

Exploring Leadership Challenges in Implementing Primary Education in Far Flung Areas

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study was to explore the leadership challenges in implementing primary education in far flung areas. The study was conducted in Tugunan Elementary School, Inupuan Elementary School, New Daus Elementary School, San Vicente Elementary School and Sasa Elementary School, Nabunturan, Davao de Oro. Phenomenological study was used as the research design and purposive sampling was used to select the five key participants. The researcher adhered to the criteria that required participants to attend the remote school for at least two academic years. Participants' identities were kept confidential for safety and ethical reasons. The results of the study revealed that they experienced passing a challenging road to school, difficult handling in transporting of modules, and weather disturbances. School heads describing their situation as difficult and challenging, making efforts for parents' involvement and difficult in handling multi-grade classes. The challenges encountered by the participants were teaching and school management at same time, handling multi-grade classes, lack of parent's involvement, transporting of modules, slow performing students, and making a conducive learning environment. The challenges develop the academic performance are conduct reading program, making a nice school, unity and cooperation and parents' involvement. Their coping mechanism were community harmonious relationship, having a good value, good management of school funds. The best practices developed conduct of reading program, implementing project watch, yearly feeding program, conduct of school festival of talents, and conduct of brigada eskwela.

Keyword: Leadership challenges, coping mechanism, best practices, far-flung areas, phenomenological.

1. INTRODUCTION

School heads are met with different leadership challenges as they implement education in the far-flung areas. Challenges that include being professionally and geographically isolated (Hansen, 2018). Dealing with several challenges in implementing education entails a ton of determination and passion. According to Day, Gu and Sammons (2016), the main purpose of instructional leadership is to focus on the efforts and initiative to improve teaching and learning practice. School principal plays an important role, creating an environment that facilitates teacher learning and school improvement. The major position in the school is held by the school head, who serves as the educational leader. As a crucial part of the school, they are charged with two crucial duties: managing the institution and supervising the staff members engaged in the teaching and learning process. They organize everything in the school, including the infrastructure, the personnel, the curriculum, instructional strategies, extracurricular activities, and more.

In a study involving eight rural principals located in remote parts of Australia, Lock et al. (2012) discovered that lack of personal privacy was a problem for rural leaders. The head of school must be able to adapt quickly to rural life, live in the neighborhood where the school is located, join community groups, take part in local

activities, and serve as an example in terms of work, behavior, social interaction, cultural awareness, and religion. (Clarke & Stevens, 2006; Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Harmon & Schafft, 2009).

In the Philippines, there are areas where total school enrolment is low, or there is lack of teachers, making it necessary to combine different grade levels and enable the school head to act as a teacher, a multi-grade teacher. Hence, in remote places, multi-grade schools are present to endure significant contributions to education for all movements. As of the Academic year 2008-2009, 12,225 of 37,697 public elementary schools were multi-grade (Villalino, 2010).

In the Nabunturan East District, Division of Davao De Oro, there are schools that are situated in far flung areas and the researcher would like to explore the leadership challenges experienced by the school heads as they implement primary education. According to observations and statements from some teachers and school heads, it is quite challenging for them to travel to school when there are landslides and flash floods, making it difficult for them to arrive on time; handling classes while being a school head, because whenever the school lacks enough teachers, the head of the school must step in and take over even though they have many duties and coordinator ship; and lack of support from the parents when it comes to students assessment. Given that there are various schools around Nabunturan East District located in far flung areas, the researcher is intrigued to conduct this investigation on exploring leadership challenges in implementing primary education.

2. METHODS

This chapter deals with the discussion of the methods used in the study. It includes the explanation of the research design, research locale, role of the researcher, research participants, analysis of the data, trustworthiness and credibility and ethical consideration.

2.1 Research Design

In the pursuit of exploring the leadership challenges of school heads in implementing primary education in the far-flung areas of Nabunturan East District, this study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design. Essentially, it facilitates a deeper understanding of a certain phenomenon being lived through as described by the participants (Creswell, 2014; Giorgi, 2012). The purpose of this was to explore the experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights faced by school heads in far-flung areas of the Nabunturan East District. Therefore, this strategy is appropriate for this investigation. Additionally, Creswell (2007) pointed out that a phenomenological investigation explains the significance of an idea or phenomenon for a number of people based on their common experiences.

2.2 Research Locale

This study was conducted in five schools in far-flung areas of Nabunturan East District where the five chosen school heads were assigned: Tugunan Elementary School, Inupuan Elementary School, New Daus Elementary School, San Vicente Elementary School, and Sasa Elementary School.

Nabunturan is a first-class municipality and capital of the province of Davao de Oro. On July 23, 1957, by virtue of Republic Act No. 2039. Nabunturan was once a barangay of the Municipality of Compostela, and the origin name is from the word “buntod” which means mountain. The people celebrate its Founding Anniversary every 23rd day of July. Simballay Festival is celebrated every 2nd week of December as the town’s cultural festival. It is an annual festivity coined from Mansaka word meaning “Togetherness, sharing and thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest.” The municipality of Nabunturan is comprised of 28 barangays. Agricultural activities are the people’s main source of income and livelihood in these barangays. Rice, coconut, cacao, coffee, papaya, mango, pineapple, durian and banana are some of its most popular agricultural crops.

Nabunturan has two Districts, the Nabunturan West and Nabunturan East District. The study is to be conducted to the far-flung schools and manage by Teacher In-charge in Nabunturan East District namely Tugunan Elementary School, Inupuan Elementary School, New Daus Elementary School, San Vicente Elementary School and Sasa Elementary School.

Tugunan Elementary School was opened last 2003 with only one teacher teaching grade 1 and grade 2. The school continued to grow in school year 2008-2009 the Local Government of Nabunturan provided one teacher to complete the need of teacher in school. In school year 2008-2009 it became a complete elementary school with three teachers from Kindergarten- Grade 6. The teachers are teaching in multi-grade. The school is located in sitio

Mangitngit of Barangay Katipunan, Nabunturan, Davao de Oro. People must ride a motorcycle from the poblacion for more than an hour just to reach the school.

Inupuan Elementary school was opened on June 23, 2010. It is in the far area of Barangay Mainit, Nabunturan, Davao de Oro. Inupuan Elementary School has three regular teachers. It is a multi-grade school. Some of the learners belong to an IP community. The livelihood of the parents is mostly through mining and people have to ride a motorcycle for more than one hour from the Poblacion.

New Daus Elementary School is a public elementary school located in Barangay New Daus, Nabunturan, Davao de Oro. The school has three teachers handling multi-grade classes and another task related to work. In order to reach the school, people have to ride a motorcycle from the poblacion for more than an hour.

San Vicente Elementary School is located in San Vicente, Nabunturan, Davao de Oro. The school has three teachers handling multi-grade classes and other coordinatorship. In order to reach the school, people have to ride a motorcycle from the poblacion for more than an hour.

Sasa Elementary School is a school located Barangay Sasa in Nabunturan, Davao de Oro. In order to reach the Barangay Sasa proper, people have to ride a motorcycle for half an hour from the Poblacion. The school has three teachers handling multi-grade classes and other related work in school.

2.3 Research Participants

There were the five school heads who were purposively chosen as participants of the study. They were chosen since they were the ones who handled the five public elementary schools in far-flung areas in Nabunturan East District and who had been serving the school for at least three years as school heads. In gathering the data, an In-depth interview (IDI) was used.

2.4 Role of the Researcher

The researcher oversaw selecting and gathering participants for the study, as well as evaluating the validity of the research findings. The researcher itself had to follow the seven roles of a researcher that was proposed by Fink (2000) which are the gathering, encoding, transcribing, thematizing, analyzing, confirming, and reporting.

2.5 Data Collection Procedure

To attain the goal of this study, this qualitative research necessitated extensive and methodological processes. Creswell (2007) mentioned that qualitative researchers are tied up in a series of activities in the process of collecting data. Thus, the researcher will take part in a series of activities that will start with the conceptualization phase and continue through the data collection phase and until the findings of this research.

The researcher sent a letter to the Schools Division Superintendent prior to the conduct of the study to request permission. After receiving an approval, a new letter was written to the Public Schools District Supervisor and all qualified participants who are school heads or principals. The interview guide was thoroughly validated, and a proper protocol and standard operating procedures was done through the following:

First, the participants' availability was confirmed, and they were informed of the purpose of the study and asked for permission to participate. The participants were informed that any confidential information would be handled with the utmost confidentiality.

Second, the interview adhered to safety health protocol such as following social distancing, wearing of face mask by the participants and the researcher.

Third, the researcher asked permission from each of the participants to have the interview recorded to ensure that no biases and data manipulation will take place in the further stages of the study.

Fourth, the interview was audio recorded through a mobile phone. The whole conversation during the interview was recorded.

And lastly, the audio recorded interview was transcribed word for word to maintain transparency.

2.6 Data Analysis

The gathering of data was followed by data transcription. Gathered data were summarized, transcribed, translated and analyzed. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) defined data analysis in qualitative research as the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, observation notes, or other non-textual materials that the researcher accumulates to increase the understanding of the phenomenon.

To categorize the data for analysis, the researcher first separated out a large amount of raw data by relevant patterns, then they drew importance from the data and created a logical chain of evidence. Additionally, the data processing took place during the findings' transcribing period. After the individual interview was transcribed for this study, comments that related to the issue were broken down into key ideas that reflected into distinct thought. The classification of the data was a part of the data analysis process, which was thoroughly examined in the thematic analysis. To make sure the participant replies were properly analyzed, thematic analysis was carried out.

2.6 Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness is important in evaluating the worth and it was one of the major concerns in qualitative research. To attain trustworthiness and validity of results in this study, four strategies were utilized which are credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability.

Credibility. By selecting the most qualified subjects and using the most appropriate research methodology, the researcher was able to establish credibility. Participants were urged to speak out and freely express their thoughts and feelings. In this study, the researcher determined with certainty whether the research findings represent accurate information derived from the participant's original data and whether they accurately reflect the participant's original viewpoint. the participants' responses.

Dependability. If the study were to be replicated, in the same setting, using the same approach, and including the same subjects, the researcher would be able to demonstrate reliability. They made sure that the study was conducted fairly and honestly. In addition, the researcher used their phone to record the entire interview, which was then transcribed.

Transferability. Shenton (2004) explained that transferability concerns relate to the extent to which the results of the research can be extrapolated, with confidence, to a wider population. In addition, the researcher made sure that the study was transferable by basing their conclusions on the informants' responses and conducting data analysis.

Confirmability. This refers to the neutrality of the data rather than the neutrality of the researcher and audit trail, which focus on the product (Silverman, 2001). The researcher made use of confirmability by remaining objective, avoiding biases, and distancing from outside influences that might emerge throughout the course of the investigation.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Knowing the responsibility of the qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher adhered to the ethical considerations of this study. Informed consent form was given to the informants to signify their interest and willingness to participate and to avoid violating some ethical issues. Emanuel, Wendler & Grady (2000) stated that informed consent is the most common tool in ensuring ethical acceptability. Understanding that research subjects, the researcher was of all possible dangers, advantages, and alternatives to the study and was willing to engage in it without being coerced is the goal of informed consent.

Ethics must be built around the idea of a researcher's integrity and must aim to define the traits or virtues they needed to act morally or ethically. There must be no injury of any kind to research participants.

To proceed with this study, the researcher asked permission from the Schools Division Superintendent of Davao de Oro with an endorsement letter from the graduate school office of Assumption College of Nabunturan, and in addition to that, permission was obtained from the Public Schools District Supervisor of the Nabunturan East District. When an approval was issued, the researcher immediately approached the potential participants, informing them of the purpose of the study. The researcher also mentioned to the informants that if they were no longer interested in participating in the study, they could decline at any time.

3. FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of the research questions that explored the leadership challenges in implementing primary education in far-flung areas. The various experiences of these school heads were disclosed through an in-depth interview, the research informants were selected through purposive sampling based on the school they are assigned and the length of service in handling far flung schools. In keeping with the research ethics of qualitative research, pseudonyms have been used in order to conceal the identities of the research informants or participants. The presentation of the result was done according to the order of the specific research question used in this study.

What were the experiences encountered by school heads in implementing primary education in far flung areas?

In this section, the findings of the first major research question, “What were the experiences encountered by school heads in implementing primary education in far flung areas?” The responses were presented verbatim; that is transcribing based on the language of the participants used during the interview. Conforming to the research ethics, the identities of the school heads had been concealed to ensure protection regarding to their privacy.

What are your unforgettable experiences implementing primary education in far-flung areas?

This part presents the themes that had emerged from the specific question. There are three themes that were drawn out from the question, “What are your unforgettable experiences implementing primary education in far flung areas?” These are: challenging road to school, difficult handling in transporting of modules, and weather disturbances.

How would you describe your situation implementing primary education in far flung areas?

In this section, the findings of the first major research question, “What were the experiences encountered by school heads in implementing primary education in far flung areas?” The responses were presented verbatim; that is transcribing based on the language of the participants used during the interview. Conforming to the research ethics, the identities of the school heads had been concealed to ensure protection regarding to their privacy. This part presents the themes that had emerged from the specific question. There are three themes that were drawn out from the question, “How would you describe your situation implementing primary education in far flung areas?”. These are: Difficult and challenging, making efforts for parents’ involvement, and difficult in handling multi-grade classes.

What are the leadership challenges encountered by school heads in implementing primary education in far flung areas?

In this section, the findings of the first major research question, “What are the leadership challenges encountered by school heads in implementing primary education in far flung areas?” The responses were presented verbatim; that is transcribing based on the language of the participants used during the interview. Conforming to the research ethics, the identities of the school heads had been concealed to ensure protection regarding to their privacy.

What challenges you encountered in leading the implementation of primary education in far flung areas?

This part presents the themes that had emerged from the specific question. There are six themes that were drawn out from the question, “What challenges you encountered in leading the implementation of primary education in far flung areas?”. These are: Teaching and school management, handling multi-grade classes, lack of parents’ involvement, transporting of modules, slow performing learners and making a conducive learning environment.

What challenges develop the academic performance of the primary education in far flung areas?

This part presents the themes that had emerged from the specific question. There are three themes that were drawn out from the question, “What challenges develop the academic performance of the primary education in far flung areas?”. These are: conduct reading program, making a nice school, unity and cooperation and parents’ involvement.

What are coping mechanisms employed by school heads in facing leadership challenges in implementing primary education in far flung areas?

In this section, the findings of the third major research question, “What coping mechanisms employed by school heads in facing leadership challenges in implementing primary education in far flung areas?” The responses were presented verbatim; that is transcribing based on the language of the participants used during the interview. Conforming to the research ethics, the identities of the school heads had been concealed to ensure protection regarding to their privacy.

Coping Mechanism Employed by School Heads in Facing Leadership Challenges Implementing Primary Education in Far-Flung Areas

This part presents the themes that had emerged from the specific question. There are three (3) themes that were drawn out from the question, “How did you cope with the leadership challenges encountered in implementing primary education in far flung areas?” These are: Community harmonious relationship, having a good values, and good management of school funds.

What are the best practices of the school heads in implementing primary education in far flung areas?

In this section, the findings of the fourth major research question, “What are the best practices in implementing primary education in far flung areas?” The responses were presented verbatim; that is transcribing based on the language of the participants used during the interview. Conforming to the research ethics, the identities of the school heads had been concealed to ensure protection regarding to their privacy.

Best practices of the participants that would help in improving performance in implementing primary education in the far-flung areas

This part presents the themes that had emerged from the specific question. There are five themes that were drawn out from the question, “What are the best practices in implementing primary education in far-flung areas?”. These are: Conduct Reading Program, Implementing Project Watch, Yearly Feeding Program, Conduct of School Festival of Talents, and Conduct Brigada Eskwela.

Advice to future school administrators who will be assigned in the far-flung areas

This part presents the themes that had emerged from the specific question. There are four themes that were drawn out from the question, “What you can share to aspiring school administrators who will be assigned in far-flung areas in implementing primary education?” These are: Hardworking and collaborate with the community, understand situation and being transparent, know how to respect and being fair and create a learner-centered environment.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data that the researcher has gathered; different experiences of school heads were explored as they implement primary education in far flung areas.

The researcher was able to explore experiences and challenges of the school heads assigned in far-flung areas. The researcher was amazed learning about the different experiences and challenges they encountered just to reach the place and provide learning to school children. School heads face different job roles in school that is from administrative to instructional leadership they act as a school head at the same time a classroom adviser and others are handling multi-grade classes. Some of the problems they encountered are lack of parents’ involvement to address this problem school heads and the teaching personnel make actions to address problem by calling their attention through General Parents and Teachers’ Association meeting and homeroom meetings. The participants experienced difficulties in handling or transporting the modules from District Office to school, this was handled by making ways of the school head and stakeholders to solve the problem. Slow performing students were addressed by having a school reading program. School head must be a critical thinker. Think of a solution together with the colleagues and stakeholders to solve the problem that will arise in school. School heads should always think that all the actions and solution they are making, they are accountable of it. And think of they are not only the one facing this fight, but they also have their co-workers, stakeholders and the DepEd family with them. In addition, school heads must always seek for professional growth by enrolling oneself to post graduate degrees and attending trainings and seminars. Seeking for professional growth can help improve oneself and be knowledgeable to your profession and the school and the community can benefit of it. The school is part of the community and when a school head assigned in that school become part of it and he/she established harmonious strong connection to the people and the community.

Becoming a school administrator is not an easy job. All your actions and decisions are accountable to you. It is important to follow the values of integrity accountability, diligence and perseverance. These values guide school administrators in making actions for the school, students and the community. May this study will help open

the minds of the people on the real situation of the school heads and teachers as they implement primary education in far flung areas.

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