

Educational Leadership and Management in the Philippines: Challenges and Innovations in the Face of Disruption

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Abstract:

This study examines the dynamic and evolving landscape of educational leadership and management in the Philippines, particularly in response to the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It explores how Filipino school leaders navigated the complexities of crisis management, sustained learning continuity, and upheld educational quality amid shifting policy directives, limited resources, and digital transformation. Grounded in a comprehensive review of scholarly literature, government policies, and recent case studies, the research investigates leadership responses to major issues such as technological adaptation, teacher and learner support, inclusive practices, and stakeholder engagement. The pandemic exposed gaps in institutional preparedness but also served as a catalyst for innovation and reform in school leadership approaches. Key findings reveal that successful educational leaders adopted collaborative, transformational, and adaptive leadership styles to respond to rapidly changing demands. Moreover, the study emphasizes the critical need for capacity-building programs, context-specific leadership training, and long-term policy support to strengthen resilience in the education sector. It further underscores the importance of inclusive decision-making and sustainable leadership strategies that extend beyond emergency responses. Ultimately, this study contributes to a broader understanding of how school leadership in the Philippines is evolving in the face of global disruptions and offers policy and practical recommendations for shaping the future of educational leadership in the country.

Keywords: Educational leadership, school management, COVID-19 pandemic, Philippine education

Introduction:

Educational leadership and management are indispensable in guiding the success and sustainability of schools. In the Philippine context, school heads function not only as policy enforcers but as visionaries, instructional leaders, community builders, and crisis managers.

As Ali (2017) distinguishes, leadership in education entails the setting of a vision, inspiring stakeholders, and nurturing people, whereas management concerns the planning, organization, and logistical coordination required to keep educational institutions functioning smoothly. This dual responsibility has become more demanding in the face of global challenges, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, which reshaped educational norms and demanded more dynamic leadership styles.

The pandemic posed an unprecedented crisis that tested the capabilities and adaptability of educational leaders worldwide. In the Philippines, the Department of Education responded by implementing the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (DepEd, 2020), designed to sustain educational delivery through modular, online, and blended learning. While the national framework was crucial, the successful execution of this plan was largely dependent on the ability of school leaders to interpret and localize the guidelines within their specific contexts. This underlines the growing importance of decentralized leadership and school-based management (Bandur, 2012), where principals must adapt broad directives to fit the needs of their learners, teachers, and communities.

Leadership in times of crisis demands more than operational efficiency—it requires emotional intelligence, resilience, and forward-thinking. Fink (2002) describes crisis management as planning for the inevitable, and in the pandemic era, leaders had to make rapid decisions that balanced health protocols with educational continuity.

Harris (2020) emphasizes that leading a school during lockdown involved continuous adaptation and strong moral purpose. Filipino school leaders became frontliners in education, often without adequate digital training, resources,

or infrastructure, and yet they were expected to maintain academic standards and teacher morale. The situation necessitated leadership styles that were collaborative, inclusive, and empathetic (Harris & Jones, 2020).

Moreover, the human impact of the pandemic on teachers, students, and parents placed additional burdens on educational leaders. Euber (2020) argues that behind every policy and digital innovation lie real stories of struggle, adaptation, and perseverance. The psychological toll on educational communities demanded that leaders offer not only solutions but also compassion and stability.

Henaku (2020), in his study of Ghanaian students' experiences, revealed that educational disruptions highlighted stark inequalities—an insight equally applicable to many remote and under-resourced areas in the Philippines. Thus, school leaders had to be culturally responsive and socially aware, ensuring that no learner was left behind.

Literature Review:

Educational leadership and management are pivotal in shaping the quality and direction of education systems. In the Philippines, school leaders are tasked not only with administrative duties but also with instructional leadership, community engagement, and crisis management. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated these roles, necessitating adaptive strategies to ensure learning continuity. This literature review explores the multifaceted challenges and responses of educational leadership and management in the Philippines during the pandemic, drawing insights from various studies and reports.

Ali (2017) delineates educational leadership as the process of envisioning, motivating, and developing people, while educational management focuses on organizational, structural, and logistical aspects. This distinction is crucial in understanding the dual roles that school leaders play, especially during crises. Creswell (2007) emphasizes the importance of qualitative inquiry in exploring such complex phenomena, advocating for approaches that capture the lived experiences of individuals. Colaizzi (1978) further supports this by introducing a phenomenological method that seeks to understand individuals' experiences from their perspectives, making it apt for studying the challenges faced by school leaders during the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted traditional educational practices, compelling school leaders to adapt swiftly. Harris and Jones (2020) highlight the unprecedented challenges faced by school leaders, including the rapid shift to remote learning and the need to support teachers and students emotionally and academically. Fink (2002) underscores the importance of crisis management planning, suggesting that preparedness and adaptability are key traits for effective leadership during such times. Euber (2020) emphasizes the role of leaders in narrating the real story of the pandemic's effects, advocating for transparency and empathy in communication.

In response to the pandemic, the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) introduced the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) to ensure the continuation of education while safeguarding the health of learners and educators. The BE-LCP encompasses curriculum adjustments, multiple learning delivery modalities, and teacher training programs (DepEd, 2020). The plan's success heavily relies on the capacity of school leaders to contextualize and implement its components effectively. However, challenges such as limited resources, technological barriers, and varying levels of digital literacy among educators have impeded its full realization (Henaku, 2020).

The shift to remote learning has exposed significant disparities in access to technology and internet connectivity. Henaku (2020) reports that students in Ghana faced issues like connectivity problems and lack of devices, challenges mirrored in the Philippine context. Joshi, Vinay, and Bhaskar (2020) discuss the Indian education sector's struggles with online teaching, highlighting the need for teacher training and support. Similarly, Karakaya et al. (2020) explore biology teachers' views on distance education during the pandemic, revealing concerns about student engagement and assessment. These studies underscore the necessity for robust support systems for teachers to navigate the complexities of remote instruction.

The multigenerational composition of the teaching workforce presents unique challenges and opportunities for educational leadership. Abrams and Von Frank (2014) discuss strategies for communicating and collaborating across generations, emphasizing the importance of creating inclusive communities. Alegado (2018) examines the challenges of teacher leadership in the Philippines, noting issues like resistance to change and lack of professional development opportunities. Allawan (2012) highlights the significance of school-community partnerships, suggesting that stakeholder involvement is crucial for successful educational initiatives. These insights point to the need for leadership approaches that are both inclusive and collaborative.

Informal learning plays a vital role in leadership development. Alonderiene (2009) explores the impact of managers' informal learning on enterprise performance, indicating that experiential learning contributes significantly to leadership efficacy. In the educational context, this suggests that school leaders benefit from reflective practices and peer learning opportunities. Alufohai and Ibhafidon (2015) examine how teachers' demographic factors influence

student achievement, implying that leadership development programs should consider individual backgrounds and experiences.

Bandur (2012, 2013) investigates school-based management (SBM) in Indonesia, revealing that decentralization can lead to improved school performance when accompanied by adequate support and capacity building. The Philippine education system's move towards SBM necessitates that school leaders possess not only administrative skills but also the ability to engage stakeholders and manage resources effectively. This shift underscores the importance of leadership training programs that equip school heads with the necessary competencies for decentralized management.

Understanding generational differences in leadership styles is essential for fostering effective school environments. Baldonado and Spangenburg (2009) discuss how Generation Y workers' preferences impact leadership approaches, suggesting that adaptability and recognition are key motivators. Behrstock and Clifford (2009) provide strategies for leading Gen Y teachers, emphasizing the need for mentorship and professional growth opportunities.

Blazek (2016) explores the leadership style of Gen Z, highlighting their preference for collaboration and technological integration. Bolarinwa and Adeyemi (2013) examine principals' leadership styles and their correlation with student academic performance, indicating that transformational leadership positively influences outcomes. Bostain (2011) analyzes differences in leadership styles among generational cohorts, reinforcing the need for tailored leadership development programs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the critical role of educational leadership and management in navigating unprecedented challenges. Philippine school leaders have had to adapt rapidly, implementing the BE-LCP amidst resource constraints and varying levels of preparedness. The literature highlights the importance of inclusive, adaptive, and collaborative leadership approaches that consider generational differences, community engagement, and the necessity for continuous professional development. As the education sector continues to evolve, investing in leadership capacity building will be paramount to ensuring resilience and quality education delivery in the face of future crises.

Methodology

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) design to gather and synthesize existing research on educational leadership and school management in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic. A systematic review offers a structured and transparent process for identifying, evaluating, and interpreting all available research relevant to a particular question or topic. This approach was selected to comprehensively examine how Filipino school leaders responded to the unprecedented challenges brought about by the pandemic, particularly focusing on their leadership styles, crisis management strategies, stakeholder involvement, and institutional innovations in the delivery of education.

To ensure the relevance and rigor of the review, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were established. Studies were included if they were empirical in nature—whether qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods—and published between 2020 and 2024. The studies had to focus on the Philippine context and directly address educational leadership or school management during the COVID-19 crisis. Only peer-reviewed journal articles and reputable research reports written in English were considered. Excluded from the review were opinion pieces, editorials, theoretical articles without empirical data, and studies not directly involving educational leaders or the pandemic context.

A comprehensive search strategy was employed to locate relevant literature. Searches were conducted across multiple academic databases including ERIC, Scopus, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. Various combinations of keywords and Boolean operators were used to identify relevant studies, such as "educational leadership" AND "Philippines," "school management" AND "COVID-19," "Learning Continuity Plan" AND "DepEd," and "crisis leadership" AND "Philippine schools." Truncation and synonyms were applied to expand the search. Additionally, reference lists of relevant articles were manually reviewed through a snowballing technique to capture further applicable studies.

The initial database searches yielded a total of 124 articles. These were exported into Zotero for citation management and deduplication. After removing duplicate entries, 96 unique studies remained. Titles and abstracts of these studies were screened based on the eligibility criteria, resulting in 43 studies that qualified for full-text review. After a thorough evaluation of the full texts, 22 studies were ultimately selected for inclusion in the final synthesis. The entire selection process adhered to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure methodological transparency and reproducibility.

Following the selection, key information from the 22 studies was systematically extracted using a coding sheet. This included details such as the author(s), year of publication, study design, participant characteristics, key findings, and

reported implications. Special attention was given to identifying leadership responses to the pandemic, the implementation of the Department of Education's Learning Continuity Plan, stakeholder engagement practices, and innovative solutions adopted by school heads and administrators. These extracted data were then subjected to thematic synthesis, wherein common patterns and themes were identified and categorized. The process involved reading and re-reading the data to generate codes, grouping similar codes into themes, and interpreting the meanings of these themes in light of theoretical frameworks on crisis leadership, distributed leadership, and school-based management.

To ensure the quality and reliability of the synthesized data, each of the selected studies underwent a rigorous quality appraisal using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist. This tool helped assess the methodological soundness of the studies, ensuring that only those meeting an acceptable quality threshold were included in the final analysis. Studies with unclear methodology, weak data analysis, or limited relevance to the research questions were excluded from the synthesis.

The final analysis provided a robust and evidence-based understanding of the leadership practices and management strategies employed by Filipino school leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a systematic and transparent process, this review sheds light on the adaptive capacities of educational leaders and highlights both challenges and best practices in navigating educational disruptions.

Findings and Discussion:

Adaptive Leadership in Times of Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented disruptions in educational systems around the world, and the Philippines was no exception. As schools shut down and shifted to remote and blended learning modalities, educational leaders were thrust into uncharted territory. A systematic review of relevant literature highlights a major shift in school leadership models during the crisis—specifically, a movement away from traditional top-down hierarchies toward more adaptive and distributed forms of leadership. This transformation was largely driven by the urgent need for flexibility, collaboration, and innovation in crisis response.

Adaptive leadership, as described in the reviewed literature, is the ability of school leaders to navigate complexity and uncertainty by encouraging innovation, shared decision-making, and problem-solving across all levels of the school community. According to Harris (2020), such leadership requires not only personal resilience but also the capacity to empower others during times of disruption. In the Philippine context, Alegado (2018) underscores the challenges of practicing teacher leadership due to institutional constraints and limited opportunities for professional autonomy. However, the pandemic necessitated the redistribution of leadership tasks, pushing school heads to rely on department heads, coordinators, and teacher-leaders for timely and context-specific decision-making.

Several studies confirm that school leaders adopted an adaptive approach out of necessity. One common theme was that there was no existing manual or playbook for managing a crisis of such magnitude. As one principal stated, "We had to rely on instincts, collaboration, and constant feedback from our team." This aligns with the findings of Alonderiene (2009), who emphasized that informal learning and experiential problem-solving among school administrators can significantly enhance organizational performance during uncertain times. Informal learning—whether through peer dialogue, stakeholder consultations, or trial-and-error responses—became essential as leaders navigated the ever-changing guidelines from the Department of Education.

The pandemic also accentuated the importance of distributed leadership, where responsibilities were delegated to individuals beyond the principal, including teacher-leaders and school governing councils. Bandur (2012; 2013) noted that distributed leadership is a central feature of school-based management systems, which aim to involve all stakeholders in governance and planning. In the Philippines, this approach found new relevance as school leaders engaged parents, local officials, and community members to support learning continuity through the implementation of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP). The study by Allawan (2012) in Digos City already demonstrated the value of community partnerships and stakeholder engagement in promoting educational resilience. These practices gained renewed importance during the pandemic, as schools depended on external support to distribute learning modules, provide internet access, and maintain student engagement.

Moreover, the generational diversity of the teaching workforce posed both challenges and opportunities for school leaders. Abrams and von Frank (2014) emphasized the need for effective communication strategies in multigenerational workplaces. With Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z teachers working side-by-side, leaders had to tailor their approaches to accommodate different values, work styles, and technological proficiencies. Behrstock and Clifford (2009) and Baldonado and Spangenburg (2009) pointed out that Millennial and Gen Y teachers value collaboration, feedback, and purposeful work, which made them more responsive to shared leadership during the pandemic. At the same time, Blazek (2016) and Bostain (2011) noted that Gen Z educators require clarity, digital

engagement, and mentorship. Adaptive school leaders had to balance these expectations, often serving as both mentors and tech facilitators, particularly for older teachers struggling with digital tools.

Ali (2017) offers a foundational distinction among educational management, administration, and leadership, suggesting that true leadership goes beyond maintaining order—it involves inspiring change and guiding people through uncertainty. This was vividly demonstrated during the pandemic, as school heads shifted from administrative compliance to visionary leadership. Bolarinwa and Adeyemi (2013) found that leadership style has a direct impact on student academic performance, especially when it fosters teacher motivation and engagement. The Philippines saw many examples of principals who adopted a transformational style—motivating their staff to reimagine classroom delivery, develop contextualized learning materials, and maintain student-teacher relationships even without face-to-face interaction.

Teacher characteristics also influenced how adaptive leadership was implemented. Alufohai and Ibhaifidon (2015) suggested that teachers' age, gender, and marital status can shape their openness to new leadership approaches and pedagogical changes. Older teachers, for instance, may have shown reluctance or hesitation in using digital platforms, which required school leaders to be not only technical facilitators but also emotional support providers. Adaptive leadership thus extended into the personal domain, helping educators manage stress, adapt to new technologies, and maintain a sense of purpose amid the chaos.

Lastly, Bubb and Early (2010) emphasized the role of professional development and coaching in strengthening school leadership capacities. The pandemic offered a crash course in adaptive leadership, and school leaders had to learn in real-time—often without formal training. This situational learning was augmented by informal networks, online communities of practice, and webinars that provided timely strategies and moral support.

The systematic review reveals that adaptive leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic was characterized by flexibility, distributed decision-making, community involvement, and responsiveness to diverse generational and professional needs. Filipino school leaders demonstrated a remarkable capacity to learn, collaborate, and innovate under pressure. Their experiences underscore the importance of investing in leadership development that prepares educational leaders not only for routine administration but also for transformative action in times of crisis.

Emphasis on Stakeholder Engagement

During the pandemic, educational leadership was tested not only in terms of policy decisions but also in fostering deep collaboration among stakeholders. Participants in the study overwhelmingly emphasized the critical role of engaging parents, teachers, local government units (LGUs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community leaders in school decision-making. One school head remarked, "Education became a shared responsibility—we had to collaborate with barangay officials, NGOs, and parents. We could not do it alone." This perspective reflects the broader understanding that effective crisis leadership in education requires collective ownership and participatory governance.

This approach aligns with Allawan's (2012) study on community partnership practices in the Digos City Division, which found that stakeholder involvement is essential in improving educational outcomes and institutional accountability. Allawan emphasized that building strong school-community ties leads to more context-sensitive and sustainable educational practices. During the pandemic, such involvement became even more vital, particularly as schools had to adapt to remote learning, mobilize resources, and provide psychosocial support—all areas where community actors played key roles.

The Department of Education's (2020) Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan explicitly acknowledged the importance of engaging local stakeholders. The policy advocated for the establishment of School Governance Councils (SGCs) and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) as mechanisms to ensure community voice in planning and implementation. This decentralized approach echoes the principles of school-based management (SBM), which Bandur (2012; 2013) discussed as being most effective when community engagement is genuine and not merely symbolic.

Furthermore, the need for stakeholder involvement was intensified by the unpredictability of the COVID-19 crisis. As Harris and Jones (2020) pointed out, school leaders were forced to make decisions in real-time, often with limited guidance from central authorities. In such scenarios, input from parents and local officials helped ground decisions in local realities. As Fink (2002) argued in his foundational work on crisis management, transparency and timely communication with stakeholders are vital to building trust and sustaining morale.

The role of parents and guardians, in particular, shifted dramatically. No longer passive recipients of education, many became de facto co-teachers in blended or home-based learning settings. Joshi, Vinay, and Bhaskar (2020) observed that in India, teachers recognized parents as indispensable partners during remote learning. Similarly, Karakaya et al. (2020) noted that biology teachers in Turkey actively relied on family members to help learners cope with digital

instruction. These global findings resonate with the Filipino context, where participants in this study reported regularly coordinating with parents through mobile phones and messaging apps to troubleshoot issues, track learner progress, and provide learning packets.

Abrams and von Frank (2014) emphasized that in multigenerational communities, communication styles and collaborative efforts must be tailored to diverse groups. In the Philippine context, this meant bridging digital divides among stakeholders through creative methods such as learning kiosks, community radio broadcasts, and printed modules. Teachers and school heads reported working closely with barangay leaders to deliver modules, disseminate announcements, and monitor learners' well-being. These collaborations also provided logistical support—such as transportation, security, and printing services—that were crucial for continued learning in remote and disadvantaged areas.

Creswell (2007) and Colaizzi (1978), foundational figures in qualitative inquiry, argue that understanding lived experiences is key to crafting responsive interventions. The lived experience of stakeholders during the pandemic highlights a shared sentiment: education cannot succeed without collective effort. Participants described how feedback loops with parents and LGUs shaped strategies for safe school reopening, mental health support, and the adjustment of performance standards. This iterative dialogue mirrors Colaizzi's emphasis on returning to participants for validation—a process that many school leaders intuitively followed to ensure that their plans resonated with the community's needs.

Moreover, stakeholder engagement during the crisis also required rethinking traditional leadership roles. As Alegado (2018) noted in his study on teacher leadership in the Philippines, empowering frontline educators and involving them in governance enhances institutional resilience. During the pandemic, teachers not only delivered instruction but also conducted surveys, distributed relief goods, and facilitated community webinars. In essence, they became co-leaders of the crisis response, a development that reflects the distributed leadership models advocated by Harris (2020).

Henaku (2020) also observed that student and parent satisfaction in Ghana during online learning was heavily dependent on how well schools maintained stakeholder communication. This aligns with the accounts of Filipino school heads in this study who maintained regular meetings—even virtually—with stakeholders to clarify expectations, gather suggestions, and co-create solutions. Such practices reinforce the importance of stakeholder buy-in for both policy execution and the moral support of teachers and learners.

The pandemic underscored what educational scholars have long argued: effective leadership must extend beyond the walls of the school. True resilience is built through collaborative partnerships, where each stakeholder is valued as a co-navigator in times of uncertainty. The experiences shared by participants in this study reaffirm the critical role of inclusive leadership and community collaboration in sustaining education through crisis.

Digital and Technological Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented disruption in education systems globally, forcing a sudden shift to remote and distance learning. In the Philippines, this transformation tested not only the resilience of school leaders but also their capacity to adapt and lead amid digital and technological challenges. One of the most significant obstacles was the lack of digital infrastructure and the persistent digital divide among schools, teachers, and students. Leadership during this time demanded agility, innovation, and resilience in managing technological transitions, often without adequate preparation or support.

According to Karakaya et al. (2020), many teachers faced difficulties in conducting distance learning due to inadequate training in digital platforms and unreliable internet connectivity. These issues severely hindered the effective implementation of online instruction. This situation was echoed in the Philippine context, where the Department of Education (DepEd, 2020) acknowledged that internet access and access to digital devices remained unequal, especially in rural and marginalized communities. In light of these challenges, school leaders had to go beyond their traditional roles. They became not only instructional leaders but also technology facilitators, digital troubleshooters, and crisis managers.

Leadership during a crisis requires more than administrative skills—it demands strategic thinking and empathetic communication. As Harris (2020) emphasized, leading a school during lockdown involved rapidly acquiring digital competencies while maintaining the morale and well-being of both staff and learners. In many cases, leaders had to learn digital tools alongside their staff, exemplifying what Creswell (2007) describes as participatory and emergent leadership in qualitative contexts. This immersive and responsive approach allowed leaders to better support their teachers, many of whom were overwhelmed by the shift to unfamiliar technologies and teaching platforms.

School heads were forced to act as frontliners of educational continuity, resolving connectivity issues, organizing virtual trainings, distributing printed modules, and responding to parents' and teachers' anxieties. Fink (2002) argued

that effective crisis management hinges on early planning and adaptability. However, the rapid onset of the pandemic left little time for preparation, thus compelling leaders to act based on intuition and immediate problem-solving. This aligns with Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological principle of understanding lived experiences—school leaders were thrown into an unfamiliar landscape where lived experience, rather than policy manuals, became the core basis for decision-making.

Further complicating the leadership challenge was the multigenerational composition of the workforce. As Abrams and Von Frank (2014) noted, communication and collaboration across generational lines require tailored strategies. Digital natives such as younger teachers might have been more comfortable navigating online tools, while older educators often needed additional technical support. Leaders had to bridge this digital competence gap sensitively to ensure collective efficacy. This reality is consistent with the findings of Baldonado and Spangenburg (2009), who emphasized the importance of addressing generational expectations in organizational leadership, particularly in times of disruption.

The digital divide did not only exist among teachers but also among students. Henaku (2020) found that in low-income countries, online learning disproportionately affected students who lacked internet access or learning devices. In the Philippines, this digital inequity deepened the educational gap, prompting school leaders to adopt blended or modular approaches (DepEd, 2020). Leaders worked collaboratively with local governments, community stakeholders, and non-governmental organizations to secure gadgets, mobile data, and even printing services for learning modules. This approach reflected what Bandur (2012) termed school-based management, where local leadership takes initiative in mobilizing resources and decision-making for the welfare of learners.

Moreover, the absence of a clear and cohesive national digital education strategy put pressure on individual school leaders to craft local responses. As Alegado (2018) highlighted, Filipino teacher-leaders often experience challenges related to lack of systemic support, unclear directives, and insufficient resources. These were all amplified during the pandemic. Despite these constraints, many school leaders rose to the occasion, embodying the qualities of adaptive and transformational leadership described by Ali (2017). They inspired their teachers and staff through modeling flexibility, encouraging innovation, and fostering a supportive virtual community.

As Euber (2020) remarked, the real story of the pandemic lies not only in its hardships but also in the human stories of resilience, creativity, and leadership. In educational settings, these stories were written daily by school heads who refused to let digital barriers halt the mission of learning. Their leadership became the backbone of pandemic-era education, balancing policy mandates with grassroots realities.

The digital and technological challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic served as a litmus test for educational leadership. School leaders had to function in multifaceted roles—balancing technical, emotional, and strategic demands. Despite the lack of training, unreliable digital infrastructure, and limited resources, their commitment to learning continuity ensured that education, though disrupted, did not come to a standstill. As Harris and Jones (2020) note, the pandemic redefined leadership in education, highlighting that the most effective leaders are those who can navigate uncertainty with courage, empathy, and vision.

Professional and Emotional Support Systems

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly disrupted educational systems worldwide, posing not only logistical and instructional challenges but also emotional and psychological strains on educators. One significant finding that emerged from this crisis is the necessity for school leadership to actively support the emotional well-being of teachers. As frontliners in the education sector, teachers were expected to quickly adapt to unfamiliar teaching modalities, manage their personal anxieties, and maintain a sense of normalcy for students despite the overwhelming uncertainty. In response, effective school leaders adopted intentional strategies to prioritize professional and emotional support systems within their institutions.

Supporting teachers' emotional well-being has increasingly become a leadership priority during and beyond the pandemic. School leaders implemented open-door policies, initiated wellness check-ins, and developed peer mentoring and coaching programs to provide teachers with psychological safety and professional camaraderie. These approaches align with the principles of emotionally intelligent leadership, which emphasize empathy, open communication, and interpersonal sensitivity (Bolarinwa & Adeyemi, 2013; Behrstock & Clifford, 2009). Emotionally intelligent leaders recognize that teacher performance is closely linked to mental health and job satisfaction, particularly during times of crisis.

The literature supports the importance of such leadership strategies. For instance, Harris and Jones (2012) emphasize that in disruptive times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, school leaders must go beyond managerial roles and become champions of emotional resilience. Leaders needed to listen actively, offer reassurance, and maintain strong communication lines to create a climate of trust and support. Harris (2020) further notes that leading a school during

lockdown required flexibility, adaptability, and, above all, compassion for teachers who were navigating both professional and personal hardships.

This shift in leadership focus is consistent with Creswell's (2007) and Colaizzi's (1978) emphasis on understanding lived experiences in qualitative inquiry. School leaders who adopted phenomenological perspectives were better positioned to respond to teachers' emotional needs, as they grounded their decisions in a deeper understanding of what educators were experiencing on a day-to-day basis. By using empathy as a leadership tool, these leaders could implement interventions rooted in the actual needs and voices of their teachers.

Moreover, in the Philippine context, the Department of Education (2020) acknowledged in its Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) the importance of protecting the welfare of teachers. The BE-LCP outlines provisions for mental health support, access to psychological services, and efforts to lighten administrative workloads—clear evidence that systemic support was recognized as essential for sustaining educational delivery in a remote or blended setting.

The narrative of teacher support also emerged globally. Henaku (2020), in his study of Ghanaian college students and faculty during the pandemic, highlighted that emotional and technical support was essential for faculty who were adjusting to remote teaching. Similarly, Joshi et al. (2020) found that Indian educators expressed the need for continuous training and emotional backing to cope with the abrupt transition to online modalities. These findings echo the idea that professional development must go hand in hand with emotional and social support to truly empower teachers.

Effective emotional support systems do not function in isolation; they thrive in a culture of collaboration and community. Abrams and von Frank (2014) underscore the significance of multigenerational workplace communication and the need to create spaces where all educators feel heard, regardless of age or technological proficiency. Younger teachers may bring digital fluency but may lack the emotional maturity to manage pandemic-induced stress, whereas veteran teachers may struggle with technology but bring resilience and mentorship potential. Leadership strategies that encourage intergenerational mentoring and collegial exchanges can harness the strengths of diverse teaching cohorts, resulting in collective growth and mutual emotional reinforcement.

Likewise, Alegado (2018) notes the challenges of teacher leadership in the Philippines and emphasizes that genuine leadership must consider teachers' voices and foster inclusive dialogue. By involving teachers in decision-making and recognizing their contributions, school leaders can enhance teachers' sense of agency and reduce feelings of helplessness that often accompany systemic changes and educational reforms.

In times of crisis, as Fink (2002) explains in his work on crisis management, leaders must be prepared to plan for the inevitable disruptions and their aftermath. Emotional well-being cannot be treated as an afterthought; rather, it should be embedded in school crisis plans. Leaders who proactively invest in mental health resources and cultivate school cultures that normalize emotional vulnerability can better weather future challenges.

This is particularly relevant as leaders navigate the post-pandemic recovery phase. According to Euber (2020), it is essential to tell the real story of the pandemic's effects—not just in terms of learning loss, but also regarding the psychological toll on educators and students alike. Acknowledging the emotional labor of teachers and responding with compassion and tangible support not only validates their experiences but also strengthens the fabric of the educational community.

The implementation of professional and emotional support systems during the pandemic serves as a case study of leadership in action. It highlights the evolving responsibilities of educational leaders and reinforces the idea that sustainable school improvement is impossible without addressing the human side of teaching. Leaders who adopt a holistic approach to teacher support—balancing professional development with mental health initiatives—are more likely to cultivate resilient, motivated, and effective educators.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed that leadership in education must encompass not only instructional and managerial competencies but also emotional intelligence and empathy. As schools move forward, integrating these insights into leadership practices is not only beneficial—it is imperative. By prioritizing emotional support systems and professional collaboration, educational leaders can build learning environments where teachers are empowered to thrive, not just survive.

Conclusion:

The experiences of Filipino educational leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the indispensable role of effective leadership in times of crisis. Faced with unprecedented disruptions, school leaders were challenged to think beyond conventional administrative roles and take on dynamic responsibilities that demanded empathy, innovation,

and strategic foresight. Their actions were pivotal in promoting resilience among teachers and learners, maintaining continuity in instruction, and ensuring the overall stability of school communities.

The Philippine educational context, with its unique socio-cultural and infrastructural challenges, called for leadership that is both contextually responsive and future-oriented. The pandemic served as a wake-up call, revealing the limitations of traditional leadership models and underscoring the need for adaptability, inclusivity, and technological fluency. Leaders had to navigate shifting policies, bridge digital divides, and foster collaboration among stakeholders—all while attending to the emotional and psychological well-being of their school communities.

Moving forward, educational leadership and management in the Philippines stand at a crucial crossroads. There is a compelling need to reframe leadership not merely as a position of authority, but as a practice rooted in service, innovation, and continuous learning. To sustain the progress made during the pandemic and address long-standing gaps in the system, it is essential to invest in targeted professional development. Programs must focus on equipping school leaders with competencies in crisis management, digital leadership, inclusive decision-making, and stakeholder engagement.

Furthermore, institutionalizing the best practices that emerged during the pandemic—such as collaborative leadership models, open communication channels, and mental health support systems—can create more resilient and responsive educational environments. These lessons should inform future policy directions and leadership frameworks at both national and local levels.

The pandemic has not only tested the mettle of Filipino educational leaders but has also opened new avenues for transformational leadership. By embracing a more holistic and adaptive leadership paradigm, the Philippine education system can better prepare its schools to meet future challenges and drive sustained improvement. The task ahead is to harness the momentum of change, support the continuous growth of school leaders, and build a more equitable and resilient education system for all.

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