

Exploring The Leadership of Elementary School Principals in The Post-Pandemic Education: A Collaizi Method

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the challenges and school leadership of elementary school principals in transitioning to post-pandemic education. It employed Colaizzi method, a qualitative approach. Pertinent data were obtained through in-depth and written interviews using semi-structured interview questions from eleven principals in the various public elementary schools in the municipality of Candelaria, Quezon province. The analysis presented three (3) themes of school leadership and management: challenges, leadership and responsibilities, and strategic responses as “tip of the iceberg.” The study revealed the following findings: the health and security of learners and personnel, academic performance of the learners and learning gap being the big issues, restricted mobility, budget and funds, and the work arrangement of the teachers are the most common challenges encountered. Also, top-down management was perceived as the common style for transitioning to the post-pandemic set-up. The findings reflected that although the standards of education are in paucity and has school forms-rigor-submission culture, still the priority is mainly focused on the basic academic which are reading, writing and numeracy, and health awareness.

Keywords: *school principals, leadership, management, post-pandemic education*

Article History:

Received: August 30, 2022

Accepted: November 15, 2022

Revised: September 30, 2022

Published online: December 6, 2022

Suggested Citation:

Plata, M.A., Evangelista, M.C., Deduyo, R.P. & Estrellado, C.P. (2022). Exploring The Leadership of Elementary School Principals in The Post-Pandemic Education: A Collaizi Method. *The Research Probe*, Volume 2 Issue 2, pp. 170 - 175.

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**This paper is a finalist in the International Research Competitions 2022, Category 2 Undergraduate*



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Introduction

According to Education Assistant Secretary Malcolm Garma, “the new normal would be a combination of the school-based and home-based systems. He said that the “new normal” in education would not be a purely classroom setup.” We need to consider what it would be like for school leaders to implement such a setup in the school. What about the school's current vision, is that still relevant or does it need refining? Is the vision of school six months ago still the vision of school now, and what do we need to do to ensure that the vision reflects and drives the current reality? It's such an important time to bring people together to have that focus and purpose tailored to the needs of the students. The Department of Education and school leaders need to work to preserve and enhance the school community and shape the school vision so that everybody buys into it and everybody knows what school priorities and the vision is.

With the noticeable change of leadership in schools, the researchers conduct a research study about the challenges and school leadership of the selected elementary principals in various schools in the municipality of Candelaria. The researcher aims to acknowledge and identify these challenges in dealing with the new normal learning. Thus, the government is slowly opening schools for the limited face-to-face. For 2 years of not being able to open schools and the threat of the risk that the virus will be still present, on behalf of the Department of Education, school principals are expected to institute a new way of management and leadership within the school to make it safe for everyone.

Methodology

A phenomenological approach to qualitative research was employed to achieve the goal of this study. This study used the interview guide questionnaire as the research instrument which aimed to collect data on the specific questions that the researchers have made. Content validation was performed on the interview guide questions. The semi-structured interview questionnaire has the following parts: Part 1. Profile of the participants; Part 2. The lived experience of the principals; Part 3. Challenges being faced amid the post-pandemic. The eleven (11) principals from different elementary schools in the municipality of Candelaria were purposely chosen as the participants of the study. This study followed the interview protocol refinement framework comprising four phases to systematically develop and refine an interview protocol, to the extent possible, before data collection (Yeong, 2018). After the gathering of data, the researchers proceed in applying an array of data analysis methods in phenomenological studies, the

researchers particularly selected the method proposed by Colaizzi (1978). Specifically, this method of Colaizzi (1978) consists of seven developmental steps as follows: 1.) acquiring a sense of each transcript; 2.) extracting significant statements; 3.) formulating meanings; 4.) organizing the meanings into themes; 5.) describing the phenomenon; 6.) describing the fundamental structure; and 7.) returning to the participants (Sanders, 2014).

Findings

The generated themes on the challenges encountered by the school principals in terms of school preparation and transition to post-pandemic education summed up to:

Health and Equity. The top priority when dealing with the return to school of students and teachers.

Restricted mobility. Due to the strict compliance to health protocols, students' socialization and collaboration are restricted.

Academic performance (inadequate learning and learning gap). This became a big challenge due to the lack of knowledge of parents to teach their children at home. In some cases, the parents were the ones answering the modules.

Budget / Funds. Due to lack of budget/funds, the preparation of school facilities and accomplishing requirements were the toughest for them.

Work arrangement. It becomes more difficult for the teachers to go back to school because they get used to working from home arrangements during the pandemic.

Conclusion

Challenges are important ingredient for any school leadership. With the teachers and staff, they faced and dealt with it, they are applying open communications over groupthink. The connections among them were hierarchically direct, which made them adapt to the challenges that their schools are facing. The leadership of principals manifested proactive mindset in their school and majority of them plans to be rigor in terms of direct management as the pandemic wanes. The leadership they showed in transitioning to post-pandemic education has a resounding burdensome specially in terms of transformative and organizational resilience. Uncovering the themes made another theme for the coping strategies the school principals used in dealing with challenges and performing their leadership and responsibilities. These include adaptability and flexibility, being resilient, visionary, and strategic in stakeholders' partnership, regular SLAC sessions, good and open communication. The elementary principals are firm to top-down

approach as main component skill that they knew would be beneficial and effective among cohorts.

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