Leadership Practices Of School Heads In The Last Mile Schools In The Public Elementary Schools

Aldrin N. Magistrado[1,2]; Glenn M. Pardines[1,3]; Nerissa M. Pardines[1,4]; Ma. Eloisa A. Altez [1,5]

[1]Doctor of education major in Educational Management student, University of Northeastern Philippines, Iriga City, Philippines;
[2]De La Paz Elementary School, Buenavista, Quezon
[3] Bukal Elementary School, Buenavista, Quezon
[4]Cabong Elementary School, Buenavista, Quezon
[5]Sta. Yana Elementary School, Unisan, Quezon
e-mail address: magistradoaldrin1@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Receiving a quality education is a constitutional right of every learner across the globe, regardless of the school's location. Its realization lies in the quality of teaching/learning under the management of the school head. In Buenavista District I, six (6) schools belonged to the last mile schools where learning resources are limited. This study determined the leadership practices of school heads in those schools. The self-made questionnaire was utilized to identify the perception of thirty (30) teachers and (6) school heads. The data collected were analyzed using frequency counting, percentage, weighted mean, and t-test to determine the significant difference between the two groups' perceptions and the significant difference between the problems encountered and the solutions offered. The study revealed a significant difference between the perception of teachers and school heads on the leadership practices but no significant difference in the problems encountered on leadership practices and the solution offered.

Keywords:
Leadership Practices, School Heads, Last Mile Schools

INTRODUCTION

The delivery of quality education is a role of every school in all countries across the globe, regardless of its geographical location. UNESCO's 4th Sustainable Development Goal also promotes learning opportunities and quality education. Likewise, it is a constitutional right of a learner as mandated by Article XIV Section 1 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution. However, despite the Department of Education's effort to provide quality instruction, the system remains challenged (Symaco & Bustos, 2022), particularly those geographically isolated schools with limited learning resources. The Philippines, for instance, was found to have the highest learning poverty in East Asia and the Pacific, according to a survey by the World Bank (2022). Thus, there is a need to mitigate the learning gaps and assess the practices.

As the school's leader, the school head must perform such roles as management, teacher evaluation, and enforcing discipline to learners, R.A. 9155. In support of this, they are evaluated based on the performance of the school they manage (DepEd Order No. 32 s.2010). Hence establishing a sound communication system so teachers (Chiwamba & Kigobe, 2022) will be motivated to work inside the classroom is adhered to.

In modernizing the educational system, the school head, aside from the teachers, is responsible for realizing this. The aim to deliver quality, accessible,

relevant, and liberating education should always be practiced, however, according to the report of the former DepEd Secretary in 2019, 7,144 schools across the country need immediate support on accessibility. These were those schools located remotely, and the challenges faced were the unavailability to limited resources in teaching/learning situations. The school heads' leadership skills in the last mile schools were tested more than those in the areas near the town proper.

In the context of Buenavista District, six schools were situated remotely from the town proper. All had no access to an internet connection and had limited classrooms and learning materials issued. This study aimed to explore the leadership practices of school heads assigned to these schools. Primarily, it determined: (1) the leadership practices of school heads in the last mile schools in Buenavista District I in terms of communicating the vision, mission, goals, and objectives of the department, data-based strategic planning, conflict management, building high-performance teams, coordinating with others, and leading and managing change; (2) the significant difference of the school heads' perceptions from their teachers on the extent of the school leadership practices; (3) the problems encountered on school leadership practices; and (4) the solutions offered in addressing the problems; and (5) the significant difference on the problems encountered and the solutions offered.

METHOD

This quantitative research utilized descriptive-correlation design. The descriptive described the degree of a quantifiable variable, while the correlational method identified the significant difference in the data obtained from the two groups of respondents. The respondents, composed of thirty (30) teachers and six (6) school heads, were from the six (6) last mile public elementary schools in Buenavista District, namely: Cabong Elementary School, De La Paz Elementary School, Del Rosario Elementary School, Magallanes Elementary School, Mabutag Elementary School, and San Isidro Ibaba Elementary School. Their responses were taken for the school year 2022-2023. The instrument used in gathering data was a researcher-made questionnaire proofread by an English major teacher and validated by three (3) school heads and five(five) teachers from last mile schools in San Narciso District I. The validators' recommendations were considered, and the reliability was tested after the validation. In gathering data, the researchers first sent a letter of approval to conduct the study to the district supervisor in Buenavista District I. After the approval, the instruments were personally distributed to the respondents and given five (5) days to answer the questionnaire. Mean was used in calculating the extent of the practice of the school heads along different aspects and determining the level of seriousness of the problems encountered and the level of urgency of the solutions. T-Test was used to calculate the significant difference in the responses of teachers and school heads on leadership practices and draw out the significance of the difference between the problems and solutions on leadership practices.

Scale	Numerical Rating	Descriptive Rating		
		Leadership practices of school heads	Problems encountered on leadership practices	Solutions to the problems encountered
4.21-5.00	5	Very Much Practiced	Very Much Serious	Very Much Urgent
3.41-4.20	4	Much Practiced	Much Serious	Much Urgent
2.61-3.40	3	Practiced	Serious	Urgent
1.81-2.60	2	Fairly Practiced	Moderately Serious	Moderately Urgent
1.00-1.80	1	Not Practiced	Not Serious	Not Urgent

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Leadership Practices of School Heads

The leadership practices of the school heads in the last mile schools in Buenavista district I are presented in Table 1, along with verbal interpretation.

It is noteworthy that all indicators were perceived as very much practiced. It denotes that the school heads assigned in the last mile schools in the locale had shown good leadership practices, particularly in developing and communicating the Department of Education's vision, mission, goals, and objectives. It is primarily due to the consistent reminders of the department's role in achieving quality education. The functions of school heads were communicated and defined properly during the management committee meetings and pieces of training held at the regional, division, and district levels. Likewise, the study conducted by Lim (2014) revealed that analyzing and using data in identifying school needs and implementing and monitoring the School Improvement Plan were considered the critical leadership skills a school head must demonstrate to lead a school effectively.

Table 1. Leadership Practices of School Heads In The Last Mile Schools

Leadership practices	Average Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Developing and communicating Vision, Mission, Goals and Objectives	4.59	Very Much Practiced
Data-based strategic planning	4.42	Very Much Practiced
Problem solving/conflict management	4.55	Very Much Practiced
Building high performance teams	4.40	Very Much Practiced
Coordinating with others	4.51	Very Much Practiced
Leading and managing change	4.47	Very Much Practiced

Conversely, building a high-performance team, though perceived as very much practiced, got the lowest mean among other aspects. The geographical location affects the last mile schools in involving external stakeholders in participating for the betterment of the school. The donations were sometimes unable to reach the schools due to their location. Regarding the school performance, tasks were given simultaneously to each school personnel due to their small number; thus, the quality of work suffered. Therefore, it is recommended to implement thorough planning in every activity. The calendar of activities should be put in place so that everyone will be aware of the task assigned. The recognition can also motivate the teachers to perform better. Likewise, as concluded in the study of Ballarta, et al. (2022),

intensifying the development of schools by providing appropriate rewards like additional incentives such computers, office supplies, printers, and other office and laboratory equipment for those which could improve the level of practice of school personnel.

b. Significant differences on the perceptions of school head and teachers on school leadership practices

The independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine the significant difference between the perception of teachers and school heads on leadership practices in the last mile schools in Buenavista District I. As revealed in Table 2, there were significant difference (t(33)=-12.949, p=0.000) in the scores with mean score of (M=-0.749, SD=0.337).Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

It denotes the difference in perceptions of school heads and teachers rooted in their work assignments. The school heads were assigned to empower the teachers, while the latter were focused on learning delivery however they can have e the same perception on the practices when shared governance is enhanced. The school heads will communicate his/her targets in the schools so that the teachers will be informed. The annual implementation plan and the school improvement plan should also be crafted together. Spending hours in learning action cells can also strengthen the connection between school heads and their teachers.

Table 2. The Perceptions Of School Head And Teachers On School Leadership Practices

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
The perceptions of the school head and teachers on school leadership practices	-.749	.337	.058	-.867	-.631	-12.949	33	.000

c. Problems Encountered on Leadership Practices

Table 3 reveals ten most occurring problems encountered by the school heads in the last mile schools. Four (4) out of ten (10) indicated problems were rated serious, while the rest were moderately serious.

Interpersonal relations got the highest average mean of 2.88 based on the perception of the respondents interpreted as serious. A harmonious relationship between superiors and subordinates was sometimes challenging due to the job descriptions, and few sometimes misinterpreted the school head's way of giving instructions. With this, proper communication indeed plays a vital role in an institution. The emotional intelligence of a school head matters in leading. The same was revealed by Gomez et al. (2021) that emotional intelligence is vital for effective leadership and that the most used skills/competencies were self-awareness, self-management, and empathy.

Meanwhile, training, experiences, and resources were the least severe among the problems, verbally interpreted as moderately serious. The school heads, even those who were assigned at the last mile schools were exposed to several leadership trainings. Through this, they gain skills essential in leading the school. As Jacobsen et al (2022) concluded, training was associated with increased school leaders' performance. Meanwhile, resources coming from the national and local budget were distributed equally to the schools through DepEd Order No. 8, s.2019, or the guidelines on the release, use, and monitoring of maintenance and other operating expenses allocation of schools. As per the order, the school budget depends on the enrolment, which is why mile schools receive smaller budgets due to the small population. Hence, the wise use of consumption is encouraged especially since the school has limited source.

Table 3. Problems Encountered In Leadership Practices

Problems encountered	Average Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Attitudes/personal point of view	2.62	Serious
Nature of task	2.57	Moderately Serious
Intervening activities	2.60	Moderately Serious
Interpersonal relationship	2.88	Serious
Job's expectation	2.82	Serious
Knowledge and skills	2.62	Moderately Serious
Power practices	3.38	Serious
Lack of resources	2.52	Moderately Serious
Limited experience	2.52	Moderately Serious
Training inadequacy	2.52	Moderately Serious

d. Solutions Offered to The Problems Encountered

Table 5 displays the solutions to problems encountered in the last mile schools in Buenavista District I. The extent of the urgency of each are also shown.

Based on the data, all solutions should be addressed as urgently as they are necessary to lead the school to improve. However, from the highest to lowest rank, utilizing internal and external stakeholders for resource generation was perceived as the most urgent, 3.27. Since the schools have limited resources, few school projects were put up. The production of learning materials was also limited because other budgets are allocated for other school expenses. Thus, school budgeting should be thoroughly planned in the annual improvement plan (AIP) and enhanced-school improvement plan (E-SIP). As agreed by Carpio, et.al (2022) establishing shared governance, responsibility, and accountability on utilization of school funds along school operation and development, teachers' welfare and development, and students' welfare and development through sound implementation of programs and projects in school should be aligned with School Improvement Plan (SIP).

Moreover, building a personalized learning environment needs also to be addressed as it was rated highest compared to others. The school head should allow the teachers to strengthen their field of interest, for it helps the latter practice the

profession with ease. The program specialization will help the school improves because the school head and teachers are performing their chosen expertise. Learning action cell sessions could be a venue in identifying the school personnel's strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threat (SWOT). The implementation of this very method leads the personnel to analyze, think critically and evaluate the situation effectively (Lola, et.al, 2022).

On the other hand, utilizing peer collaboration was the least urgent based on the data, as it is required for the school to perform. Fewer teachers made it easier for the school head to communicate with them, and the issues were immediately resolved. Likewise concluded by Agbenyega & Klibthong (2022) that respectful leadership practices serve the whole community. Thus, it is strongly recommended that communication should always be consistently practiced.

Table 5. Solutions To the Problems Encountered

Problems encountered	Average Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Participates in focused and sustained personal and professional development	2.77	Urgent
Provides shared vision and purpose	2.73	Urgent
Utilizes peer collaboration	2.70	Urgent
Maintains high visibility	2.92	Urgent
Creates an inclusive work environment	3.12	Urgent
Understands self and others technique in leading	2.75	Urgent
Improves collegiality between superior and subordinates	2.97	Urgent
Utilizes internal and external stakeholders for resource generation	3.27	Urgent
Builds a personalized learning environment	3.27	Urgent
Enrols in post-graduate studies	3.17	Urgent

e. Significant Differences on The Problems Encountered and Solutions Offered

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the perceptions of school heads and teachers for the problems encountered and the solutions offered on leadership practices. As revealed in Table 5, there was no significant difference (t(9)=1.799, p=0.106) in the scores with the mean score for problems encountered (M=0.26, SD=0.457) was higher/lower than and solutions offered (M= 0.23, SD=0.590). Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

It can be deduced from the findings that the school heads and the teachers have almost the same perceptions on the extent of the problems encountered in actualizing school leadership practices. Likewise, it could be manifested that they are working together for the school. The researchers suggest that the continuity of collaboration of school personnel should be implemented to achieve progress.

Table 5. The Significant Differences On The Problems Encountered And Solutions Offered

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Problems Encountered	.26	.457	.145	-.067	.587	1.799	9	.106
Solutions offered	.23	.590	.186	-.192	.652	1.234	9	.249

Table 5. Solutions To the Problems Encountered

Problems encountered	Average Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Participates in focused and sustained personal and professional development	2.77	Urgent
Provides shared vision and purpose	2.73	Urgent
Utilizes peer collaboration	2.70	Urgent
Maintains high visibility	2.92	Urgent
Creates an inclusive work environment	3.12	Urgent
Understands self and others technique in leading	2.75	Urgent
Improves collegiality between superior and subordinates	2.97	Urgent
Utilizes internal and external stakeholders for resource generation	3.27	Urgent
Builds a personalized learning environment	3.27	Urgent
Enrols in post-graduate studies	3.17	Urgent

f. Significant Differences On The Problems Encountered And Solutions Offered

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the perceptions of school heads and teachers for the problems encountered and the solutions offered on leadership practices. As revealed in Table 5, there was no significant difference (t(9)=1.799, p=0.106) in the scores with the mean score for problems encountered (M=0.26, SD=0.457) was higher/lower than and solutions offered (M= 0.23, SD=0.590). Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

It can be deduced from the findings that the school heads and the teachers have almost the same perceptions on the extent of the problems encountered in actualizing school leadership practices. Likewise, it could be manifested that they are working together for the school. The researchers suggest that the continuity of collaboration of school personnel should be implemented to achieve progress.

Table 5. The Significant Differences On The Problems Encountered And Solutions Offered

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Problems Encountered	.26	.457	.145	-.067	.587	1.799	9	.106
Solutions offered	.23	.590	.186	-.192	.652	1.234	9	.249

CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of this study is to determine the leadership practices of school heads in the last-mile schools in Buenavista District I. It also identifies the level of problems encountered and the solutions offered. Based on the gathered data, it is concluded that the DepEd's vision, mission, goals, and objectives are well communicated in the far-flung schools however, due to the smaller number of teachers, the tasks are given simultaneously, and as a result, the work quality decreases. The school head and their teachers have different perceptions on leadership practices as they vary in job description. It is also concluded that interpersonal relationship is one of the serious problems that need to be solved along with the power practices of the school head. Both school heads and teachers agree that the problems being encountered and solutions can be solved within the institution through communication.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following were recommended: (a) thorough planning including all school personnel for easier delegation and management of tasks, (b) providing incentives that motivate the teachers to perform well at work, (c) crafting annual implementation plan and school improvement plan should be done together, (d) increasing communication should be a practiced at all times through regular learning action cell strengthens connections between school head and teachers, (e) maximizing the use of school resources, and (f) continuous collaboration of school personnel towards achieving school progress.

REFERENCE

Agayon, A. J. D., Agayon, A. K. R., & Pentang, J. (2022). Teachers in the new normal:

Challenges and coping mechanisms in secondary schools. *Journal of Humanities and Education Development (JHED), 4.*

Agbenyega, J. S., & Klibthong, S. (2022). Giving voice: inclusive early childhood teachers' perspectives about their school leaders' leadership practices. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 1-17.

Ballarta, L. V., Illescas, C. M., Perez, D. R., & Hamora, L. A. (2022). School-Based Management Level of Practice in Selected Public Elementary Schools in Mimaropa Region, Philippines. *Journal of Pedagogical Inventions and Practices*, *8*, 134-146.

Carpio, R. P., Illescas, C. M., Perez, D. R., & Hamora, L. A. (2022). Efficiency of School Heads in the Utilization of School Funds in the Department of EducationMimaropa Region. *The Peerian Journal*, *2*, 1-24.

Chiwamba, S. V., & Kigobe, J. (2022). Challenges Encountered by School Heads in Carrying out Instructional Supervisory Activities in Public Secondary Schools in Lindi Region-Tanzania. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, *29*(4), 1-8

Chua Reyes, V., Hamid, O., & Hardy, I. (2022). When reforms make things worse: school leadership responses to poverty, disasters, and cultures of crises in the Philippine education system. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *25*(2), 331-344.

Gómez-Leal, R., Holzer, A. A., Bradley, C., Fernández-Berrocal, P., & Patti, J. (2022). The relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership in school leaders: a systematic review. Cambridge Journal of Education, 52(1), 1-21.

Jacobsen, C. B., Andersen, L. B., Bøllingtoft, A., & Eriksen, T. L. M. (2022). Can leadership training improve organizational effectiveness? Evidence from a randomized field experiment on transformational and transactional leadership. *Public Administration Review*, *82*(1), 117-131.

Lola, I., Madinabonu, N., & Ruslan, K. (2022). Using swot analysis in education. *Results of National Scientific Research International Journal*, *1*(3), 126-131.

Morris, J. E., Lummis, G. W., Lock, G., Ferguson, C., Hill, S., & Nykiel, A. (2020). The role of leadership in establishing a positive staff culture in a secondary school. Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 48(5), 802–820.

Sherry, E. (2022). Measuring Sustainable Development Goal 4. In *The Routledge Handbook of Sport and Sustainable Development* (pp. 106-112). Routledge.

Symaco, L. P., & Bustos, M. T. A. (2022). Overview of Education in the Philippines. *International Handbook on Education in South East Asia*, 1-27.

World Bank. (2022). The World Bank Annual Report 2022.

Biographical Notes:

Aldrin N. Magistrado is a teacher at De La Paz Elementary School, Buenavista, Quezon, Philippines. He has a master's degree in administration and supervision and presently taking up Doctor of Education major in Educational Management at University of Northeastern Philippines Iriga City. His research centered on basic education, particularly on classroom management and school leadership.

Glenn M. Pardines is a Principal I of Bukal Elementary School , Buenavista District 2 Division of Quezon. He holds Master of Arts in Education Major in Administration and Supervision in University of Northeastern Philippines and Bachelor of Elementary Education from Quezonian Education Collage Inc. Atimonan, Quezon.His research primarily focused on Multigrade teaching in Public Elementary School.

Nerissa L. Pardines is a Head Teacher I of Cabong Elementary School , Buenavista District 1 Division of Quezon. She holds Master of Arts in Education Major in Administration and Supervision in University of Northeastern Philippines and Bachelor of Elementary Education from Philippine Normal University, Lopez Campus. Her research primarily focused on school leadership style.

Ma. Eloiza A. Altez is a Principal I of Sta. Yana Elementary School , Unisan District, Division of Quezon. She holds Master of Arts in Education Major in Administration and Supervision in University of Northeastern Philippines and Bachelor of Elementary Education from Philippine Normal University, Lopez Campus. Her research emphasizes on educational leadership.