences to the students (Gallego, 2022).

In addition, the inquiry of Pelegrino, Caballes, and Javillonar (2020) confirms that in the public schools of Palawan, they encountered challenges in accessing to learning materials that contribute to the learning of the students. In addressing the problems of materials, the teachers utilized the Open Educational Resources (OER) that focuses on ICT assisted teaching. OERs enable the teachers to tailored localized materials to provide quality, usable, accessible, appropriate education for all including schools with poor or limited internet services.

Extending the Help and Services to the Community

When I had the time to speak to them, I saw and glimpse their sincere smiles, that what I think that maybe God has a purpose why I am here. IDI-06

My experience that I can share to other school heads is always understand the situation of the students. IDI-03

My advice is to accept the community and its people. It is important for school heads to understand their culture, and their behaviors so that they can connect with them. IDI-04

The study of Sanchez, et. al (2022) agrees that most of the school heads and teachers assigned in challenging situations see learning as an opportunity in addressing the needs of the learners. They sacrificed and exerted efforts among their learners as if they are their children, own siblings, and part of their families. In their respective stations, the research participants in their study appreciate the fact that they have a lot of opportunities to help their learners and the community.

Meanwhile, the investigation of Valenzuela and Buenvenida (2021) confirms that principals must outsource funds internally and externally to provide a safe working atmosphere to their teachers. By creating a conducive and supportive environment the teachers can demonstrate their best qualitative teaching.

Concentrating on Student Literacy

There are competencies and subject to be followed, but if the students don't know how to read, them give remedial sessions to them. IDI-02

In terms of the development of the students, it is better for K-3 students to focus on developing their reading skills. IDI-01
Regarding about the literacy and numeracy it must be strengthen for improvement of our learners. IDI-06

Teaching students in remote location, teachers ensure to practice one-on-one reading tutorial. Reading skills plays a significant role in unlocking the different complex lessons and competencies which requires the teacher to teach reading intensively among the learners. Tutorial serve as one of the powerful strategies especially in addressing the different unique needs of the learners (Naparan and Alinsug, 2021)

Further, Domingo & Salva (2021) confirms that implementation of the curriculum is the focus of the school heads in their study. Their participants elaborated that they empower their subordinates to make plans and decision to improve their teaching and learning. School heads are responsible for creating plans and initiatives to improve the delivery of literacy and numeracy in schools that supports strategies that highlights the intervention of struggling learners.

IMPLICATION FOR ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE

The rich and valuable experiences shared by the participants of this study are necessary for knowing the realities of school heads assigned in last mile schools. Showcasing their stories on the challenges that they encountered, exploring their various coping mechanisms, and magnifying their realizations is the main purpose of the conduct of this endeavor. The extraction of their responses enables to revealed the various themes that elaborates the lived experiences of school heads assigned in last mile schools.

In addition, the experiences shared by the participants may inform the different administrators to revisit or develop new policies that focus on addressing the needs of the schools situated in last mile. They may use this study as empirical evidence that school heads in last mile school need support and assistance in terms of manpower and resources. In turn, this study also speaks the need for the administrators to allocate enough resources so that the students will have better and meaningful learning opportunities.

Moreso, the results also shows that most of the school heads assigned in last mile school have little to no leadership experience which implies that they are encouraged to participate in various trainings and seminars that will surely develop their leadership skills. Engagement in various



personal and professional activities allows them to foster their decision-making, managerial, and leadership skills. Also, school heads are encouraged to constantly monitor their performance by creating schedules, strategic plans, and assessment tools that keep them on track on the attainment of the programs and projects mandated by the department.

In relation, school heads need to establish organizational culture that enable them to utilize different strategies in maintaining cordial relations with the students, teachers, and stakeholders. It was presented in this study that communication and collaboration plays a greater role in addressing the challenges of school heads in last mile schools.

CONCLUSION

In general, the participants shared an array of colorful experiences pertaining to being a public-school heads assigned in last mile schools. So, to speak, their experiences were not that easy as they had to face various challenges in their journey such as the establishing community partnership, insufficiency of resources, cultivating leadership strategies, leadership opportunities, and challenges to accessibility and safety going to the station. More so, the leadership of school heads assigned in last mile school were put into test and enable them to strategically create immediate and feasible solutions.

In response to these difficulties, the school heads assigned in last mile schools developed varying ways of coping which focused majorly on establishing good communication with stakeholders. They also recognized that collaboration with stakeholders could help them gain mileage in facing the challenges in last mile schools. More so, giving rewards and recognition could add fuel to the various stakeholders in helping the school attain the educational programs and objectives. Managing schools effectively were also seen as integral by the participants in addressing the complex tasks of being an instructional and administrative leader. Lastly, in addressing the challenges of the travel of the school heads they noted that it is important to have transportation and safety procedures.

Overall, certain realizations struck many of the participants as they ruminated on their experiences in the field. One important aspect of this is the relevance of possessing positive attitudes of a school head. The pursuit of providing evidence of leadership was also one of the major themes which spelled the desire of the school heads showcase their leadership skills in leading last mile schools. It was explicitly revealed by the school heads the necessity of assistance from colleagues that stressed that they need to improve their skills and adapt strategies from different experiences of school heads. Moreover, they have also seen that the importance of effective mechanisms in leading schools is a way of ensuring that they will prioritize access of resources that will surely help the teaching-learning process. Lastly, the participants stressed that extending help and service to the community and concentrating on the literacy of the students are the main goals of the existence of last mile school.

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