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RESILIENT LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF SCHOOL HEADS IN LAST MILE SCHOOLS IN THE DAVAO REGION

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ABSTRACT

Educational leadership in last mile schools is essential for overcoming challenges like limited resources, remote locations, and low community involvement. Although resilient leadership is widely discussed, its application in last mile contexts remains underexplored. This study investigated the leadership practices, challenges, and strategies of school heads in last mile schools. A case study with a multiple perspective approach was employed, involving key informant interviews with 11 school heads and 11 teachers from selected last mile schools in the Davao Region. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis to identify emerging themes. The findings revealed that resilient leadership practices are marked by collaboration and transparency, resilience, empowerment, inclusivity and well-being, and innovation. In general, the resilient leadership in last mile schools relies on sustained community engagement and targeted support for the professional growth of school leaders and teachers. This study offers practical guidance that administrators and policymakers may consider when designing leadership development programs to advance educational equity and resilience in underserved contexts.

KEYWORDS: *Resilient Leadership, Practices, Last Mile Schools, Case Study, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

Resilient leadership practices have garnered increasing attention in academic literature in recent years (Plessis, 2017). These practices are broadly defined as a leader's capacity to navigate and recover from challenges, setbacks, and disruptions, guiding their organizations toward sustained success. They encompass a range of traits, behaviors, and strategies that enable leaders to withstand adversity (Peshawaria, 2023). Key attributes of resilient leaders include high levels of self-awareness and emotional intelligence, which allow them to recognize their strengths and weaknesses, manage emotions effectively, and foster clear and empathetic communication (Zhang & Tian, 2022).

In addition, resilient leaders cultivate organizational cultures that promote trust, collaboration, and innovation (Mittal & Professor, 2023). They emphasize building strong relationships and creating environments where individuals feel valued and motivated, even in the face of adversity. By encouraging open communication, teamwork, and a growth mindset, these leaders establish safe and supportive spaces for idea exchange and experimentation (Dagohoy, 2021). Their ability to adapt quickly and make agile decisions enables them to respond effectively to emerging opportunities and threats (Perkins, 2023).

In today's complex and unpredictable organizational environments, resilient leadership is considered essential, particularly during times of crisis and disruption (Ford et al., 2021). It not only equips leaders to manage immediate challenges but also inspires employees to develop resilience and determination. By embedding resilient leadership strategies into organizational frameworks, leaders can nurture a culture of adaptability and perseverance among their teams (Fu & Cao, 2021).

In the context of education, last mile schools refer to institutions located in rural or geographically isolated areas with limited access to educational resources (Beesley et al., 2019). Xuan et al. (2023) reported that these schools face multiple systemic and logistical challenges. Since their inception, last mile schools have reached over 10,000 students, contributing to improvements in school attendance and academic performance (Maistry, 2022; Mustikasari et al., 2020).

The role of resilient leadership in the administration of last mile schools is particularly critical, as these schools often contend with challenges such as resource scarcity, limited community involvement, and geographical remoteness (Akther & Evans, 2024). Effective school management in such contexts demands resilient leadership practices that empower leaders to navigate issues such as insufficient

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funding and fragile stakeholder engagement (Dossin, 2023). These leaders are tasked with developing innovative solutions and sustaining a positive school climate despite adversity.

Furthermore, resilient leadership has been found to be instrumental in empowering teachers in last mile schools (Plessis, 2017). School administrators who adopt these practices can foster environments that support teacher effectiveness, continuous professional development, and shared leadership (McLeod & Dulsky, 2021). These practices also enhance resource management and community partnership building—key components in driving school performance and improving student outcomes (Sarah et al., 2023).

Despite increasing recognition of resilient leadership, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding its application in last mile school contexts. While several studies acknowledge its importance, few have investigated how resilient leadership is practiced in schools facing unique contextual challenges such as high teacher attrition, minimal infrastructure, and weak community ties (Plessis, 2017). Understanding these specific challenges is vital for developing effective leadership interventions (Echazarra & Radinger, 2019) and advancing the broader discourse on educational leadership in under-resourced settings (Cozier, 2024).

In Australia, resilient leadership in last mile schools has attracted considerable international interest, particularly as leaders in remote areas require specialized competencies to overcome geographic isolation and resource limitations (McCalman et al., 2022). Research has shown that implementing resilient leadership strategies in such settings has the potential to transform educational systems and significantly improve student outcomes (Dossin, 2023).

A global perspective on resilient leadership further enables the exchange of best practices and innovative strategies that enhance educational quality and strengthen leadership capacity worldwide (Hammond, 2021). In the Philippines, last mile schools face challenges similar to those encountered in other countries, including insufficient infrastructure and learning materials (Lagat et al., 2023; Douali et al., 2022). The growing acknowledgment of resilient leadership in this context has sparked efforts to develop contextually responsive and innovative solutions (Steve, 2022).

The Philippine education system also encourages participatory decision-making in last mile schools by engaging stakeholders to address community-specific needs (Ratner et al., 2017; Sarah et al., 2023). This inclusive approach is designed to enhance institutional capacity while fostering a culture of resilience, innovation, and creativity (White & Downey, 2021). In these settings, school leaders are expected to demonstrate adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and visionary thinking to ensure equitable and quality education for all learners (Limon et al., 2022; Berglund & Johnston, 2019).

Given these considerations, this study sought to explore the resilient leadership practices of school heads in last mile schools to maintain effective school operations in demanding environments.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design grounded in the interpretivist philosophical worldview to explore the resilient leadership practices of school heads assigned to last mile schools in the Davao Region. The design was chosen to generate an in-depth understanding of leadership strategies, subjective experiences, and adaptive practices in schools marked by geographic isolation and resource scarcity (Creswell & Poth, 2016). A multiple-perspective approach was employed by including both school heads and teachers, allowing for richer insights and strengthening the study's credibility through data triangulation (Patton, 1990).

Research Participants

A total of 22 participants were purposively selected, comprising 11 school heads and 11 public school teachers from various divisions within Region XI. Inclusion criteria required school heads to have at least five years of experience in last mile schools, while teacher participants were required to have at least three years of teaching experience in similar contexts and hold regular, full-time positions. The study was conducted across 11 geographically isolated divisions designated by the Department of Education as last mile schools.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection utilized researcher-made, semi-structured interview guides tailored separately for school heads and teachers. These guides were validated by experts and aligned with the central research question. Key informant interviews enabled participants to describe their leadership responses, stressors, and strategies (Dejonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Ethical approval was secured from the DNSC Research Ethics Committee, and informed consent was obtained. Interviews were conducted either in person or online depending

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on accessibility and participant availability. All interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and verified through participant checking.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was performed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization with the data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Manual coding was used to enhance close interaction with the transcripts. To ensure trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba's (1988) four criteria were followed: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols were strictly followed, including the protection of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and cultural sensitivity. No real names or school identifiers were used, and all information was securely stored for academic purposes only (Manti & Licari, 2018). This methodology was designed not only to capture technical practices but also the emotional and contextual aspects of resilient leadership in remote school settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Resilient Leadership Practices Employed By School Heads in Last Mile Schools

The study on resilient leadership practices among school heads in last mile schools examines the challenging circumstances faced by school administrators. These leaders have demonstrated their ability to overcome obstacles through creative efforts and resilient leadership behaviors. Resilient leadership is conceptualized as a strategy that emphasizes adaptability, community involvement, and creative problem-solving. School administrators foster relationships among teachers, students, and parents, cultivating an inclusive culture of shared ownership regarding school performance. The openness and commitment to change are evident, as many school heads actively seek feedback from the community and promote a culture of openness and collective learning. Additionally, technology is recognized as a tool to facilitate communication and enhance teaching effectiveness despite the challenges posed by limited resources.

Table 1 illustrates the school heads and teachers' perspectives and the emergent themes on resilient leadership practices in leading last mile schools in the Davao Region.

Table 1
Resilient Leadership Practices Employed by the School Heads in Last Mile Schools

School Heads' Perspectives	Teachers' Perspectives	Emerging Themes
▪ Empowering Community Engagement ▪ Leveraging Available Resources ▪ Maintaining Transparent Communication	▪ Empowering Community Engagement ▪ Leveraging Available Resources ▪ Maintaining Transparent Communication	**Fostering Collaborative and Transparent School Communities**
▪ Embracing Adaptability ▪ Demonstrating Resourcefulness ▪ Fostering Collaboration and Support	▪ Embracing Adaptability ▪ Demonstrating Resourcefulness ▪ Fostering Collaboration and Support	**Building Resilient and Supportive Learning Communities**
▪ Cultivating a Positive School Culture ▪ Prioritizing Teacher Development ▪ Promoting Teacher Well-Being	▪ Cultivating a Positive School Culture ▪ Prioritizing Teacher Development ▪ Promoting Teacher Well-Being	**Nurturing a Thriving and Empowered School Community**
▪ Promoting Holistic Development ▪ Ensuring Students Well Being ▪ Fostering Inclusive Education ▪ Focusing Mental Health Awareness	▪ Promoting Holistic Development ▪ Ensuring Students Well Being ▪ Fostering Inclusive Education ▪ Focusing Mental Health Awareness	**Creating Inclusive and Holistic Learning Environments for Student Well-Being**
▪ Integrating Innovation and Technology ▪ Practicing Empathic Leadership ▪ Managing Crises and Ensuring Continuity	▪ Integrating Innovation and Technology ▪ Practicing Empathic Leadership ▪ Managing Crises and Ensuring Continuity	**Leading with Innovation, Empathy, and Resilience**

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Table 1 presents the resilient leadership practices as perceived by school heads and teachers in last mile schools in the Davao Region. It highlights the alignment between the school heads and teachers' perspectives and synthesizes these into five overarching emerging themes, which represent core constructs of resilient leadership in last mile schools. School heads and teachers in last mile schools emphasized the importance of fostering collaborative and transparent school communities through empowering community engagement, leveraging available resources, and maintaining transparent communication. They also highlighted the value of building resilient and supportive learning communities by embracing adaptability, resourcefulness, and fostering collaboration and support. These practices not only promote school cohesion but also ensure continuity of instruction in unpredictable and under-resourced environments, where collaboration serves as a vital tool for navigating complex challenges.

In addition, nurturing a thriving and empowered school community was seen as essential, with practices centered on cultivating a positive school culture, prioritizing teacher development, and supporting teacher well-being, and promoting teacher well-being. Resilient leadership was also recognized as instrumental in creating inclusive and holistic learning environments for student well-being through promoting holistic development, ensuring students' well-being, fostering inclusive education, and raising mental health awareness. Lastly, both teachers and school heads underscored the significance of leading with innovation, empathy, and resilience by integrating innovation and technology, practicing emphatic leadership, and managing crises while ensuring continuity to sustain learning and foster a responsive, people-centered school culture amid adversity.

Theme 1: Fostering Collaborative and Transparent School Communities

The theme 'Fostering Collaborative and Transparent School Communities' emerged from the shared perspectives of school heads and teachers who consistently emphasized the importance of community engagement, transparency, and resource maximization in last mile schools. School heads demonstrated resilient leadership by actively forging strong partnerships with parents, local stakeholders, and community leaders to share responsibility for student learning. They leveraged available resources through collaboration with government and non-government organizations and maintained open lines of communication to foster trust and inclusive decision-making. These practices were particularly vital in geographically isolated and resource-limited contexts, where collective effort and clarity in communication were essential for sustaining school operations and addressing local educational challenges.

Teachers affirmed these leadership practices, highlighting how collaborative efforts and transparent communication strengthened school-community ties and improved educational outcomes. They recognized the school heads' role in uniting the community around shared goals, efficiently utilizing limited resources, and creating an inclusive environment where their voices were heard. Teachers viewed this participatory approach as a key driver of school resilience, especially in contexts where external support was minimal. Together, these perspectives illustrated how school heads fostered a culture of openness, trust, and shared responsibility, essential qualities for building responsive and resilient school communities in last mile areas of the Davao Region.

School Heads' Perspective: Empowering Community Engagement

From the perspective of school heads, empowering community engagement involved building strong partnerships with stakeholders and fostering shared responsibility for leading education in last mile schools. By organizing community meetings, actively listening to concerns, and involving community members in decision-making, school leaders promoted transparency, trust, and a shared vision. This inclusive approach is essential in last mile schools, where collective effort is key to overcoming limited resources and achieving sustainable educational outcomes. The significance of empowering community engagement from school heads is evident in the following excerpt:

> [SH2_S2] *I **build strong partnerships with the community and stakeholders** to provide **resources and create a shared responsibility for education**.*

The excerpt underscored the critical role of empowering community engagement as a resilient leadership practice in last mile schools. School head [SH2_S2] emphasized the importance of building strong partnerships with the community and stakeholders, suggesting a proactive approach to securing additional resources and fostering shared responsibility for educational outcomes. This indicated a recognition that, in last mile schools, school success depends not only on internal capacity but also on mobilizing external support and reinforcing collective ownership of educational goals.

Teachers' Perspective: Empowering Community Engagement

From the teachers' perspective, empowering community engagement has been affirmed as a resilient leadership practice of school heads. Teachers have echoed the views of school heads, recognizing the importance of involving parents, local leaders, and other stakeholders in school activities and decision-making. They have confirmed that strong community ties fostered by the school heads promote a

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collaborative environment, increase resource support, and strengthen the shared commitment to student success. This alignment between school heads and teachers highlights a unified approach to resilient leadership in last mile schools. The significance of empowering community engagement from teachers is evident in following excerpt:

> [T1_S1] *Community engagement to **build strong relationships** with **local communities, parents, and stakeholders** to support student learning and well-being.*

Teachers recognize that community engagement is vital in supporting student learning and fostering overall well-being. As highlighted in [T1_S1], building strong relationships with local communities, parents, and stakeholders created a supportive environment where learners can thrive. This collaboration allows schools to better respond to students' needs and promotes shared responsibility for their educational success.

School Heads' Perspective: Leveraging Available Resources

A vital perspective in resilient leadership has been leveraging available resources, which emphasizes the strategic use of local assets and partnerships to enhance educational opportunities. This approach has been especially crucial in last mile schools, where leaders have had to creatively utilize limited resources to meet the diverse needs of their students. The importance of leveraging available resources from school heads is illustrated in the following excerpt:

> [SH1_S3] *We are resourceful in terms **of leveraging local resources and partnerships with NGOs**.*

The excerpt illustrated the resourcefulness of school heads in last mile schools, particularly in leveraging local resources and forming partnerships with NGOs, as noted in [SH1_S3]. This strategic collaboration is essential for enhancing educational outcomes in underserved areas. By tapping into local assets, school leaders can create a supportive network that addresses the unique challenges faced by their institutions.

Teachers' Perspective: Leveraging Available Resources

A crucial perspective in resilient leadership has been leveraging available resources, which underscored the importance of utilizing both internal and external assets to enhance the effectiveness of last mile schools. This approach has been vital for school heads who seek to create sustainable educational environments despite facing significant challenges. The significance of leveraging available resources from teachers is highlighted in the following excerpt:

> [T2_S6] *Our school head helps make our last-mile school resilient by regularly preparing everyone for emergencies through drills and training, **ensuring that we have a reliable supply of water and electricity, and closely collaborating with the community, local government, and NGOs to gather resources and support.***

In [T2_S6], the school head strengthened resilience in a last mile school through emergency preparedness, ensuring regular drills and training to equip staff and students for crises. They also secure basic utilities like water and electricity to maintain school operations. By collaborating closely with the community, local government, and NGOs, the school head broadens support networks, mobilizing resources that help the school adapt and remain stable during challenges.

School Heads' Perspective: Maintaining Transparent Communication

From the school heads' perspective, maintaining transparent communication was a vital aspect of resilient leadership. It involved fostering open and honest dialogue with all stakeholders teachers, parents, students, and community members—to build trust and ensure that everyone worked toward shared goals. In last mile schools, where collaboration was essential to overcome challenges, transparent communication helped align efforts, addressed concerns early, and strengthened collective commitment to the school's success. The significance of maintaining transparent communication from school heads is illustrated in the following excerpt:

> [SH1_S17] *We keep **open lines of communication** with our parents, guardians, sitio leaders, and barangay officials to foster **trust and collaboration**.*

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In [SH1_S17], the school head highlighted the practice of maintaining open lines of communication with key stakeholders such as parents, guardians, sitio leaders, and barangay officials. This consistent engagement builds trust and fosters collaboration, which is crucial for mobilizing support and ensuring the success of school programs, especially in last mile school settings.

Teachers' Perspective: Maintaining Transparent Communication

From the teachers' perspective, maintaining transparent communication has been a key element of resilient leadership, and we have affirmed the school head's consistent efforts in promoting open and effective dialogue within the school community. In last mile schools, this transparency has helped build trust, encouraged collaboration, and created a supportive environment where teachers, parents, and stakeholders have worked together toward shared educational goals. Such leadership has fostered unity and positively impacted student outcomes, especially in challenging contexts. The importance of maintaining transparent communication from teachers is reflected in the following excerpt:

> [T2_S28] ***Strong community engagement***, *emotional intelligence, and* ***effective communication*** *are key to building* ***trust*** *and support.*

In [T2_S28], the teacher identified strong community engagement, emotional intelligence, and effective communication as key factors in building trust and gaining support. These elements are vital in creating a resilient and responsive school culture where mutual understanding and cooperation thrive.

Fostering collaborative and transparent school communities is essential in last mile schools, where school heads prioritize collaboration with local stakeholders to enhance educational outcomes. This leadership style fosters a sense of ownership among community members, encouraging them to actively participate in the educational process. teachers affirmed this perspective, noting that such engagement not only enriches the learning environment but also strengthens the partnership between home and school, ultimately benefiting student success. By engaging parents and community organizations, school leaders can gather insights that inform decision-making and tailor strategies to meet local needs (Willis et al., 2021). Such inclusive practices not only build trust but also strengthen the connection between schools and communities, creating a supportive network that promotes student success (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2022).

In addition to fostering collaborative and transparent school communities emphasizes resilience in the face of challenges. School heads who adopt this approach are better equipped to navigate the complexities of last mile education, as they leverage community resources and support to address obstacles (Luo et al., 2023). Resilient leaders actively seek feedback from community members, which helps them adapt their strategies and remain responsive to changing circumstances. This adaptability is crucial in environments where resources are limited and community involvement is vital for sustaining educational initiatives (Judson et al., 2024).

Moreover, fostering collaborative and transparent school communities cultivates a culture of shared responsibility among stakeholders. When school leaders involve community members in governance and decision-making processes, they empower individuals to take ownership of educational outcomes (Aas et al., 2020). This shared leadership model not only enhances accountability but also encourages a collective commitment to student achievement. By creating an environment where everyone feels valued and heard, school heads can foster collaboration that transcends traditional boundaries, enhancing the overall learning experience (León-Jiménez et al., 2020).

Fostering collaborative and transparent school communities aligns closely with Heifetz' (1994) Adaptive Leadership Theory and Burns' (1978) Transformational Leadership Theory. Adaptive leadership emphasized the importance of engaging stakeholders to tackle complex challenges, mirroring the collaborative nature of fostering collaborative and transparent school communities (Heifetz, 1994). By fostering dialogue and encouraging diverse perspectives, adaptive leaders create a shared understanding of community needs, which enhances their ability to navigate uncertainty and implement effective solutions. This collaborative approach not only empowers community members but also builds a resilient educational environment where collective problem-solving becomes the norm.

Similarly, transformational leadership focuses on inspiring and motivating community members to work together toward common goals, fostering a shared vision that enhances educational effectiveness (Burns, 1978). By cultivating strong relationships and encouraging active participation, transformational leaders empower community stakeholders to take ownership of their educational environment, which aligns closely with the principles of fostering collaborative and transparent school communities. This synergy not only enhances collaboration but also drives collective efforts toward sustained improvement and success in schools. Together, these theories provide a robust framework for understanding how community-centered leadership can drive resilience and improvement in last mile schools.

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Volume: 10 | Issue: 6 | June 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

Theme 2: Building Resilient and Supportive Learning Communities

The theme 'Building Resilient and Supportive Learning Communities' emerged from the aligned perspectives of school heads and teachers, both of whom emphasized adaptability, resourcefulness, and collaboration as core leadership practices in last mile schools. School heads shared how they embraced adaptability to adjust to shifting circumstances, such as limited infrastructure, natural disasters, and other disruptions, while remaining focused on sustaining educational delivery. Their resourcefulness was evident in how they maximized available materials, repurposed resources, and engaged the broader community to address operational and instructional needs. Furthermore, they cultivated a culture of support among staff, encouraging teamwork and mutual assistance to navigate challenges together.

Teachers echoed these sentiments, highlighting the significance of school heads' adaptability in ensuring continuity of learning during times of uncertainty. They appreciated the leaders' proactive efforts to create solutions using limited resources and valued their encouragement of collaborative practices within the school. This fostered a sense of unity and collective responsibility among teachers and staff, strengthening the school's capacity to withstand and recover from adversity. Together, these practices not only addressed immediate operational demands but also contributed to the long-term resilience and cohesion of learning communities in last mile schools across the Davao Region.

School Heads' Perspective: Embracing Adaptability

From the school heads' perspective, embracing adaptability has been a crucial aspect of resilient leadership, especially in last mile schools. It involved being flexible and responsive to ever-changing circumstances, which enabled school leaders to navigate challenges effectively. By welcoming new ideas and implementing innovative solutions, school heads have ensured that teaching and learning continued despite limitations, fostering a culture of resilience and continuous improvement. The significance of embracing adaptability from school heads is highlighted in the following excerpt:

> [SH1_S21] *A resilient leader who leads a last mile school should be **flexible** and open to **new ideas**.*

The excerpt reflected school heads' perspectives on embracing adaptability as a key trait of resilient leadership in last mile schools. One school head [SH1_S21] asserted that leading in such challenging contexts requires flexibility and openness to new ideas, suggesting that responsiveness to change is fundamental to effective leadership.

Teachers' Perspective: Embracing Adaptability

From the teachers' perspective, embracing adaptability has been a vital aspect of resilient leadership, especially in last mile schools. They have affirmed the importance of having school heads who are resourceful and flexible when facing challenges. Such adaptability has allowed school leaders to guide the school through difficulties, turn limitations into opportunities, and ensure that teaching and learning continue smoothly despite unfavorable conditions. The significance of embracing adaptability from teachers is reflected in the following excerpt:

> [T2_S1] *School heads in last mile schools show resilience by being **resourceful and adaptable**.*

The excerpt highlighted teachers' perspectives on how school heads embraced adaptability to lead effectively in last mile schools. One teacher [T2_S1] recognized resilience in school heads through their ability to remain resourceful and adaptable, noting that such flexibility allows leaders to respond effectively to complex and evolving challenges.

School Heads' Perspective: Demonstrating Resourcefulness

From the school heads' perspective, demonstrating resourcefulness has been a vital aspect of resilient leadership, especially in last mile schools. It involved being proactive and creative in identifying and utilizing all available resources, whether human, material, or financial, to overcome challenges. By mobilizing support from the community, partners, and stakeholders, school heads ensured that educational operations remained sustainable and effective despite constraints. This resourcefulness has enabled them to maximize what was available and implement innovative approaches, thereby promoting quality education for every learner. The importance of demonstrating resourcefulness from school heads is illustrated in the following excerpt:

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[SH2_S28]***Resourcefulness*** *enables a leader to mobilize support from the community, local government, and other stakeholders to fill gaps and sustain school operations.*

The excerpt illustrated school heads' perspectives on demonstrating resourcefulness as a defining element of resilient leadership in last mile schools. One school head [SH2_S28] emphasized that resourcefulness allows leaders to mobilize support from the community, local government, and other stakeholders, which is essential in bridging gaps and sustaining school operations amid scarcity.

Teachers' Perspective: Demonstrating Resourcefulness

From the teachers' perspective, demonstrating resourcefulness has been a key aspect of resilient leadership, especially in last mile schools. They have recognized how important it is for school heads to creatively maximize limited resources to improve learning outcomes. This quality has enabled leaders to find innovative solutions that support both students and teachers, helping the school to thrive despite challenges and resource constraints. The significance of demonstrating resourcefulness from teachers is reflected in the following excerpt:

[T2_S1]*School heads in last mile schools show resilience by being* ***resourceful*** *and adaptable.*

The excerpt reflected teachers' perspectives on the importance of resourcefulness in the leadership of last mile schools. One teacher [T2_S1] recognized that school heads demonstrate resilience through their ability to be both resourceful and adaptable, indicating that these traits are essential for navigating the constraints of remote and underserved settings.

School Heads' Perspective: Fostering Collaboration and Support

From the school heads' perspective, fostering collaboration and support has been a crucial aspect of resilient leadership. It involved creating and nurturing a cooperative environment where all members of the school community, teachers, students, parents, and stakeholders, worked together toward shared goals. By building strong relationships and promoting open communication, school heads have ensured that everyone feels valued, engaged, and committed to the educational process, which ultimately strengthens the school's capacity to overcome challenges and achieve success. The significance of fostering collaboration and support from school heads is reflected in the following excerpt:

[SH8_S3]*By fostering* ***open communication and collaboration****, I ensure that the school community works together toward common goals.*

The excerpt highlighted school heads' perspectives on fostering collaboration and support as essential to resilient leadership in last mile schools. Complementing this insight, [SH8_S3] described how promoting open communication and collaboration ensures the entire school community works together toward common goals, reinforcing unity and collective effort. Together, these reflections portray collaboration not just as a strategy, but as a foundation for inclusive decision-making and sustained progress, enabling school heads to rally diverse stakeholders around a shared vision of education in underserved areas.

Teachers' Perspective: Fostering Collaboration and Support

From the teachers' perspective, fostering collaboration and support was a vital part of resilient leadership, and they affirmed the school head's efforts in promoting a cooperative culture within the school and the wider community. This focus on teamwork and shared responsibility has empowered teachers and engaged stakeholders, which is essential in overcoming challenges and improving educational outcomes in last mile schools. The importance of fostering collaboration and support from teachers is evident in the following excerpt:

[T9_S1]*Resilient school heads in last mile schools prioritize adaptability, community engagement, and* ***creative problem-solving to effectively lead their schools through challenges.***

The excerpt expressed teachers' perspectives on how school heads foster collaboration and support as integral to sustaining resilience in last mile schools. One teacher [T9_S1] observed that resilient school heads prioritize not only adaptability and problem-solving but also strong community engagement, recognizing collaboration as key to navigating persistent challenges.

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Building resilient and supportive learning communities were pivotal for school heads, particularly in last mile schools where unique challenges prevailed. teachers affirmed this perspective, recognizing that such communities foster collaboration and provide essential support, enabling them to better address the diverse needs of their students. Embracing adaptability was a fundamental trait that allowed leaders to remain flexible and open to innovative ideas. Resilient leaders had to embrace change, viewing it as an opportunity for growth rather than a setback (Halimah et al., 2024). This adaptability not only enabled leaders to respond effectively to the dynamic needs of their students but also fostered a culture of resilience within the school community, encouraging all stakeholders to embrace new approaches to teaching and learning (Luo et al., 2023).

Demonstrating resourcefulness was another essential quality that underpinned effective leadership in these contexts. Leaders who demonstrated resourcefulness were adept at mobilizing community support and creatively utilizing available resources to address challenges (Mogaji & Dimingu, 2024). By leveraging local assets be it financial support, volunteerism, or partnerships with organizations school heads enhanced their schools' capacities to tackle immediate issues while laying the groundwork for long-term sustainability (Maulidi & Mtebe, 2022). This quality empowered leaders to navigate obstacles and reinforced the importance of community involvement in the educational process.

Collaboration and support formed the backbone of a resilient educational environment. Resilient leaders prioritized fostering a collaborative atmosphere among teachers and community members, which was crucial for building a strong support network (Maulana & Wardah, 2023). Such environments encouraged educators to share best practices, seek assistance, and work collectively to address challenges (Fuxman, 2024). This collaborative spirit not only enhanced professional development among teachers but also cultivated a sense of belonging and commitment among all stakeholders, vital for maintaining morale and motivation.

In connecting this building resilient and supportive learning communities to established leadership theories, Heifetz' (1994) Adaptive Leadership Theory and Werner's (2002) Resilience Theory emerged as particularly relevant. Heifetz (1994) emphasized the necessity of adaptability in leadership, encouraging leaders to respond to complex challenges with flexibility. This adaptability allowed leaders to navigate uncertainty by adjusting their strategies and approaches based on the evolving needs of their environment. Moreover, it empowered them to foster a culture of innovation, where team members felt encouraged to experiment with new ideas and solutions without fear of failure.

Meanwhile, Werner (2002) highlighted resilience as a multifaceted construct that encompassed qualities such as resourcefulness and community support. This perspective underscored the importance of building strong networks within the community, as collaborative efforts significantly enhanced a leader's ability to mobilize resources effectively. Additionally, by fostering an environment where individuals felt supported and connected, schools created a solid foundation for overcoming challenges and promoting sustained growth. Together, these theories provided a robust framework for understanding how the core qualities of resilient leadership effectively addressed the unique challenges faced by last mile schools.

Theme 3: Nurturing a Thriving and Empowered School Community

The theme 'Nurturing a Thriving and Empowered School Community' emerged from the shared perspectives of school heads and teachers, who both recognized the importance of fostering a positive school environment, supporting professional growth, and ensuring the well-being of educators. School heads emphasized their role in cultivating a school culture that promotes mutual respect, motivation, and a shared vision. They viewed teacher development as a strategic investment, organizing capacity-building initiatives, mentoring programs, and opportunities for professional advancement. Additionally, they prioritized teacher well-being by creating supportive systems that acknowledged personal and professional challenges, thereby enhancing morale and performance.

Teachers affirmed these practices, noting how a positive school culture led by supportive leadership increased job satisfaction and strengthened their commitment to teaching. They expressed appreciation for school heads who actively supported their development through training and collaborative learning, particularly in the challenging contexts of last mile schools. The emphasis on well-being from addressing workloads to providing emotional support fostered resilience among educators, enabling them to perform effectively despite resource constraints. Together, these perspectives highlighted how empowering teachers through culture, development, and care contributes to a dynamic and resilient educational community.

School Heads' Perspective: Cultivating a Positive School Culture

From the school heads' perspective, cultivating a positive school culture has been a foundational aspect of resilient leadership. It has involved fostering an environment where collaboration, trust, and empowerment have thrived among all members of the school

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EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 10 | Issue: 6 | June 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

community. By promoting these values, school heads have ensured that teachers, students, and staff feel valued, motivated, and inspired to actively contribute to the school's educational mission and collective success. The significance of cultivating a positive school culture from school heads is highlighted in the following excerpt:

> [SH8_S2]*Empowering teachers and staff recognize the importance of teamwork and build trust with the teachers and staff, creating an environment where everyone feels valued and motivated.*

The excerpt highlighted school heads perspectives on cultivating a positive school culture as a key component of effective leadership in last mile schools. Expanding on this, [SH8_S2] described the importance of empowering teachers and building trust through teamwork, resulting in an environment where all staff feel valued and motivated.

Teachers' Perspective: Cultivating a Positive School Culture

From the teachers' perspective, cultivating a positive school culture has been a fundamental aspect of resilient leadership, and they have affirmed the school head's commitment to creating an environment that encourages feedback, collaboration, and empowerment among educators. This supportive atmosphere has been vital for fostering an inclusive and responsive learning environment that meets the diverse needs of students in last mile schools. The significance of cultivating a positive school culture from teachers is evident in the following excerpt:

> [T10_S20]*The school head empowers teachers through professional development and promote adaptive teaching methods.*

The excerpt revealed teachers' perspectives on how school heads cultivate a positive school culture by valuing teacher input and fostering professional growth in last mile schools. [T10_S20] emphasized the role of professional development and adaptive teaching strategies in empowering teachers, which contributes to a more dynamic and supportive learning environment.

School Heads' Perspective: Prioritizing Teacher Development

From the school heads' perspective, prioritizing teacher development has been a critical aspect of resilient leadership. It involved investing in the continuous growth and professional development of educators to enhance their effectiveness and adaptability in the classroom. By focusing on equipping teachers with the necessary skills and strategies, school heads ensured that educators were prepared to meet the evolving needs of their students and contributed to improved learning outcomes. The significance of prioritizing teacher development from school heads is evident in the following excerpt:

> [SH1_S19]*I provide professional development to my teachers that focuses on resilience, problem-solving, and innovative teaching strategies.*

The excerpt showcased school heads' perspectives on prioritizing teacher development as a strategic approach to strengthening educational resilience in last mile schools. One school head [SH1_S19] emphasized offering professional development that targets resilience, problem-solving, and innovative teaching strategies skills crucial for navigating complex, resource-constrained environments.

Teachers' Perspective: Prioritizing Teacher Development

From the teachers' perspective, prioritizing teacher development has been a key element of resilient leadership, and they have affirmed the school head's dedication to providing structured opportunities for continuous professional growth. This focus on development has been essential for improving teaching skills and promoting a collaborative learning environment, especially in last mile schools where ongoing support has helped teachers better meet students' needs. The significance of prioritizing teacher development from teachers is illustrated in the following excerpt:

> [T5_S1]*The school head practices resilient leadership in last mile schools is facilitating professional growth through School Learning Action Cells (SLAC), held twice a month.*

The excerpt highlighted teachers' perspectives on how school heads prioritize teacher development as a core element of resilient leadership in last mile schools. One teacher [T5_S1] noted that professional growth is facilitated through bi-monthly School Learning Action Cells (SLAC), reflecting a structured commitment to continuous learning.

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Volume: 10 | Issue: 6 | June 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

School Heads' Perspective: Promoting Teacher Well-Being

From the school heads' perspective, promoting teacher well-being has been a fundamental aspect of resilient leadership. It involved actively supporting the mental, emotional, and physical health of educators as a vital component of creating a thriving school environment. By prioritizing teacher well-being, school heads have helped foster a positive and productive atmosphere where teachers feel valued and empowered, ultimately contributing to better outcomes for both educators and students. The significance of promoting teacher well-being from school heads is evident in the following excerpt:

[SH6_S19]***Prioritizing teacher well-being*** *is essential.*

The excerpt reflected school heads' perspectives on promoting teacher well-being as a vital responsibility of resilient leadership in last mile schools. One school head [SH6_S19] directly asserted that prioritizing teacher well-being is essential, recognizing its centrality to sustaining effective teaching and overall school function.

Teachers' Perspective: Promoting Teacher Well-Being

From the teachers' perspective, promoting teacher well-being has been an essential aspect of resilient leadership, affirming the school heads' efforts to support their mental and emotional health. This commitment has helped create a positive and nurturing environment where teachers feel valued, motivated, and better equipped to carry out their responsibilities effectively, especially in the challenging contexts of last mile schools. The significance of promoting teacher well-being from teachers is highlighted in the following excerpt:

[T9_S22]*Lastly,* ***self-care*** *is vital for teachers.*

The excerpt expressed teachers' perspectives on how school heads promote teacher well-being by creating supportive and emotionally responsive environments in last mile schools. [T9_S22] emphasized that self-care is vital for teachers, underscoring the need for personal and institutional support systems that sustain well-being.

Nurturing a thriving and empowered school community was vital in last mile schools, where school heads prioritized creating an environment that valued and motivated teachers. teachers affirmed this perspective, noting that when they feel supported and appreciated, their commitment to student success and overall school improvement significantly increases. Cultivating a positive school culture fostered a sense of belonging among educators, encouraging them to engage actively in their roles and collaborate with colleagues (Wuletu et al., 2024). By recognizing and celebrating teachers' contributions, school heads boosted morale and created a cohesive atmosphere that directly impacted student learning outcomes (Jacinto, 2022). This foundation of support not only enhanced teacher satisfaction but also cultivated a community focused on shared educational goals.

In addition to cultivating a positive environment, prioritizing professional development was essential for empowering teachers. Continuous training opportunities enabled educators to refine their skills and adapt to the evolving demands of teaching (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). By investing in professional growth, school leaders demonstrated their commitment to enhancing educational quality, which led to improved teaching practices and student success (Alexopoulos & Dimas, 2023). Such initiatives not only equipped teachers with the necessary tools to excel but also instilled confidence in their abilities, fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

Moreover, promoting teacher well-being was a critical component of a supportive school culture that promoted effective learning. When teachers experienced high levels of well-being, they were better able to manage stress and maintain a positive attitude, which significantly enhanced their interactions with students (Zhou et al., 2024). A focus on mental and emotional health allowed educators to build strong relationships with their students, creating an inviting classroom atmosphere conducive to learning (Emeljanovas et al., 2023). Therefore, prioritizing teacher well-being was essential for overall school success, as healthy and happy educators contributed to better student outcomes.

In connecting this theme to established leadership theories, Heifetz' (1994) Adaptive Leadership Theory and Burns' (1978) Transformational Leadership Theory were particularly relevant. Heifetz (1994) emphasized the need for leaders to be adaptable, enabling them to respond effectively to teachers' needs and foster a supportive culture. This adaptability allowed leaders to tailor their approaches based on feedback, ensuring that teachers felt heard and valued. Additionally, it encouraged a proactive stance in addressing emerging challenges, ultimately strengthening the overall school environment.

Similarly, Burns (1978) highlighted the transformational potential of leadership in inspiring and motivating educators, aligning seamlessly with the goal of empowering a positive school culture. This transformational approach encouraged leaders to create a shared

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Volume: 10 | Issue: 6 | June 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

vision that fostered collaboration and commitment among teachers. By actively involving educators in the decision-making process, leaders cultivated a sense of ownership that enhanced both morale and student outcomes. Together, these theories provided a robust framework for understanding how supportive practices could enhance resilience and effectiveness within educational settings.

Theme 4: Creating Inclusive and Holistic Learning Environments for Student Well-Being

The theme 'Creating Inclusive and Holistic Learning Environments for Student Well-Being' emerged from the aligned perspectives of school heads and teachers, who both recognized that resilient leadership in last mile schools goes beyond academic instruction to address the full spectrum of student needs. School heads emphasized promoting holistic development by integrating values education, life skills, and extracurricular opportunities that nurture learners' physical, emotional, social, and cognitive growth. They also ensured students' well-being by creating safe and nurturing spaces. Furthermore, they championed inclusive education by implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies and creating policies that welcome diverse learners, including those with disabilities and those from marginalized backgrounds. School heads also took proactive steps in promoting mental health awareness, recognizing the emotional toll of poverty, displacement, and social exclusion on students.

Teachers echoed these priorities, affirming the need for a whole-child approach to education. They acknowledged how leadership support allowed them to implement inclusive and learner-centered teaching practices that respected cultural identities and individual learning needs. Teachers also stressed the value of school-wide initiatives that fostered emotional well-being, including peer support programs, open communication channels, and collaboration with guidance counselors or external mental health partners. Their shared experiences highlighted that resilient leadership is grounded in empathy, inclusivity, and a deep understanding of student well-being, crucial elements in cultivating supportive learning environments in last mile schools across the Davao Region.

School Heads' Perspective: Promoting Holistic Development

From the school heads' perspective, promoting holistic development has been a fundamental aspect of resilient leadership. It involved nurturing the whole child by integrating social-emotional learning, life skills, and health education into the school's educational framework. School heads recognized that academic success has been deeply connected to students' emotional and social well-being. By supporting this approach, they ensured that learners were equipped not only with academic knowledge but also with the essential skills needed to navigate life's challenges and grow into well-rounded individuals. The significance of promoting holistic development from school heads is evident in the following excerpt:

> [SH1_S20] *This helps them develop and enhance their **capabilities**, and we also incorporate **social-emotional learning** in the curriculum to help learners develop **coping skills and resilience**.*

The excerpt reflected school heads' perspectives on promoting holistic development by addressing both the academic and emotional needs of learners in last mile schools. One school head [SH1_S20] emphasized the incorporation of social-emotional learning (SEL) into the curriculum as a way to help students develop coping skills and resilience, recognizing that emotional strength is just as critical as academic ability.

Teachers' Perspective: Promoting Holistic Development

From the teachers' perspective, promoting holistic development affirmed the school heads' resilient leadership in nurturing every aspect of a learner's growth intellectual, emotional, social, and ethical. Especially in last mile schools, we recognized how this comprehensive approach has helped students build resilience, adapt to challenges, and thrive both academically and personally, even in difficult circumstances. The significance of promoting holistic development from teachers is highlighted in the following excerpt:

> [T1_S3] *Give great importance to **values education** by inculcating the values of respect and self-discipline to the students as to mold them into **better individuals**.*

The excerpt highlighted teachers' perspectives on promoting holistic development as a central aim of school leadership in last mile schools. One teacher [T1_S3] emphasized the importance of values education, particularly in instilling respect and self-discipline, as a means of shaping students into well-rounded individuals.

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Volume: 10 | Issue: 6 | June 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

School Heads' Perspective: Ensuring Students Well Being

From the school heads' perspective, ensuring students' well-being has been a critical aspect of resilient leadership. It involved recognizing and addressing the diverse challenges that students faced, such as poverty, long commutes, and other socio-economic hardships. By understanding these realities, school heads have implemented responsive interventions and created a supportive environment where all learners feel safe, valued, and empowered to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. The importance of ensuring students' well-being from school heads is evident in the following excerpt:

> [SH1_S7] *Most especially, we focus on the holistic development of every learner by promoting* ***social-emotional learning, life skills, and health education****.*

The excerpt reflected school heads' perspectives on ensuring student well-being through comprehensive and context-sensitive approaches in last mile schools. One school head [SH1_S7] emphasized the importance of promoting holistic development by incorporating social-emotional learning, life skills, and health education into the curriculum, recognizing that supporting students extends beyond academics.

Teachers' Perspective: Ensuring Students Well Being

From the teachers' perspective, ensuring students' well-being has been a key aspect of resilient leadership, affirming the school heads' commitment to creating a supportive and inclusive environment that prioritizes students' mental and emotional health. This focus has been vital for helping students succeed both academically and socially, especially in the challenging contexts of last mile schools. The significance of ensuring students' well-being from teachers is reflected in the following excerpt:

> [T6_S5] *School head will also prioritize the* ***mental health and well-being*** *of teachers and students to help them stay strong and focused.*

The excerpt expressed teachers' perspectives on how school heads ensure student well-being by fostering emotionally safe and inclusive learning environments in last mile schools. [T6_S5] pointed out that school heads prioritize the mental health of both teachers and students, highlighting the belief that collective well-being strengthens focus and resilience within the school community.

School Heads' Perspective: Fostering Inclusive Education

From the school heads' perspective, fostering inclusive education has been a vital aspect of resilient leadership. It has involved a strong commitment to ensuring that all learners, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, have had equitable access to quality educational opportunities. By promoting inclusivity, school heads have created a diverse and supportive learning environment that addresses the unique needs of every student, enabling all learners to thrive and succeed. The significance of fostering inclusive education from school heads is highlighted in the following excerpt:

> [SH1_S16] *We also implement* ***differentiated instruction*** *where* ***cultural concepts*** *are being incorporated to meet the* ***diverse learning needs*** *of our learners.*

The excerpt highlighted school heads' perspectives on fostering inclusive education as a strategic response to the diverse and often marginalized realities of learners in last mile schools. One school head [SH1_S16] shared the implementation of differentiated instruction that incorporates cultural concepts, a method designed to respect learners' backgrounds while addressing varied learning needs.

Teachers' Perspective: Fostering Inclusive Education

From the teachers' perspective, fostering inclusive education has been a vital part of resilient leadership, affirming the school heads' dedication to creating a safe and supportive school culture where every student feels valued and included. This emphasis on inclusivity has been crucial for promoting student well-being and ensuring positive learning outcomes, especially in last mile schools. The significance of fostering inclusive education from teachers is evident in the following excerpt:

> [T10_S10] *The school head supports student well-being and promote an* ***inclusive, safe****, and* ***supportive school culture****.*

The excerpt reflected teachers' perspectives on how school heads foster inclusive education by cultivating supportive and collaborative school environments in last mile contexts. One teacher [T10_S10] noted that the school head actively promotes student well-being while

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EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 10 | Issue: 6 | June 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

building an inclusive, safe, and supportive school culture an approach that ensures every learner feels seen and valued regardless of their background.

School Heads' Perspective: Focusing Mental Health Awareness

From the school heads' perspective, focusing on mental health awareness has been a crucial aspect of resilient leadership. It has involved prioritizing the emotional well-being of both students and staff by creating a supportive and understanding school environment. By emphasizing mental health, school heads have helped individuals develop essential coping skills and resilience, enabling them to thrive academically, socially, and personally. The significance of focusing on mental health awareness from school heads is reflected in the following excerpt:

> [SH1_S20] *This helps them develop and enhance their capabilities, and we also incorporate **social-emotional learning** in the curriculum to help learners develop **coping skills** and r**esilience**.*

The excerpt reflected school heads' perspectives on focusing mental health awareness as a key component of educational leadership in last mile schools. One school head [SH1_S20] emphasized the integration of social-emotional learning into the curriculum to help students build coping skills and resilience, underscoring the importance of mental and emotional development alongside academic growth.

Teachers' Perspective: Focusing Mental Health Awareness

From the teachers' perspective, focusing on mental health awareness has been an essential aspect of resilient leadership, affirming the school heads' commitment to promoting emotional well-being for both students and educators. This priority has been vital for creating a supportive environment where everyone can succeed academically and personally, especially in challenging last mile school settings. The importance of emphasizing mental health awareness from teachers is highlighted in the following excerpt:

> [T6_S5] *The school head will also prioritize the **mental health and well-being** of teachers and students to help them stay strong and focused.*

The excerpt highlighted teachers' perspectives on the importance of mental health awareness as an essential aspect of school leadership in last mile schools. [T6_S5] pointed out that school heads who prioritize the mental health of both teachers and students help ensure that the school community remains strong and focused amidst daily challenges.

Creating inclusive and holistic learning environments for student well-being was vital in last mile schools, where school heads prioritized fostering an atmosphere that valued and supported students. Teachers affirmed this perspective, noting that when students feel valued and nurtured, their engagement in the educational process significantly increases, leading to improved outcomes. School heads adopted a comprehensive approach that addressed not only academic achievement but also the emotional and social well-being of students (Sargiotis, 2024). By promoting holistic development, leaders created an environment where students felt valued and supported in all aspects of their lives, promoting a more balanced educational experience (Henriksen & Gruber, 2024). This focus on the whole child ensured that various dimensions of student growth were nurtured, leading to improved learning outcomes and personal development.

Moreover, ensuring well-being being was paramount in creating an inclusive educational environment. School leaders were tasked with implementing practices that promoted mental health awareness among students, recognizing that emotional support was essential for academic success (Daly et al., 2025). By focusing mental health awareness into the school culture, leaders destigmatized mental health issues and encouraged students to seek help when needed (Frazier & Fosco, 2024). This proactive approach not only enhanced individual student well-being but also cultivated a supportive community where students felt safe and empowered to thrive.

Fostering inclusive education was another critical aspect of student-centered leadership, as it ensured that all students, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities, had access to quality learning experiences. Leaders championed inclusive practices that accommodated diverse learning needs, fostering an environment where every student could succeed (Tang, 2023). By promoting collaboration among educators to share best practices and resources, school heads created a unified effort to support all learners, ultimately enhancing the overall educational experience (Goyibova et al., 2025). This commitment to inclusivity empowered students to embrace their unique identities and contribute meaningfully to the school community.

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EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 10 | Issue: 6 | June 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

Connecting this theme to established leadership theories, Heifetz' (1994) Adaptive Leadership Theory and Burns' (1978) Transformational Leadership Theory were particularly relevant. Heifetz (1994) emphasized the need for leaders to be adaptable, enabling them to respond effectively to the diverse needs of students and foster an inclusive culture. This adaptability allowed leaders to implement flexible strategies that accommodated varying learning styles, ensuring that all students felt supported and engaged. Additionally, by remaining responsive to feedback from both students and educators, leaders continuously refined their approaches to meet the evolving demands of the school community.

Similarly, Burns (1978) highlighted the transformational potential of leadership in inspiring and motivating educators to embrace inclusivity, aligning seamlessly with the goal of empowering all students. By fostering a shared vision of inclusivity, leaders galvanized teachers to adopt innovative practices that catered to diverse learners, enhancing overall educational outcomes. Additionally, this transformational approach encouraged collaboration among staff, creating a unified effort to support every student's unique needs and aspirations. Together, these theories provided a robust framework for understanding how inclusive student-centered leadership could enhance resilience and effectiveness within educational settings.

Theme 5. Leading with Innovation, Empathy, and Resilience

The emerging theme 'Leading with Innovation, Empathy, and Resilience' reflects the shared perspectives of school heads and teachers on the essential qualities of leadership in last mile schools. School heads demonstrated resilience by effectively managing crises, ensuring continuity of learning during disruptions such as natural disasters. They embraced innovation by integrating technology and alternative learning strategies, even in resource-constrained environments, to maintain instructional delivery. Furthermore, school heads practiced empathic leadership, showing genuine concern for the emotional and psychological well-being of both students and staff. This empathetic approach helped foster trust and a sense of security, which are crucial in sustaining morale and motivation during challenging times.

Teachers affirmed these leadership practices, recognizing the importance of adaptive and compassionate leadership in sustaining educational progress. They highlighted how school heads' openness to innovation allowed them to reach students despite connectivity issues and physical distance. Teachers also appreciated the empathic stance of school leaders, particularly in addressing their professional and personal struggles, which created a culture of mutual support. Their accounts emphasized that resilient school leadership is not only about strategic crisis response, but also about fostering a people-centered, forward-looking school community capable of navigating adversity with creativity and care.

School Heads' Perspective: Integrating Innovation and Technology Integration

From the school heads' perspective, integrating innovation and technology has been a pivotal aspect of resilient leadership. It involved leveraging digital tools and creative teaching methods to transform learning experiences and overcome the unique challenges faced by schools, especially those in underserved areas. By embracing innovation, school heads have enhanced educational delivery and ensured that learners have had access to relevant and engaging opportunities for growth. The significance of integrating innovation and technology from school heads is evident in the following excerpt:

> [SH1_S6] *We explore **innovative ways to integrate technology** in teaching and learning.*

The excerpt reflected school heads' perspectives on integrating innovation and technology as a strategic response to the limitations and demands of last mile education. One school head [SH1_S6] highlighted efforts to explore innovative ways of integrating technology into teaching and learning, demonstrating a proactive stance in modernizing instruction despite infrastructural constraints.

Teachers' Perspective: Integrating Innovation and Technology Integration

From the teachers' perspective, integrating innovation and technology has been a key aspect of resilient leadership that supported and affirmed the school heads' efforts to adopt flexible teaching methods and creatively use available resources. This emphasis has been crucial for meeting the evolving demands of modern education and enhancing learning experiences, especially in last mile schools with limited access to technology. The significance of integrating innovation and technology from teachers is highlighted in the following excerpt:

> [T10_S7] *The school head prioritize flexible teaching methods and **innovative use of resources, including technology**.*

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EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 10 | Issue: 6 | June 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

The excerpt reflected teachers' perspectives on the importance of innovation and technology integration as key elements of effective school leadership in last mile schools. [T10_S7] pointed out that school heads prioritize flexible teaching methods and innovative use of resources, including technology, to enhance learning experiences despite infrastructural limitations.

School Heads' Perspective: Practicing Empathic Leadership

From the school heads' perspective, practicing empathic leadership has been a fundamental aspect of resilient leadership. It has involved understanding and addressing the emotional needs of both students and staff, fostering a compassionate and supportive school environment. By leading with empathy, school heads have helped ensure that everyone feels valued, heard, and motivated to overcome challenges together. The significance of practicing empathic leadership from school heads is underscored in the following excerpt:

> [SH8_S21] *By leading with **empathy**, I ensure that students and staff feel **supported, valued**, and motivated to keep striving despite hardships.*

The excerpt highlighted school heads' perspectives on practicing empathic leadership as a cornerstone of resilience and relational effectiveness in last mile schools. One school head [SH8_S21] emphasized the importance of leading with empathy to ensure that both students and staff feel supported, valued, and motivated, particularly in the face of persistent hardships. This approach fosters a nurturing environment where individuals are more likely to remain engaged and committed.

Teachers' Perspective: Practicing Empathic Leadership

From the teachers' perspective, practicing empathic leadership has been a vital part of resilient leadership that affirms the school heads' commitment to understanding and addressing the emotional needs of students and the entire school community. This approach has fostered a caring and supportive environment where everyone feels valued and empowered, helping both educators and learners build resilience and successfully face challenges together. The significance of practicing empathic leadership from teachers is highlighted in the following excerpt:

> [T6_S14] *The school head led by example to inspire **resilience**.*

The excerpt conveyed teachers' perspectives on the value of empathic leadership, highlighting how school heads inspire resilience through emotional connection and leading by example in last mile schools. One teacher [T6_S14] noted that their school head demonstrated resilience through action, serving as a role model for both teachers and students during challenging times.

School Heads' Perspective: Managing Crises and Ensuring Continuity

From the school heads' perspective, managing crises and ensuring continuity has been a critical aspect of resilient leadership. It involved preparing for emergencies by developing comprehensive contingency plans and flexible strategies to ensure that learning continued uninterrupted during challenging times. By proactively navigating crises, school heads have maintained educational stability and safeguarded the well-being and progress of their learners. This focus from school heads is highlighted in the following excerpt:

> [SH2_S8] *I prepare for emergencies with **contingency plans** to ensure **learning continuity** during **crises**.*

The excerpt revealed school heads' perspectives on managing crises and ensuring learning continuity as essential aspects of resilient leadership in last mile schools. [SH2_S8] underscored the importance of having contingency plans in place to maintain educational delivery during emergencies, demonstrating a commitment to safeguarding student learning amid disruption.

Teachers' Perspective: Managing Crises and Ensuring Continuity

From the teachers' perspective, managing crises and ensuring continuity has been a crucial aspect of resilient leadership that reflects the school heads' dedication to maintaining smooth educational operations during difficult times like disasters or emergencies. This focus on problem-solving and adaptability has reassured teachers and students alike, enabling learning to persist despite challenges and helping the whole school community to stay strong and focused. This focus from teachers is evident in the following excerpt:

> [T2_S4] *Our school heads also focus on learners to have **flexible learning methods** during **emergencies**.*

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Volume: 10 | Issue: 6 | June 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

The excerpt reflected teachers' perspectives on how school heads manage crises and ensure educational continuity through proactive planning and adaptive strategies in last mile schools. One teacher [T2_S4] emphasized that school heads prioritize flexible learning methods during emergencies, allowing learners to continue their education despite disruptions.

Leading with innovation, empathy, and resilience in education was vital in last mile schools, where school heads prioritized integrating technology and fostering a culture of innovation. Teachers affirmed this perspective, noting that when school heads model these qualities, it encourages them to adopt new teaching methods and embrace technological tools, significantly enhancing student learning. School heads leveraged modern tools to enhance teaching and learning experiences, ensuring that students were prepared for a rapidly changing world (Halimah et al., 2024). By embracing technology, leaders created dynamic learning environments that not only engaged students but also facilitated personalized learning pathways tailored to individual needs (Ruiz-Rojas et al., 2024). This commitment to innovation helped schools remain relevant and responsive to the demands of contemporary education.

Empathic leadership was another critical dimension of innovative and visionary leadership. School leaders who demonstrated empathy could better understand the challenges faced by both students and staff, creating a supportive and inclusive environment (Linvill & Onosu, 2023). This emotional intelligence allowed leaders to connect with their communities on a deeper level, fostering trust and collaboration (Jenita et al., 2024). By prioritizing empathic leadership, school heads motivated educators and students alike, ensuring that their needs were met while driving forward the school's vision.

Crisis management and continuity were vital components of effective leadership, especially in the face of unexpected challenges. Innovative leaders had to be prepared to adapt swiftly to crises, ensuring that educational processes remained uninterrupted (Azlan et al., 2024). This involved not only having contingency plans in place but also fostering a resilient school culture that could navigate adversity (Brown et al., 2023). By demonstrating strong crisis management skills, leaders-maintained stability and instilled confidence in their school communities, enabling them to focus on learning and growth even during difficult times.

In this context, Heifetz' (1994) Adaptive Leadership Theory and Burns' (1978) Transformational Leadership Theory were particularly relevant. Heifetz (1994) underscored the importance of adaptability in leadership, allowing leaders to navigate complex challenges and respond effectively to changing circumstances. This adaptability fostered a culture of resilience, enabling school heads to implement innovative solutions that met the diverse needs of their students and staff. Burns (1978) emphasized the transformational power of leadership in inspiring and mobilizing stakeholders, which drove collective action. Together, these theories illuminated the critical role of innovative leadership in fostering resilience and success in last mile schools.

CONCLUSIONS

The resilient leadership practices employed by school heads in last mile schools have been marked by a strong commitment to fostering community partnerships, promoting adaptability, and prioritizing the well-being of both teachers and students. By actively engaging with local stakeholders and leveraging available resources, school leaders have created supportive environments that enhance educational outcomes. Emphasizing professional development and mental health awareness has further strengthened the capacity of educators to navigate challenges effectively. This holistic approach has not only addressed immediate needs but has also cultivated a culture of collaboration and innovation, ensuring that both educators and students can thrive in the face of adversity.

By cultivating strong connections and prioritizing collaboration, school leaders not only improve educational experiences but also build resilience within their communities. This comprehensive approach has ultimately led to a thriving educational environment where both students and teachers can succeed despite the challenges they face.

Implications

The insights gained from this study may assist school heads and district administrators in making informed decisions related to policy development and resource allocation. A deeper understanding of effective resilient leadership practices equips these stakeholders to implement context-sensitive strategies that address the specific needs of last mile schools. These strategies could enhance institutional responsiveness, strengthen support systems for teachers and students, and improve overall school functioning. By aligning leadership approaches with local challenges, administrators may foster more sustainable and equitable educational outcomes. Informed leadership at both the school and district levels would likely contribute to long-term improvements in school performance and community trust in educational institutions.

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Volume: 10 | Issue: 6 | June 2025 - Peer Reviewed Journal

This study contributes to the academic discourse on educational leadership by providing insights specific to last mile schools. It establishes a foundation for future research by highlighting the critical role of resilient leadership in addressing unique challenges within underserved educational contexts. Scholars may build on these findings to further investigate how resilience influences leadership effectiveness and student outcomes. Additionally, this research could inspire studies that examine the mechanisms through which resilient practices are developed and sustained in different cultural and geographic settings. Expanding this body of knowledge would support the refinement of leadership models tailored to marginalized or remote communities. Ultimately, the study encourages ongoing scholarly inquiry that deepens understanding of how resilient leadership shapes educational practices and contributes to equity in education.

Implications for Practice. In educational management, effective practices derived from this study on resilient leadership in last mile schools emphasize the importance of building strong community partnerships, fostering adaptability, and promoting a supportive school culture. School heads who actively engage with local stakeholders, NGOs, and parents may establish collaborative networks that optimize resource utilization and address context-specific challenges. Such engagement could strengthen school-community relationships, enabling more tailored and sustainable solutions to the unique issues faced by last mile schools.

Additionally, prioritizing continuous professional development for teachers enables them to implement innovative teaching methods and adapt effectively to diverse student needs. Creating a safe and supportive environment, combined with transparent communication and empathetic leadership, further strengthens the school's capacity to address mental health concerns and promote student well-being. Together, these practices contribute to a resilient educational framework that enhances both teaching effectiveness and student outcomes in last mile contexts.

Implications for Policy. Developing or enhancing school resilience in last mile schools aligns closely with the principles outlined in DepEd Memorandum No. 59, s. 2019, which prioritizes the development of last mile schools through efforts aimed at reaching out and closing educational gaps. Policymakers may focus on comprehensive training programs that equip both educators and school heads with innovative strategies and practical tools to effectively navigate the unique challenges present in these contexts. Investing in ongoing professional development for school leaders enhances their leadership capabilities, adaptability, and capacity to cultivate supportive and resilient school cultures. Concurrent investment in the growth of both teachers and school heads could lead to improvements in educational quality and increased student engagement. Ultimately, such policy initiatives contribute to more equitable and effective educational outcomes in marginalized and underserved areas.

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