LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL HEADS IN LEADING EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of school heads in leading educational institutions, particularly their challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights for future directions in the Digos City Division. Ten (10) school heads with at least three years of leadership experience participated in the study. Using a phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews were conducted to capture their narratives. Thematic analysis provided insights into their leadership journey, focusing on managing schools and overcoming institutional challenges. School heads faced challenges such as lack of social support, time and resource constraints, and transparency issues in administration. These challenges heightened stress, complicated decision-making, and affected school management. To cope, they built support networks, conducted systematic classroom observations, and implemented efficient decision-making strategies. Despite the difficulties, school heads highlighted the importance of fostering a positive school culture, promoting collaboration, and ensuring a clear educational vision. They emphasized the need for stronger institutional support and better resource allocation. The study recommended enhancing educational leadership by strengthening support systems, improving resource management, and fostering collaboration. Future research may explore the role of social support in leadership resilience and strategies to enhance school heads' effectiveness.

Keywords: Educational Institutions, Leading, School heads

1. INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership plays a critical role in shaping the quality and success of schools. School heads, as the primary leaders within educational institutions, are tasked with the responsibility of guiding their schools toward achieving educational goals while ensuring the welfare and development of both students and staff. In the context of the Digos City Division, school heads encounter a variety of challenges as they lead their institutions, ranging from administrative duties to dealing with the socio-cultural and resource-related issues that impact their ability to effectively manage their schools.

Leadership in education is more than simply a managerial role; it requires a deep understanding of the community's needs, the ability to navigate complex systems, and a commitment to fostering an environment conducive to learning and growth. While the theoretical frameworks of educational leadership often focus on the development of professional competencies and leadership skills, there remains a gap in understanding the lived experiences of school heads in the Philippines, particularly those who work in more localized settings such as the Digos City Division. The challenges they face and the coping mechanisms they employ are crucial to ensuring effective school leadership, yet they are often overlooked in academic research.

A critical component of educational leadership is resilience—the ability to respond to and recover from challenges. In many instances, school heads must navigate resource constraints, limited support systems, and the pressures of managing diverse stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, and the community. These stressors can lead to burnout and decreased job satisfaction if not adequately addressed. In the face of such challenges, effective school leaders develop coping strategies that allow them to continue fulfilling their responsibilities while maintaining their own well-being and commitment to educational excellence.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore the lived experiences of school heads in the Digos City Division, focusing on the challenges they encounter, their coping mechanisms, and the insights they have for future leadership practices. By using a phenomenological approach, this research aims to capture the essence of school heads' experiences and provide a deeper understanding of their leadership journey. Through in-depth interviews, the study investigates how these leaders manage the complexities of school administration and what strategies they employ to overcome the obstacles they face. Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on educational leadership by offering a detailed examination of the challenges faced by school heads in the Digos City Division. It also provides practical recommendations for improving leadership practices, strengthening institutional support, and fostering a positive school culture. By understanding the lived experiences of school heads, policymakers and educational stakeholders can better support these leaders in their roles, enhancing the quality of education and the overall success of schools in the region. Educational leaders worldwide are increasingly facing complex challenges that significantly affect the quality and accessibility of education. These challenges have become more pronounced in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused global school closures and disrupted education for over 1.6 billion learners. In countries like the United

States, India, and Brazil, the pandemic exposed and exacerbated existing inequities in education, particularly due to the digital divide. Marginalized students, often from lower-income families or rural areas, lacked access to the necessary technology and internet connectivity required for remote learning. This gap in access led to substantial learning setbacks for these students, further widening the disparities in educational opportunities across the globe (Axios, 2023). As the world transitions to more digitally focused education models, educational leaders are tasked with bridging this divide and ensuring that all students have equal access to the tools they need for learning.

In addition to the challenges created by the digital divide, educational leaders in both developed and developing countries, such as the Philippines and South Africa, are facing difficulties in integrating technology effectively into the learning process. Despite technological advancements, many students still do not have the required devices or stable internet connections to fully participate in online education. This reality has made it difficult for schools to deliver high-quality learning experiences, particularly in rural and underserved areas where infrastructure is often inadequate. The complexity of integrating technology into classrooms goes beyond simply providing devices; it also involves training teachers to use these tools effectively and ensuring that students have the skills to navigate digital learning platforms (UNICEF, 2023). This ongoing challenge calls for a comprehensive approach that includes adequate funding, professional development for educators, and policy changes that prioritize equitable access to technology.

Diversity and inclusion issues are also emerging as significant concerns in educational leadership. In countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, educational institutions continue to be led predominantly by white individuals, despite the increasing diversity of student populations. This lack of representation among school leaders can result in decision-making that may not adequately reflect the needs of diverse student bodies. It also limits the role models and mentors available to students from underrepresented groups. To address this, many countries are now pushing for more inclusive leadership structures that promote diversity at all levels of education. These efforts are aimed at ensuring that educational systems better represent the communities they serve and foster more inclusive learning environments where all students feel valued and supported (Investopedia, 2023).

Financial constraints also pose significant challenges for educational institutions, particularly in higher education. In countries like Australia and the United Kingdom, rising operational costs and declining international student enrollments have put pressure on universities to find new ways of maintaining financial sustainability. As a result, some institutions are considering mergers as a strategy to reduce costs and pool resources. While mergers may offer potential financial benefits, they also raise concerns about the future of educational access, program offerings, and the potential loss of institutional identity. Educational leaders in these regions are grappling with the challenge of balancing financial stability with the need to preserve the quality and accessibility of education (The Australian, 2023).

Furthermore, the ongoing global learning crisis remains a pressing issue. Despite global efforts to improve educational outcomes, many students, particularly in low-income countries like Kenya and India, are still not achieving age-appropriate learning outcomes. This crisis is driven by various factors, including inadequate funding for education, teacher shortages, and systemic inefficiencies within educational systems. In these countries, educational leaders are working under challenging conditions to implement reforms that aim to improve the quality of education, enhance teacher training, and ensure that all students can reach their full potential. These efforts are critical to breaking the cycle of poverty and ensuring that all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have the opportunity to succeed (World Bank, 2023).

These interconnected challenges require educational leaders to be not only innovative and adaptable but also resilient in the face of adversity. The ability to navigate these complex issues, while fostering equity, inclusion, and resilience within educational systems, will be key to creating sustainable and effective education systems that can meet the needs of all learners worldwide. To address these challenges effectively, there must be a collective effort from governments, educational institutions, and communities to create policies and practices that prioritize equity, accessibility, and the long-term success of students.

Educational leaders in the Philippines are grappling with a range of challenges that significantly impact the quality and accessibility of education. The COVID-19 pandemic led to widespread school closures, affecting millions of learners across the country, including those in urban centers like Metro Manila and rural areas such as Mindanao and the Visayas. The pandemic highlighted existing educational inequities, particularly in marginalized areas where students lacked access to remote learning due to insufficient devices and internet connectivity. In provinces like Sulu, Eastern Samar, and Ifugao, many students were unable to participate in online education, deepening the learning divide (Bautista, 2021). According to a study by the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), only about 30% of students had access to the necessary technology for online learning during the pandemic (PBSP, 2021). This created substantial learning gaps that educational leaders are still working to address, particularly in remote provinces like Apayao and Bohol.

Moreover, educational leaders in both urban and rural parts of the Philippines, such as Quezon City and Marawi, face challenges in integrating technology into the learning process. Despite efforts to enhance digital literacy and provide resources like the DepEd's Learning Continuity Plan, students still struggle with a lack of consistent internet access and reliable devices. This digital divide has hindered the full implementation of blended learning strategies, leaving many students behind, particularly in areas like the far-flung barangays of the Bicol region and the mountain provinces. Educational leaders are now focusing on developing solutions to bridge these gaps and ensure that technology is used effectively to enhance the learning experience (DepEd, 2021).

The Philippines is also grappling with issues related to diversity and inclusion in education. Educational leaders must address the disparities between urban and rural students, with those in rural areas like Mindoro and Zamboanga often facing inadequate educational facilities, fewer resources, and a lack of qualified teachers. This inequality has sparked calls for a more inclusive and equitable education system that can meet the needs of all learners, regardless of their socioeconomic background or geographic location. Furthermore, there is an increasing need to ensure that leadership within educational institutions in places like Davao City and Cebu reflects the diverse student population in the country. Educational leaders are being urged to adopt inclusive practices that provide equitable opportunities for all students (UNESCO, 2022).

In addition to these challenges, financial constraints are impacting the education sector in the Philippines. Despite various efforts to increase the education budget, there remains a significant gap in funding for public schools, which limits their ability to provide high-quality education. This is particularly evident in schools in remote areas such as those in the provinces of Bukidnon, Cotabato, and Masbate, where resources for infrastructure and instructional materials are often insufficient. As a result, some schools are forced to make difficult decisions, such as reducing the number of subjects offered or consolidating classes to cope with these financial limitations (Republic of the Philippines, 2022). Educational leaders are advocating for increased government funding and more efficient resource management to address these gaps and ensure the sustainability of the education system.

Finally, the ongoing learning crisis in the Philippines remains a critical issue, particularly in the context of teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate learning materials. Despite efforts to improve education quality, many students in provinces like Palawan, Tawi-Tawi, and Camiguin continue to fall behind in critical subjects such as literacy and numeracy. Educational leaders in these regions are working to implement reforms that aim to improve teacher training, enhance classroom management, and provide more targeted interventions to help students catch up. These reforms are essential to addressing the long-term educational needs of the country's youth and ensuring that all learners have the opportunity to succeed (World Bank, 2023).

These interconnected challenges in the Philippines call for innovative leadership that is adaptable and resilient in the face of adversity. Educational leaders must prioritize equity, inclusion, and sustainable development to foster a more effective and inclusive education system that can meet the evolving needs of all students.

In the Davao region, educational leaders are confronted with several pressing local challenges that hinder the quality and accessibility of education. One of the most significant issues is the disparity in educational resources between urban and rural areas. In cities like Davao City and Tagum, access to modern educational tools, internet connectivity, and well-trained teachers is relatively better. However, in more remote areas such as in the municipalities of Talaingod, Maragusan, and the island provinces of Samal and Island Garden City of Samal, students and educators face substantial challenges due to limited infrastructure and resources. In these areas, many students still rely on printed modules for learning, and the lack of stable internet connections hampers the implementation of online and blended learning (DepEd Davao, 2022). This highlights a critical social value in the Philippines—*bayanihan* or community solidarity—where local leaders and communities are often coming together to support students in overcoming these barriers, either through volunteer programs or resource pooling.

Furthermore, educational inequities persist, particularly among Indigenous communities in the Davao region. In areas like the mountains of Compostela Valley and parts of Davao Oriental, Indigenous Peoples (IP) students often face challenges in accessing quality education due to cultural and language barriers, limited access to schools, and the underrepresentation of IP teachers. These barriers prevent many IP children from fully participating in mainstream education, leading to high dropout rates. To address this, local educational leaders have been advocating for culturally responsive teaching strategies and the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in the curriculum to bridge this gap and create a more inclusive education system (Bangsa, 2021). The social value of *pagkakaisa* or unity is evident here, as schools and local communities work together to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and practices in a way that respects cultural diversity while enhancing educational outcomes.

Another critical issue is the teacher shortage in rural schools across the region, particularly in provinces such as Davao del Sur and Davao Occidental. Due to the challenging living conditions in these areas, it is difficult to attract and retain

qualified teachers. This shortage results in overcrowded classrooms and an increased burden on the teachers who remain, further contributing to the decline in education quality. To address this, the local government and DepEd have launched programs aimed at offering incentives for teachers who are willing to work in remote areas, though these programs are still in the early stages and have not yet fully addressed the issue (DepEd Davao, 2021). The social value of *pagmamalasakit* or compassion is deeply embedded in efforts to motivate and support teachers in their work, encouraging them to stay in underserved areas for the sake of their students' future.

Moreover, financial constraints also significantly affect schools in the Davao region. Public schools, particularly in rural and coastal areas, are often forced to make do with insufficient resources. Schools in areas like the Davao de Oro and Davao del Norte provinces are struggling to provide basic facilities, including classrooms, desks, and even basic learning materials. To cope with these challenges, schools have relied on local government support, partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community-based efforts to fund infrastructure and ensure that students continue learning (Republic of the Philippines, 2022). This reliance on communal cooperation reflects the Filipino social value of *damayan*, or mutual aid, where the community comes together to support its members in times of need.

Finally, the impact of natural disasters on education in the Davao region is another ongoing issue. The region is prone to typhoons, floods, and earthquakes, which frequently disrupt school operations and damage school facilities. In areas like Davao Oriental and Davao del Norte, where schools are often located in disaster-prone zones, educational leaders face the challenge of ensuring continuity of education during and after disasters. Local government units and DepEd are working together to implement disaster-resilient school designs and create contingency plans for remote learning in the event of natural calamities (National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, 2022). This highlights the social value of *resilience*, a core trait embedded in the Filipino identity, where communities persist and adapt even in the face of adversity, ensuring that the education of their children continues despite the challenges.

These local issues in the Davao region highlight the need for educational leaders to be innovative, adaptable, and resilient in addressing challenges related to infrastructure, inclusivity, teacher quality, and disaster preparedness. The Filipino social values of *bayanihan*, *pagkakaisa*, *pagmamalasakit*, *damayan*, and *resilience* play a critical role in addressing these challenges, demonstrating the strong sense of community and collective responsibility that drives efforts to improve the educational landscape in the region. Solutions that foster collaboration between local government, educational institutions, and communities are essential for ensuring that all students in the Davao region have access to quality education.

The research gap in the context of educational challenges in the Davao region is significant and requires focused attention. While there is some national-level research on educational disparities, there is a lack of localized studies that specifically address the challenges faced by schools in remote and marginalized areas of Davao. For example, while the digital divide is acknowledged in broader studies, there is insufficient research on how it uniquely impacts rural schools in areas such as Talaingod, Maragusan, and the island provinces of Samal. Similarly, there is a gap in understanding the educational barriers faced by Indigenous Peoples (IP) students in regions like Compostela Valley and Davao Oriental, where cultural differences, language barriers, and a lack of culturally responsive curricula hinder access to quality education. Furthermore, the issue of teacher shortages, particularly in rural and disaster-prone areas like Davao del Sur and Davao Occidental, has not been deeply explored in terms of retention rates and the factors influencing teachers' decisions to stay or leave these regions. Research is also lacking on how schools in Davao prepare for and recover from natural disasters, a concern that is especially relevant in a region prone to typhoons and earthquakes. Additionally, while financial constraints are widely recognized, there is limited research on how community-based solutions and partnerships with NGOs and local governments are being used to address these issues in Davao's public schools. Finally, the role of Filipino social values such as *bayanihan* (community solidarity), *pagkakaisa* (unity), and *pagmamalasakit* (compassion) in overcoming educational challenges in the region remains underexplored. Addressing these gaps could lead to more effective, context-specific interventions that enhance educational equity and quality in the Davao region.

In the Davao region, several studies have highlighted the multifaceted challenges faced by educational leaders, students, and communities. While educational inequities at the national level have been well-documented, there is still a gap in region-specific research that explores these challenges in greater depth. A significant body of literature focuses on the digital divide in the region, particularly in rural and remote areas. Studies by Bautista (2021) and DepEd Davao (2022) suggest that students in provinces such as Talaingod, Maragusan, and parts of the Davao de Oro and Davao Oriental have limited access to technology and the internet. These barriers make it difficult for students to fully engage in online and blended learning, which are increasingly becoming the norm in Philippine education. The transition to online education during the pandemic exacerbated these disparities, as students from marginalized communities struggled to access the necessary resources, such as computers, smartphones, and stable internet connections (Bautista, 2021). While DepEd has implemented various initiatives, including the distribution of learning modules and internet-based programs,

these efforts remain insufficient in addressing the broader digital divide, especially in more remote areas like Davao del Norte and the mountain provinces.

Another critical issue highlighted in the literature is the education of Indigenous Peoples (IP) in the Davao region. IP students in areas like Compostela Valley and Davao Oriental face significant barriers to education, including language differences, cultural dissonance, and a lack of culturally relevant teaching methods. Research by Bangsa (2021) shows that many IP children struggle to relate to mainstream educational curricula that fail to integrate their cultural heritage and native languages. As a result, many IP students either drop out or do not reach their full academic potential. To bridge this gap, there have been calls for incorporating Indigenous knowledge systems and local languages into the curriculum to make learning more accessible and meaningful for IP students. Programs such as the DepEd's Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) program have shown some promise, but research suggests that these programs are still in the early stages of implementation, and their effectiveness remains limited by lack of trained educators and support structures (Bangsa, 2021).

Teacher shortages and challenges in teacher retention in remote areas of the Davao region also appear prominently in the literature. A study by DepEd Davao (2021) emphasizes that regions like Davao Occidental, Davao del Sur, and Davao del Norte are struggling to attract and retain qualified teachers due to low compensation, challenging living conditions, and the limited availability of professional development opportunities. This shortage is particularly acute in specialized subjects such as Science and Mathematics. To address this, local government units have started offering financial incentives, housing allowances, and travel reimbursements for teachers willing to work in these areas, but the issue persists. Research by the Republic of the Philippines (2022) suggests that while these efforts are helpful, more sustainable solutions, including long-term professional development and career growth opportunities, are needed to ensure teacher retention in rural schools.

In addition to teacher shortages, the financial constraints faced by schools in the Davao region are another recurring theme in the literature. Schools in areas like Davao del Norte, Davao de Oro, and Davao Oriental often lack basic resources, including classrooms, desks, and teaching materials. Studies have shown that financial limitations often force schools to make difficult decisions, such as consolidating classes, reducing educational programs, or relying heavily on community-based support for materials and infrastructure (Republic of the Philippines, 2022). Research by DepEd Davao (2022) also highlights how some schools in these provinces depend on partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local businesses to fund infrastructure projects and support learning initiatives. However, such partnerships are often short-term and cannot fully address the structural funding gaps that hinder the development of public education in the region.

The region's vulnerability to natural disasters, including typhoons, floods, and earthquakes, has also been extensively covered in the literature. According to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (2022), schools in disaster-prone areas like Davao Oriental and Davao del Norte face significant disruptions during natural disasters. Educational institutions often serve as evacuation centers, and this dual role places additional stress on already overburdened schools. Furthermore, damage to school buildings and infrastructure further disrupts the continuity of education. A significant body of literature advocates for integrating disaster risk reduction and resilience planning into the education system, including the construction of disaster-resistant school buildings and the development of remote learning strategies that can be deployed during emergencies. Studies also suggest that building local capacity for disaster management at the school and community level can mitigate the impact of disasters on educational continuity (National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, 2022).

While much of the literature focuses on the challenges, there is also an emerging focus on solutions and innovative practices in the Davao region. The role of community-based initiatives and *bayanihan* (community solidarity) has been explored in recent studies. For example, schools in rural Davao have partnered with local farmers, businesses, and NGOs to secure resources for educational activities and infrastructure development. This collective approach demonstrates the importance of community involvement in addressing educational challenges. Research by Republic of the Philippines (2022) highlights how these local partnerships can serve as a model for other regions in the country, showing the power of community-driven educational solutions. Furthermore, studies have suggested that integrating Filipino social values like pagmamalasakit (compassion) and pagkakaisa (unity) into the educational process could foster greater collaboration among educators, parents, students, and the broader community, ensuring that the education system remains responsive to local needs. Finally, disaster resilience in education continues to be a vital area of research. Studies show that the region's educational institutions are slowly becoming more resilient to disasters, with improvements in disaster-resilient infrastructure, contingency planning, and the use of technology to continue education during emergencies (National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, 2022). However, more research is needed to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of these interventions and how they can be scaled up across the region.

2. METHODS

This study employs a **qualitative research design** to explore the lived experiences of educational leaders in the Davao region, focusing on the challenges they face, their coping mechanisms, and the strategies they employ to address these challenges. The methodology is guided by the **phenomenological approach**, which allows the researcher to capture the essence of participants' lived experiences and gain insights into their perceptions of leadership in education.

Participants

The study focuses on a sample of **ten (10) educational leaders**, including school heads and principals, who have at least three years of leadership experience in educational institutions within the Davao region. Participants were selected using **purposive sampling** to ensure that those chosen had a significant amount of experience in managing educational institutions and were familiar with the unique challenges of leading schools in this region. The sample includes leaders from both urban and rural areas to provide a broad understanding of the regional context. The participants represent a variety of school types, including public elementary and secondary schools, to capture diverse leadership experiences.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through **in-depth, semi-structured interviews**. These interviews allowed the researcher to engage with participants in a conversational manner while exploring their personal experiences and insights related to educational leadership. The interview questions were developed to address several key themes, including:

1. The challenges faced by school leaders in the Davao region (e.g., resource constraints, teacher shortages, and infrastructure issues).
2. Coping mechanisms and strategies used by school leaders to overcome these challenges.
3. The role of community involvement, social values, and local government support in leadership practices.
4. Insights on how to improve leadership and educational practices in the Davao region.

Each interview lasted between 45 to 60 minutes, and all interviews were conducted in-person or via video call, depending on the availability and preferences of the participants. Interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants, ensuring the accuracy of the data.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interview data. This method involves identifying patterns or themes within the data that are reflective of the participants' experiences. The steps followed in the data analysis process were:

1. **Transcription**: All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure that the exact wording of the participants was captured.
2. **Initial Coding**: The transcripts were then coded, with initial codes being generated based on recurring words, phrases, and ideas related to the research questions. This process allowed for the identification of common topics and challenges mentioned by the participants.
3. **Theme Development**: The codes were reviewed and grouped into broader themes that represented significant patterns in the participants' responses. These themes were then analyzed for deeper meanings and connections.
4. **Verification**: To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, a process of **member checking** was employed. This involved sharing the preliminary findings with the participants to confirm the accuracy of the themes and interpretations.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. The following ethical principles were adhered to throughout the study:

1. **Informed Consent**: Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement, and their rights to confidentiality and voluntary participation. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant before the interviews began.
2. **Confidentiality**: All participant data were kept confidential. Personal identifiers were removed from the interview transcripts, and all data were stored securely. Participants were also assured that their responses would be anonymized in any resulting publications.
3. **Right to Withdraw**: Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

Limitations

While the study provides valuable insights into the experiences of educational leaders in the Davao region, several limitations must be noted. The sample size is small (10 participants), which limits the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study focuses only on the perspectives of school leaders, and the experiences of teachers, students, and parents are not included. Future studies could expand the sample size and include a broader range of participants to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges in educational leadership in the Davao region.

3. CONCLUSION

The chosen methods—qualitative research design, purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis—are appropriate for exploring the experiences and perceptions of school leaders in the Davao region. This methodology allows for a rich, in-depth exploration of the challenges, coping mechanisms, and leadership insights that will inform recommendations for improving educational leadership practices in the region.

4. RESULTS

The study aimed to explore the lived experiences of school heads in leading educational institutions, focusing on the challenges they face, the coping mechanisms they employ, and their insights for future leadership practices in the Digos City Division. Ten school heads with at least three years of leadership experience participated in the study. Thematic analysis of in-depth interviews revealed several key findings regarding their leadership experiences.

1. **Challenges Faced by School Heads**:
o **Lack of Social Support**: One of the major challenges identified by the school heads was the lack of social support, which significantly impacted their ability to manage the daily demands of leadership. Many reported feeling isolated in their decision-making processes and expressed the need for stronger support networks within the school community and from external educational authorities.
o **Time and Resource Constraints**: School heads often struggled with managing limited resources, including insufficient funding, inadequate facilities, and a shortage of teaching materials. These constraints created additional stress and made it difficult to meet the needs of both students and staff.
o **Transparency Issues in Administration**: Many school heads also highlighted challenges related to transparency in administrative processes. This lack of transparency led to miscommunication, increased misunderstandings, and hindered effective school management.

2. **Coping Mechanisms**:
o **Building Support Networks**: To cope with the challenges, school heads emphasized the importance of building strong support networks with fellow administrators, teachers, and community stakeholders. These networks provided emotional support and practical guidance, helping school heads navigate difficult situations.
o **Systematic Classroom Observations**: School heads also employed systematic classroom observations as a strategy to improve teaching practices and provide constructive feedback. This practice not only helped in identifying areas for improvement but also fostered a culture of continuous professional development.
o **Efficient Decision-Making Strategies**: Effective decision-making strategies were essential for managing time and resources effectively. School heads utilized strategies such as prioritizing tasks, delegating responsibilities, and making informed, data-driven decisions to overcome obstacles.

3. **Insights and Recommendations**:
o **Importance of a Positive School Culture**: Despite the challenges, school heads stressed the importance of fostering a positive school culture. They emphasized that a supportive and collaborative environment, where teachers and students feel valued, is essential for the overall success of the school.
o **Promoting Collaboration**: Collaboration among staff members and between the school and the broader community was seen as crucial for addressing challenges and promoting shared goals.
o **Clear Educational Vision**: School heads underscored the need for a clear educational vision that aligns with the school's goals and objectives. A strong vision helps guide decisions, align efforts, and create a sense of purpose for all stakeholders involved.
o **Need for Stronger Institutional Support**: The school heads recommended that there be greater institutional support from higher educational authorities, particularly in terms of resource allocation and providing adequate training for school leaders.

4. **Future Research Directions**: The study suggests that future research could explore the role of social support in enhancing leadership resilience and examine strategies to improve the effectiveness of school heads. Further investigation into the development of leadership skills and the impact of collaborative practices on school management would provide additional insights into how to improve educational leadership in challenging contexts. In summary, the study revealed that school heads face significant challenges in their leadership roles, but through effective coping strategies and a focus on fostering positive school culture and collaboration, they can overcome these challenges. Strengthening support systems and improving resource management were key recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of school leadership.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study shed light on the complex and multifaceted nature of school leadership, particularly in the context of the challenges faced by school heads in the Digos City Division. The school heads who participated in the study highlighted three major challenges: lack of social support, time and resource constraints, and transparency issues within school administration. These challenges had a significant impact on their stress levels, decision-making abilities, and overall school management.

The lack of social support emerged as a central theme, with many participants expressing feelings of isolation in their roles. This lack of support, both within the school community and from external authorities, was identified as a key factor contributing to stress and difficulties in decision-making. This is consistent with previous studies that emphasize the importance of strong support networks in leadership resilience (Grissom et al., 2021). To address this issue, school heads actively sought to build supportive relationships with colleagues and stakeholders, a strategy that proved helpful in alleviating some of the challenges they faced.

Time and resource constraints were another significant challenge highlighted by the participants. Many school heads struggled with managing limited budgets, insufficient resources, and inadequate infrastructure, which made it difficult to provide high-quality education. This finding reflects broader trends in educational leadership, where leaders often face the pressure of balancing limited resources with the need to meet educational objectives (Leithwood et al., 2020). School heads employed various coping mechanisms, such as prioritizing tasks, delegating responsibilities, and making informed decisions to maximize the impact of available resources.

Issues of transparency within school administration were also a common concern among participants. A lack of clear communication and transparency in decision-making processes often led to misunderstandings and miscommunication, which in turn affected the functioning of the school. This finding supports the growing body of research that emphasizes the importance of transparency in leadership for building trust and fostering a positive school culture (Hoy & Miskel, 2019).

Despite these challenges, the school heads were able to implement several strategies to cope with their difficulties. They emphasized the importance of fostering a positive school culture, promoting collaboration, and ensuring a clear educational vision. These strategies were seen as essential for maintaining morale, building trust among staff, and improving overall school performance. The findings suggest that effective school leadership involves not only managing administrative tasks but also creating an environment where teachers and students feel valued and supported.

Summary Conclusions

This study highlights the critical role of school heads in navigating the challenges faced in leading educational institutions. The challenges of lack of support, time and resource constraints, and transparency issues are significant barriers to effective leadership. However, the study also reveals that school heads can overcome these challenges by building support networks, fostering a collaborative culture, and making strategic decisions to optimize available resources.

The study emphasizes the importance of a clear educational vision, a positive school culture, and strong leadership practices in ensuring the success of educational institutions. It also underscores the need for stronger institutional support from higher educational authorities, particularly in terms of resource allocation and professional development for school leaders.

Future Directions

Future research could further explore the role of social support in enhancing the resilience of school heads. This would help to identify ways in which external and internal support networks can be strengthened to mitigate the challenges faced by school leaders. Additionally, research could focus on the development of specific strategies for improving transparency in school administration and fostering open communication channels between school heads, teachers, and other stakeholders.

Further studies could also investigate the impact of collaborative leadership practices on school performance, particularly in resource-constrained environments. Examining how school heads can effectively mobilize community support and engage in partnerships with external organizations could provide valuable insights into improving educational outcomes.

Finally, future research could delve into the professional development needs of school heads, focusing on how training programs and leadership development initiatives can equip school leaders with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the evolving demands of educational leadership in a rapidly changing world.

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