OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES OF REASSIGNING SCHOOL HEADS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE RESHUFFLING POLICY

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study aimed to explore how school heads in Laak North District, Davao de Oro, navigate the challenges of reassignment during reshuffling through in-depth interviews. Anchored in Resilience Theory, Situational Leadership Theory, and Complexity Theory, the research focused on participants' lived experiences and coping mechanisms. Ten school heads who had undergone reassignment were selected through purposive sampling. The findings revealed five key themes regarding their experiences: enhancing managerial skills, experiencing diverse emotions, adjusting to new environments, facing community management challenges, and encountering various obstacles. Three coping mechanisms emerged: implementing school programs, fostering professional growth, and utilizing effective communication. Additionally, school heads emphasized the importance of moral and emotional support, embracing change in leadership, and learning through diverse interactions. The results indicate that while challenges arise during reassignments, overcoming emotional difficulties is vital for professional growth, and open communication and supportive policies are crucial for ensuring student well-being and institutional success

KEYWORDS: *educational management, reshuffling, school heads, reassignment, phenomenological qualitative approach, Davao de Oro, Laak North District*

INTRODUCTION

The provision of Department Order 7 series of 1999 mandates the transfer of school heads with five years of service to other educational institutions. This policy aims to instill new leadership and broaden professional experiences, fostering continuous improvement and excellence in school management by exposing leaders to new environments and stakeholders (Ramos, 2020). In addition, in the Philippine educational system reassigning school heads faces challenges due to lack of clear rules, forced transfers, political interference, and neglect of personal and professional responsibilities. This can lead to work-life balance issues, resistance to reassignment, and worsened staff and student resistance, inadequate communication, and lack of responsibility (Salazar, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the lived experiences of the school heads assigned in Laak North District, Division of Davao de Oro, in overcoming the challenges of school heads being reassigned due to the reshuffling policy.

Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences of school heads regarding their reassignment in accordance with the reshuffling policy?

2. How do school heads cope with the challenges encountered during their reassignment in accordance with the reshuffling policy?

3. What insights do school heads have regarding their reassignment in accordance with the reshuffling policy that can be shared with others?

METHODS

The study employed a phenomenological approach to comprehend human experience, utilizing non-numerical data for a comprehensive understanding and retaining rich interpretation (Bhandari, 2023).

The participants of this study were the 10 school heads in the division of Davao de Oro division.

The following inclusion criteria were used for the selected school heads who took part in this study: (a) principal or school head in the public school; (b) school head who served for more than three years; and (c) each participant had to be a school head at a public school that had already undergone one or more reshufflings. I ensured that the participants varied in age, gender, and even school category. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria were based on the following parameters: (a) teachers who do not hold the position of principal or school head; (b) principals or school heads who served for less than three years; and (c) principal or school heads who have not yet undergone the reshuffling policy.

Additionally, the study employed thematic analysis to search for patterns among the concepts or codes that were previously acquired through the codification process.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE
Reshuffling Policy of School Heads
The 1999 Department of Education Order No. 7 requires school heads to be reassigned every five years to enhance professional growth and prevent complacency. Research supports the benefits of this reshuffling policy, which encourages knowledge sharing, diverse experiences, and innovative practices that improve student outcomes and school culture. Studies by Eda (2018), Harris and Lee (2019), and others highlight how reshuffling can lead to increased job satisfaction for administrators and foster creativity within the educational system. Further, Ng and Ma (2018) note potential positive and negative impacts of frequent leadership changes, Thompson et al (2022) emphasize the renewed community engagement that accompanies a new school head. Effective implementation of reshuffling policies, as suggested by Kumar and Chatterjee (2018) and Kim and Park (2023), can boost employee engagement and overall school performance, ultimately benefiting the educational landscape.

The Significance of Reshuffling Policy among School Leaders
Chen et al. (2019) argue that reshuffling policies can promote equitable leadership opportunities, improve educational quality, and enhance leadership skills among school leaders. Vasudeva (2021) adds that such policies foster innovation and collaboration in schools. Ngcobo and Mestry (2018) found that reshuffling improves student success and institutional efficacy. However, Musa and Bakar (2018) highlight challenges, such as managing new team dynamics and potential disruptions. Santos et al. (2020) noted that frequent leadership rotation can negatively affect job satisfaction, while Smith (2018) emphasizes the need for policy restructuring to achieve high-performing schools.

Challenges of Reassigning School Heads
Radha et al. (2019) highlight challenges faced by school leaders in understanding teacher selection criteria for reshuffling, which hinders policy implementation. Kreuzer et al. (2018) points out negative effects on school administrators' emotional health due to these changes. Winkler (2018) notes that shifting leadership can confuse and unsettle teachers and students, disrupting established routines. Nelson and Marlon (2020) identify difficulties such as stakeholder opposition, legal issues, and impacts on student performance. Dhami (2018) mentions that a lack of resources exacerbates the administrative burden during reorganization. Rosina et al. (2018) and Ngai and Chan (2018) find that adapting to new school cultures and building relationships is challenging for reassigned leaders. Rooney and Muijs (2018) discuss obstacles like resistance from administrators and cultural disruptions, while Shiekh (2019) highlights personal challenges in transitioning to new environments.

Strategies for the Successful Implementation of the Reshuffling Policy
Arja and Nokonen (2018) emphasize that school administrators rely on good communication, teamwork, and shared decision-making for effective implementation of reorganizing policies. Ahmad et al. (2019) highlights the importance of an efficient organizational structure, planning, and supportive attitudes from school leaders. Smith (2018) notes that thorough preparation and stakeholder participation are crucial for reshuffling policy success. Kotter (2019) asserts that effective leadership and a clear plan are essential for organizational transformation. Moyo and Nkabinde (2021) stress that successful implementation requires strong leadership, communication, and a deep understanding of the policy's goals. Aljuaid (2022) adds that engaging all stakeholders, especially parents, in decision-making is vital for effective policy implementation in schools.

Adapting to Leadership Transitions in Education
Taylor and Green (2020) noted that leadership transitions can enhance school effectiveness. Martin and Edwards (2021) found that accepting leadership reassignments is vital for sustaining effective leadership and a positive school environment. Chapman and Hughes (2021) highlighted that successful transitions often hinge on leaders' ability to adjust their strategies to new circumstances. Chang (2022) pointed out that seasoned school heads stress the significance of personal resilience and adaptability during these changes. Jackson and Lee (2018) argued that school leaders who actively manage transitions can greatly impact school culture. Martin and Thompson (2019) discovered that embracing transitions helps school heads forge stronger relationships with staff and stakeholders. Similarly, Nelson and Wright (2021) indicated that welcoming leadership changes enhances organizational effectiveness. Williams and Green (2020) emphasized that leaders who view transitions as growth opportunities are more likely to implement effective school reforms. Roberts (2022) highlighted the need for adaptable policies that can address the changing requirements of school heads. Carter and Jones (2022) stressed that accepting policy changes allows leaders to seek professional growth opportunities, benefiting both their leadership practices and overall school performance. Lastly, Gray and Murphy (2019) found that school heads who make strategic adjustments are more likely to successfully adapt to policy changes.

RESULTS

Table 1
Major Themes and Core Ideas on Lived Experiences of School Heads Regarding their Reassignment in Accordance with the Reshuffling Policy

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Enhancing the Managerial Skills	• enriching new skills for the past experiences • sharing of managerial best practices from the previous assignment and applying them in the new station • helping school heads develop potential in leadership style • re-igniting and troubleshooting in a new reassignment • exposing the school heads to different scenarios to enhance managerial skills and ability to manage diverse situations effectively • being in a new environment, with new skills and new personalities to develop managerial skills • developing one's skills in how to handle different situations
Encountering Diverse Emotions	• experiencing happiness with opportunities in the new environment • being excited with a bit of anxiety in a new environment • having a mixed emotion • having a heartbreaking feeling leaving the beloved place • feeling anxious dealing with new individual • feeling lonely leaving the people and subordinates whom you have already grown fond of
Adjusting to a New School Environment	• observing the school's culture, behaviors of both teachers and students • becoming observant of the diverse environments and cultures in the school will lead to adjusting to the appropriate leadership style • observing the teachers and stakeholders on their habits to adjust to their behavior • adjusting one's leadership approach to fit in the new community and build relationships • adjusting to managing diverse characters and habits of new colleagues and community members
Having Difficulty in Adjusting to Managing the Community	• having problems adjusting to a new environment • having difficulty getting along with people • having great challenges at the same time you have to adjust
Encountering Various Challenges	• being challenged to prove to the people in the new place that you are worth as a school • realizing the need to learn to improve your leadership • having challenging opportunities to improve leadership skills

Table 2
Major Themes and Core Ideas on the School Heads Coping with the Challenges Encountered During their Reassignment Following the Reshuffling Policy

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Implementing School Programs and Policies for Improvement	• employing programs to recognize and monitor both teachers and students • treating the community equally by giving a school policy that enhances the learning capacity of the students • instituting routines like daily cleaning to students to instill discipline and responsibility • implementing a child protection policy to ensure the safety and well-being of students • being strict in the implementation of the rules and regulations • establishing recognition programs for both students and staff to encourage and reward desirable behavior
Developing Professional	• enhancing and increasing familiarity with the role

Growth	• making new assign an avenue to grow professionally • sharing and acquiring different leadership styles and skills
Utilizing Effective Communication	• having clear communication with the teachers to reduce anxiety, and have common goals, vision, and mission • having open communication is necessary for mutual understanding • talking with the teachers to open for deeper understanding, of how to deal with them

Table 3
Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Insights of School Heads Regarding their Reassignment in Accordance with the Reshuffling Policy that can be Shared with Others

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Providing Moral and Emotional Support	• giving moral support when encountering difficulty • needing for moral support and encouragement from DepEd officials • showing understanding on difficulty of managing school • providing assistance and support through encouragement • giving an advance notice of reassignment
Embracing Change in Educational Leadership	• embrace and be happy to serve another new community • be physically and emotionally ready to accept challenges • expect that school heads will experience reshuffling • embrace change, including the inevitability of moving between schools. • accept and be open to any changes
Learning Through Diverse Interactions	• adjust and learn the habits of teachers to allow for a smooth relationship • learn the teachers' ability, strength, and weaknesses • adjust and learn from the experience in every transfer • learn to adapt to different kinds of people

DISCUSSION
Lived Experiences of School Heads Regarding their Reassignment in Accordance with the Reshuffling Policy
The selected school heads participating in this study shared various experiences related to their reassignment, both challenges and growth opportunities. Through a detailed analysis of the transcripts from the in-depth interviews, five (5) main themes emerged: a) Enhancing the Managerial Skills; b) Encountering Diverse Emotions; c) Adjusting to a New School Environment; d) Having Difficulty in Adjusting Managing the Community; and e) Encountering Various Challenges.

Enhancing the Managerial Skills
Research from the Department of Education indicates that regular reshuffling of school heads can help share best practices and improve managerial skills (Aquino et al., 2021). Hsu et al. (2020) acknowledge that while reshuffling presents challenges, it also provides leadership growth opportunities. Additionally, Smith and Johnson (2019) highlight that leadership succession is crucial for developing managerial skills among school leaders. Consequently, the literature supports the idea that reshuffling school heads every five years, as outlined in DepEd Order 7 series of 1999, aims to refresh leadership in schools and broaden the horizons of school leaders (Ramos, 2020).

Encountering Diverse Emotions
The result of the study is parallel with the study of Park and Datnow (2022) who noted that principals experience mixed emotions—such as anxiety, excitement, and uncertainty—when faced with transfers. Chua and Lim (2021) emphasized the complexity of these emotions, while Smith and Brown (2020) highlighted the conflicting feelings of sadness about leaving a familiar community and happiness about new opportunities.

Adjusting to a New School Environment
The result aligns with the study of Gurr (2018) discusses the benefits of successful adaptation for school heads. Smith and Johnson (2021) outline strategies such as building connections with staff, adapting to the school's culture, and seeking mentorship. Brown and Davis (2019) emphasize the need for school heads to modify their leadership styles to fit new contexts. Kim (2022) stresses that adapting leadership approaches during organizational reshuffling is essential for effective adjustment. Norton and Ali (2023) found that those who successfully adapt their strategies are more likely to maintain stability and effectiveness within their organizations.

Having Difficulty in Adjusting Managing the Community

Ramos (2020) emphasizes that the reshuffling policy encourages school heads to engage with new colleagues and stakeholders, fostering continuous improvement in school management. Hoque and Raya (2023) found that the context of a school and the maturity of its staff influence the appropriate leadership style, requiring school heads to be adaptable. Additionally, Patel and Lee (2022) noted that school heads often face challenges in grasping the unique cultural, social, and economic contexts of the new communities they serve.

Encountering Various Challenges

When school leaders are transferred due to reshuffling, they encounter challenges in adapting to new school cultures, building relationships with staff and students, and managing change (Rosina et al., 2018). Ngai and Chan (2018) also found that these leaders face various difficulties in new environments. Additionally, Chiwamba and Kigobe (2022) noted that school heads must frequently understand and adjust to different school cultures, necessitating continual adaptation to new learning settings.

School Heads Coping with the Challenges Encountered During Their Reassignment Following the Reshuffling Policy

During the conducted interviews, the participants shared the different coping mechanisms with the challenges they encountered during their reassignment following the reshuffling policy. After a careful and thorough analysis of the data gathered, the following three (3) themes emerged: a) Implementing School Programs and Policies for Improvement; b) Developing Professional Growth; and c) Utilizing Effective Communication.

Implementing School Programs and Policies for Improvement

The result of the study conforms with the study of Wang (2021) who indicated that leaders using resilience strategies are more effective in implementing policies during reshuffling. School heads encountered challenges like insufficient financial and human resources, as well as negative student attitudes. To address these issues, they strictly enforced policy provisions, sought support from stakeholders, and enhanced communication efforts (Zamora, 2021).

Developing Professional Growth

The findings align with Anderson and Smith (2021), highlighting the importance of tailored professional development for school administrators facing reassignments. School leaders view reshuffling policies as valuable opportunities to enhance their leadership skills (Nguyen & Patel, 2019) and gain experience in varied educational settings (Johnson & Smith, 2021).

Utilizing Effective Communication

Improving productivity and collaboration is significantly aided by prioritizing tasks and ensuring clear communication (Olegario, 2024). Baker (2019) emphasizes the importance of transparent communication in managing school administrators' reassignments. Additionally, Rodriguez and Chan (2021) outline strategies for cultivating a positive organizational culture during reshuffling, focusing on transparency, inclusiveness, and aligning goals with stakeholder aspirations.

Insights of School Heads Regarding their Reassignment in Accordance with the Reshuffling Policy That Can be Shared with Others

During the conduct of interviews, the participants shared the different insights of school heads regarding their reassignment in accordance with the reshuffling policy that can be shared with others. After a careful and thorough analysis of the data gathered, the following three (3) themes emerged: a) Provide Moral and Emotional Support; 3) Embrace Change in Educational Leadership; and c) Learn Through Diverse Interactions.

Provide Moral and Emotional Support

Leithwood and Jantzi (2018) highlight the importance of moral support and resilience for school leaders during organizational changes, which helps maintain effective learning environments. Smith (2019) notes that supportive policies from the Department of Education shape the leadership landscape, while Garcia (2021) emphasizes the need for encouragement from DepEd officials to foster effective school leadership. Hargreaves and Boyle (2019) discuss the emotional challenges posed by sudden reassignments, and Day and Gu (2019) underscore the significance of emotional preparation and advanced notice in easing these psychological difficulties during leadership transitions.

Embrace Change in Educational Leadership

The findings align with Fullan (2022), who asserts that effective leaders recognize the inevitability of organizational restructuring in education. Despite the challenges faced by public-school heads in remote areas, Gallego (2022) notes that they find their work fulfilling, as it aligns with their true mission in academia. Gipson and Reddick (2019) explore the experiences of principals during transfers, focusing on career advancement and community integration, while Day (2021) highlights the role of school leaders in fostering a resilient organizational culture.

Learn Through Diverse Interactions

School heads play a crucial role in influencing teacher well-being, which creates an interconnected environment that affects both teachers and students (Echon & Cabal, 2022). Medford and Brown (2022) explain that school leaders familiarize themselves with the school culture by engaging with staff and implementing necessary changes to improve teaching and learning. Additionally, reshuffling policies can promote ongoing professional growth, as collaborative interactions encourage school heads to embrace continuous learning (Garcia, 2022). Engaging with diverse perspectives further enhances their decision-making and leadership effectiveness (Peterson, 2023).

Implications for Administrative Practice

Based on the findings of this phenomenological study, important implications arise for school heads and beyond. The study highlights how school heads overcome challenges by employing various strategies such as improving managerial skills, fostering professional development, adapting to new school environments, using effective

Recommendations for Further Research

This study on overcoming challenges of reassigning school heads in Laak North District, Philippines, found essential themes but limited generalizations. The data could be expanded to include a larger sample size and diverse participants from different regions, educational levels, and experience levels. The methodologies used could be replicated by other researchers in their settings. Comparing reshuffling strategies across various leadership positions in education could provide insights into how demands during reassignments differ across

organizational levels. Addressing these research suggestions could advance understanding of reshuffling policies in educational leadership and promote effective leadership practices.

Concluding Remarks

This research study explores the challenges faced by school heads in reshaping policies in education, focusing on managerial abilities, professional growth, and adapting to new environments. Despite challenges in capturing the strategies of school heads and interpreting participants' experiences, the study found that effective reassigning school heads can improve organizational climate, teacher confidence, and student outcomes. The study aims to inspire further research and innovation in the field, exploring critical aspects of reshuffling policy techniques, organizational culture's role in supporting school heads, and the effectiveness of interventions enhancing leadership skills.

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