

Plight of School Heads as Instructional Leaders in the New Normal: Navigating the Academic Challenges

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Abstract: This study explored the plight of school heads particularly on the challenges and coping mechanisms as instructional leaders in the new normal in Santa Cruz-North District, Davao Del Sur Division. There were thirteen (13) school heads who participated in the study. This study made use of a phenomenological approach to extract the ideas of the participants. An in-depth interview was employed to gather some information with regards to their respective challenges and coping mechanisms as instructional leaders. Using the thematic analysis, the following themes emerged: the identified challenges of school heads were: adapting the new normal, increasing task demands, ensuring the monitoring of teacher's performance and student learning and mobilizing resources. The coping mechanisms were: communicating with stakeholders, providing technical assistance and managing changes. The insights drawn from the findings of the study were: having adequate pedagogic knowledge and capacity-building skills, collaborating with stakeholders, leading in a democratic way and motivating teachers. School heads as instructional leaders in the new normal were responsive to the needs of the learners and teachers. They also recognized the role of stakeholders in improving school management.

Keywords: Task Demands; Mobilizing Resources; Technical Assistance; Pedagogic Knowledge.

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I. INTRODUCTION

➤ Background of the Study

Education is essential in equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to participate in and contribute to a country's social, economic, and political development. As school leaders, principals are responsible for providing instructional leadership by supervising teaching and learning, managing instructional programs, and ensuring the effective use of instructional time. Onuma (2016) emphasized that effective instructional leadership contributes to improved curriculum implementation, quality instruction, and the achievement of school goals.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted education worldwide, affecting learners, teachers, and educational systems. During lockdowns and quarantines, 87% of the world's student population was affected, leaving approximately 1.52 billion learners out of school and related educational institutions (UNESCO Learning Portal, 2020). This sudden crisis required educational leaders to quickly adapt to changing learning environments and modalities.

In the new normal, school heads are expected to demonstrate effective leadership, sound decision-making, adaptability, and resilience in addressing emerging challenges. However, they face concerns such as unclear instructional roles, limited curriculum expertise, increased workloads, and time constraints. The changing educational landscape also presents unique challenges to school leaders' decision-making processes (Thapa, Sotang, Adhikari, Ghimire, Limbu, Joshi & Adhikari, 2020).

Moreover, school leaders are increasingly expected to focus on teaching and learning as the core functions of education. Despite this, the lack of a universal understanding of instructional leadership makes it difficult for some principals to determine how it should be effectively practiced in their schools.

In this context, the researcher seeks to examine the experiences of school heads as instructional leaders in the new normal, particularly the challenges they encountered and the strategies they used to overcome them. The findings may provide valuable insights for strengthening instructional leadership and promoting quality education.

➤ Research Questions

The school heads were challenged in the performance of their functions as instructional leaders in the new normal. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

- What are the plight of school heads as instructional leaders in the new normal education?
- How do they cope with the challenges in the new normal education?
- What educational insights can be drawn from the findings of the study?

➤ Theoretical Lens

This study is anchored on the Instructional Leadership Model of Hallinger and Murphy (1985), which views instructional leadership as the principals' actions in promoting and improving teaching and learning within the school. It involves working with teachers, learners, parents, school planning and management, as well as the effective use of school facilities and resources. The model has been widely used as a reference in instructional leadership studies (Nor Azni, 2015; Jamelaa, 2012; Yusri, 2012; Premavathy, 2010; Sukarmin, 2010; Wan Roslina, 2011; Brown and Chai, 2012; Lyons, 2010; Mattar, 2012; Peariso, 2011). It identifies three major dimensions of instructional leadership: defining the

school mission, managing instructional programs, and developing a positive school learning environment.

The model further identifies eleven leadership functions, including setting and communicating school goals, supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum, monitoring learners' progress, protecting instructional time, maintaining learning support, providing incentives to teachers and learners, enforcing academic standards, and promoting professional development. This framework is further supported by Talcott Parsons' Systems Theory (1951), which views the new normal educational system as a process where inputs are transformed through school leadership and management to achieve quality educational outcomes.

The conceptual framework of the study is presented in figure 1. As seen on the figure, there are three interconnected variables; challenges of school heads as instructional leaders in the new normal education, coping mechanisms of school heads as instructional leaders in the new normal education and insights drawn from these challenges. These three variables are the focus of the study to explore the plight of school heads as instructional leaders in the new normal education. Likewise, to reflect on their experiences and practices and improve their performances in instructional leadership.

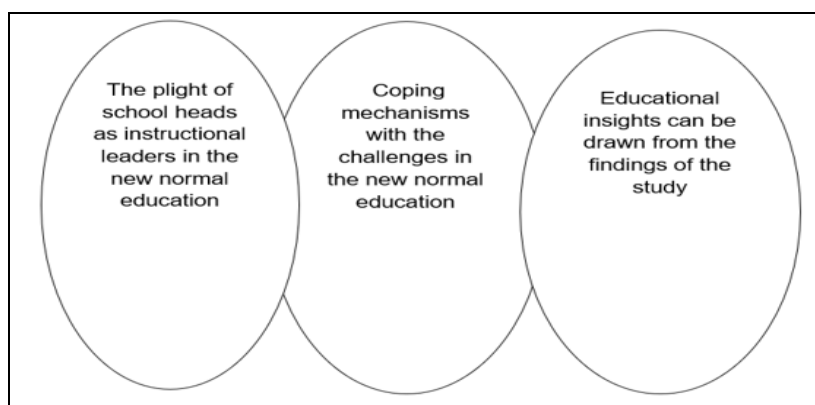


Fig 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

II. METHOD

➤ Design and Procedure

This study used qualitative research employing phenomenology. Interviews were conducted with a group of individuals who have first-hand knowledge of an event, situation or experience. The interview(s) attempts to answer two broad questions (Moustakas, 1994). The data were read and reread and culled for like phrases and themes that were then grouped to form clusters of meaning (Creswell, 2013). Through this process the researcher constructed the universal meaning of the event, situation or experiences and arrived at a more profound understanding of the phenomenon.

In this study, phenomenology attempted to extract the most pure, untainted data and in some interpretations of the approach, bracketing was used by the researcher to document personal experiences with the subject to help remove him or

herself from the process. One method of bracketing is memoing (Maxwell, 2013).

➤ Research Participants

The respondents of the study consisted of thirteen (13) selected school heads from public elementary schools in Santa Cruz-North District, Division of Davao del Sur. Purposive sampling was employed, particularly through the key informant technique, in which selected individuals serve as knowledgeable sources of information about a specific setting or group (Tongco, 2007).

The participants were deliberately selected based on their relevance to the study and their ability to provide the necessary information. Individual interviews were conducted through Google Meet and virtual meetings due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly affected the education sector. These interviews provided opportunities to

explore and compare the participants' experiences and practices as instructional leaders in managing their schools. Throughout the research process, the participants' identities and privacy were strictly protected in accordance with research ethics. The researcher maintained a professional, respectful, and ethical relationship with all participants.

➤ Data Analysis

The data gathered through in-depth interviews were carefully reviewed, transcribed, and encoded verbatim from the recorded sessions using a smartphone, computer, and laptop. The researcher examined the responses individually and documented relevant information in field notes. In-depth interviews (IDI) were used to identify the challenges and coping mechanisms of school heads as instructional leaders in the new normal and to determine insights from their experiences.

Thematic Content Analysis was employed to examine and interpret the participants' responses. The interview transcripts were systematically coded, and common themes and patterns were identified across the responses. The researcher repeatedly reviewed the participants' statements and interpretations to ensure that the emerging themes accurately reflected their experiences. Thematic analysis was used to organize the data and derive meaningful lessons and insights from the participants' accounts.

Environmental triangulation was also applied to strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings by examining information from different sources, methods,

settings, or perspectives. Triangulation allowed the researcher to capture various dimensions of the phenomenon rather than relying on a single source of information. Transcription, member checking, and triangulation analysis were used to ensure that the participants' views were accurately represented and interpreted. In conducting the study, the researcher adhered to the principles of trustworthiness and credibility emphasized by Mazuwelics (2018).

➤ Analytical Framework

The analytical framework shows how school heads, as instructional leaders, shared their experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights during the new normal. These experiences provided perspectives that may help improve educational leadership and prepare school heads for similar situations. The interview data were transcribed, organized, and analyzed to identify patterns and themes. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted virtually through Google Meet.

Figure 2 presents the procedures used in analyzing the textual data. The recorded interviews were carefully reviewed and transcribed, after which significant statements were identified and grouped into broader units of meaning or themes (Creswell, 2007). The researcher also bracketed personal assumptions to remain faithful to the participants' experiences and the phenomenon being studied (Groenewald, 2004).

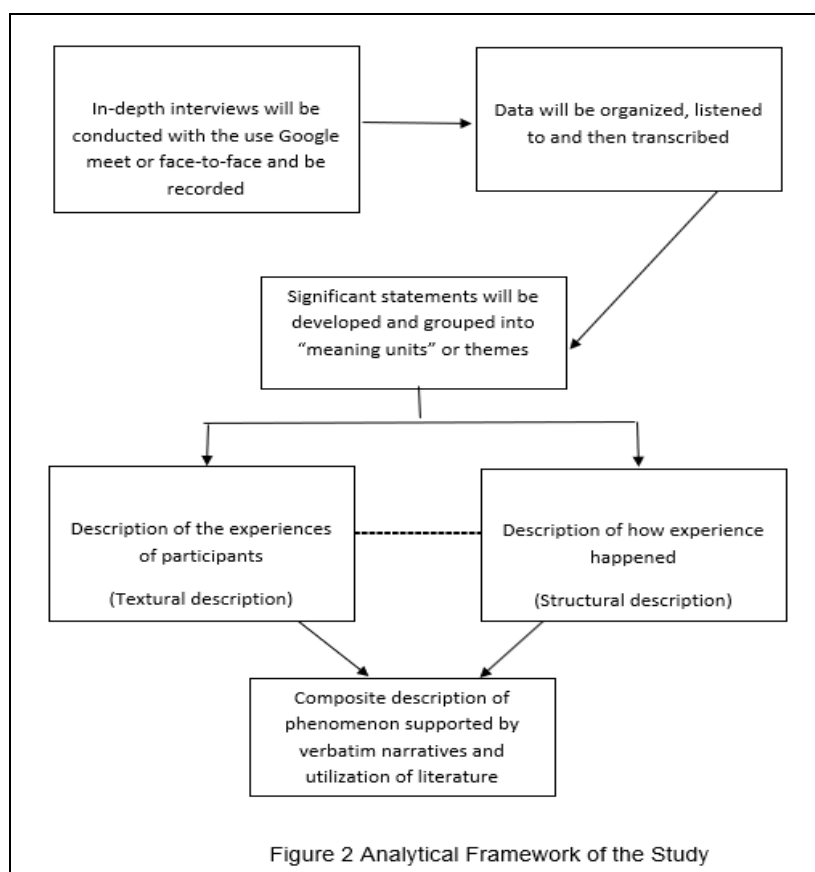


Fig 2 Analytical Framework of the Study

The identified units of meaning were organized into clusters of themes to reveal common experiences among the participants (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). A textual description was then developed to explain what the participants experienced, followed by a structural description focusing on how and in what context the experiences occurred (Creswell, 2007). Finally, a composite description was developed to present the essence and overall meaning of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2007).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

➤ *The Challenges of School Heads as Instructional Leaders in the New Normal Education*

Of the many responsibilities assigned to principals, instructional leadership has received increased attention and continues to dominate in this age of achievement and accountability. In this study, challenges of school heads as instructional leaders in the new normal education were navigated based on participants' responses.

• *Adapting to the New Normal*

Instructional leadership has become an increasingly important responsibility of school heads, particularly in the context of achievement and accountability. In this study, participants' responses revealed that adapting to the new normal was one of the major challenges faced by school heads. The shift from traditional education to new learning modalities required parents, teachers, students, and school leaders to make significant adjustments.

Among the most affected were school heads, who had to manage increased responsibilities while ensuring the continuity and quality of education. They were expected to lead their schools effectively, implement new learning platforms, and respond to the changing needs of stakeholders in the new normal.

✓ *These were Noted on the Following Remarks:*

"School readiness to quick shift of delivery of learning, responses to academic problems of teachers and students, utilization of school MOOE to cater needs of stakeholders for the new normal." (P2)

"Implementing a distance learning and learning loss of learners. Manage curriculum and instruction for the success of each learner in school and empower teachers to become leaders themselves." (P6)

*"How to give virtual instruction in different platform while signal of the internet is beyond our control. *How to provide learning materials to all the learners and how to evaluate learning. Health Risk which decreases parent participation in program implementation."* (P9)

"One is the limited contact with the learners in terms of the delivery of learnings, compared to face to face. Considering the strict health protocol where everybody needs to adhere." (P11)

"Coping with technological demands (the need to upgrade with skills in manipulating online applications to fit demand of millennial education. Transition from normal to new normal, reading skills enrolled in modular distance program, mental health of teachers and children, meager budget-these are the challenges in the new normal." (P12)

The transition to the new normal significantly affected student learning, particularly due to the absence of face-to-face classes and limited access to learning resources. Schools also faced challenges in evaluating student learning and program outcomes (World Bank Group Education, 2020). Despite these difficulties, schools were expected to ensure quality education through appropriate learning platforms, processes, and management systems. The World Bank Education Global Practice (2020) emphasized that while technology can support learning, policymakers should also ensure that learning opportunities remain accessible offline.

Following school closures, institutions were required to develop online learning experiences, although online education was already an established form of distance learning (Singh & Thurman, 2019; Stern, n.d.). Distance learning involves teachers and learners being physically separated (Newby et al., 2000), while online learning specifically occurs through the Internet (Stern, n.d.). However, schools encountered challenges such as limited digital literacy, inadequate computers and internet access, technical difficulties, assessment concerns, and insufficient support systems (Anderson, 2008). Franklin et al. (2015) further noted that the rapid shift to fully online teaching and learning presented unprecedented challenges for teachers and school leaders.

• *Increasing Tasks Demands*

Another challenge affecting instructional leadership is the increasing workload and responsibilities of school heads. Similar to teachers, principals have experienced work intensification, with additional duties involving administration, management, student concerns, personnel supervision, external coordination, conflict resolution, resource management, and parent engagement (Meyer & Macmillan, 2001; Mitchell & Castle, 2005). These expanding responsibilities often leave instructional leadership tasks to be addressed after regular working hours, making it more difficult for school heads to fully perform and share their instructional leadership roles.

✓ *Participants Emphasized the Importance of their Roles and Responsibilities in Managing Schools During the New Normal, as Reflected in the Following Remarks:*

"More online reports are tasks to do and obliged to submit an online platform." (P7)

"Providing quality education to all learners through delivery of lessons. Supervise through video lessons, online platforms and follow the health and safety protocols." (P8)

"Capacitating teachers in ICT to adapt innovations and practices that fits to this new normal set-up. Conduct frequent LAC to teachers. Encourage teachers to make

comparative analysis based on the learner's performance from modular to face-to-face classes.” (P11)

Onuma (2016) asserted that the principal has the primary functions of exhibiting effective instructional leadership practices for the improvement of diversified curriculum and quality of instructional programme for effective attainment of set school goals.

- *Ensuring the Monitoring of Teachers' Performance and Student Learning*

School heads play a vital role in setting expectations and promoting the continuous improvement of instructional programs, staff development, and classroom conditions that support active learning. The effectiveness of teaching and learning is reflected in learners' academic performance, making principals key figures in strengthening instructional delivery. Their collaboration with School Management Teams (SMTs), senior and master teachers, and subject heads is essential in ensuring effective curriculum implementation and improving learner outcomes (Naidu et al., 2008).

- ✓ *Some Participants' Responses were Noted as Follows:*

“Make learning more meaningful and productive to learners. A provider of continuing education that makes learning essential in the new normal.” (P1)

“Enhance teachers' competence to improve learning outcomes.” (P4)

“Establishing common vision for the school and implementing instructional processes that involve teachers and stakeholders. Analyze the pupils' assessment and make intervention.” (P5)

“Manage curriculum and instruction for the success of each learner in school and empower teachers to become leader themselves.” (P6)

“Implement the planned activities, evaluate and make improvement.” (P9)

“Crafting the school BE-LCP for a unified understanding and implementation of the school operation.” (P12)

Instructional leadership plays a significant role in improving teachers' instructional practices and, consequently, students' learning outcomes. Hallinger's (2011) research synthesis showed that instructional leadership has a substantial influence on student learning. Similarly, studies by Abdul Ghani and Anandan (2012), Zahara and Suria (2011), and Quah (2011) found that effective instructional leadership practices contribute to improved learning quality. In fact, instructional leadership has been found to have a stronger effect on student learning than transformational leadership (Abdul Ghani & Anandan, 2012). Thus, effective instructional leadership is essential in

achieving the school's primary goal of improving student success.

According to NASSP (2013), strengthening instructional monitoring and supervision enables teachers to perform effectively and learners to achieve better learning outcomes. This responsibility rests largely on school heads, who are expected to provide guidance, supervision, and support to ensure quality teaching and learning.

- *Mobilizing Resources*

Principal directs stakeholders in achieving the school's vision and goals and serves as a broker of resources such as materials, information, or opportunities. According to Lipham (2016), financial management skills are needed by the school principals to make them effective in planning, sourcing and in utilization of school funds. For any organization to achieve its goals and objectives and for continuous existence, managers must acquire appropriate competencies in effective management of its vital resources. The result is further supported by Ikediugwu (2016) that good school managers must carefully and effectively handle educational resources particularly money, material and machines.

- ✓ *In this Regard, School Heads Identified as Scarcity of Resources as One of the Challenges that they Needed to Address. They Stated:*

“Sometimes, we experience scarcity of supplies. We keep in touch with the stakeholders that can support the need of the school.” (P1)

“We encountered problems like availability of resources and lack of facilities in school.” (P3)

“We have meager budget. So, I manage school resources through successful planning.” (P12)

“One of the challenges in the new normal is the limited mobilization.” (P13)

In the Philippines, the Third Elementary Education Project (TEEP) encouraged school heads to mobilize local resources for instructional materials and infrastructure through collaboration with Parent-Teacher-Community Associations (PTCAs), local government units (LGUs), non-government organizations (NGOs), and alumni (DepEd, 2006b). Such partnerships help schools address resource needs and strengthen the delivery of educational programs.

Successful schools also prioritize providing teachers with adequate instructional resources, including textbooks, technology, and quality curriculum materials. Ensuring that teachers have the necessary tools and supportive working conditions enables them to perform effectively and contribute to improved teaching and learning outcomes (Wallace Foundation, 2013).

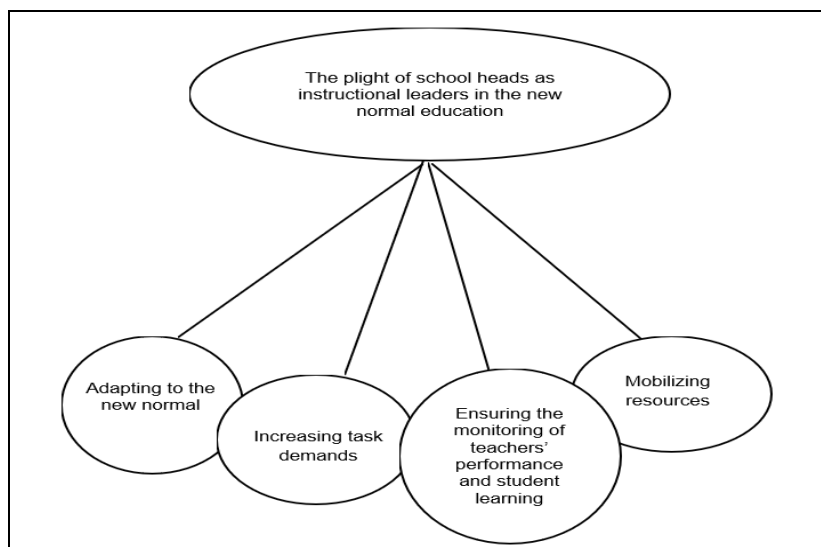


Fig 3 Emerging Themes on the Plight of School Heads as Instructional Leaders

➤ *The Coping Mechanisms of School Heads as Instructional Leaders with the Challenges in the New Normal*

The new normal education presented numerous challenges for school heads in fulfilling their roles as instructional leaders and managing school operations. Despite these difficulties, school heads are expected to remain effective and responsive to the needs of their schools. Gordon (2003) emphasized that strong instructional leadership involves having a clear direction, accurately assessing instruction, identifying ways to improve teaching, aligning resources with academic goals, supporting professional learning, and addressing practices that may hinder school improvement.

Despite the challenges encountered, the participants identified four major themes that described the coping mechanisms they used to address the difficulties of instructional leadership and school management during the new normal education.

- *Communicating with Stakeholders*

As effective communicators, principals demonstrate commitment to school goals, communicate a clear instructional vision, and establish consistent standards for teaching and teacher performance (Andrews & Soder, 1987). Similarly, Paine and McCann (2009) emphasized that schools should take the initiative in providing stakeholders with relevant data and information to support their active participation in improving student achievement.

✓ *The Importance of Effective Communication in Instructional Leadership is Reflected in the Following Statements:*

"Keep in touch with stakeholders that can support the need of teachers. Give informative announcement that parents can easily digest information that they can relay to their children." (P1)

"Effective communication with internal and external stakeholders is important to build trust and helps create

shared understanding and commitment for the new normal education." (P2)

"Conduct regular meeting of teachers to provide assistance and allocate funds for the purchase of instructional materials. There should be transparency of all purchases and proper monitoring appropriation." (P4)

"Always keep in touch with parents/ guardians motivating them to support their children." (P5)

"Deal with challenges by establishing open, regular good communication among teachers and parents. Have an open communication for effective planning. Trust your team." (P6)

"Orient and educate parents of their duties and responsibilities as parent and as partner in educating the children in the new normal." (P9)

Malipot (2020) emphasized the importance of orienting parents and learners through online or virtual platforms as part of schools' preparation for the new normal. Effective communication among school stakeholders was essential in preparing learners and parents for new learning modalities and supporting student performance. This was particularly relevant as schools increasingly adopted online instruction during the post-COVID-19 new normal (Cahapay, 2020).

School heads were also expected to establish positive relationships and effective communication channels with teachers, parents, learners, and other stakeholders to promote improved educational outcomes (O'Donnell & White, 2005). Such communication enables school leaders to address concerns related to teaching performance and strengthen collaboration among stakeholders (Le Fevre & Robinson, 2015).

- *Providing Technical Assistance*

Technical Assistance (TA) refers to professional guidance, assistance, or support provided to help individuals

perform their functions more effectively. It is a structured process that may include consultation, skills training, knowledge sharing, instruction, and the provision of technical information to achieve specific goals.

Supporting teachers should be a priority of school heads to strengthen their instructional knowledge, skills, and preparedness. Effective school leaders provide continuous support to teachers and school staff, enabling them to improve their professional performance and contribute to better teaching and learning outcomes (Wallace Foundation, 2013).

✓ *The Following Narratives Reflect the Experiences of the Participants:*

"Give inputs to the teachers that serve as guide to adapt the new normal education." (P1)

"To become an effective instructional leader, one must show full support to the teachers. School heads and teachers carefully considered what was needed to meet the needs of the most at-risk student populations, as well as the teachers that would need the most support. Instructional leaders also will work with instructional technology staff to provide instructional supervisors and instructional coaches to design and provide professional learning and support." (P2)

"Conduct SLAC sessions/ INSET to teachers, demonstration teaching and coaching." (P4)

"Give technical assistance to teachers in curriculum instruction. Provide support and resources to enable them to deliver more effective lessons." (P6)

"Making sure that the targets for the learners being achieved. By providing technical assistance to the teachers. Conduct school Learning Action Cell for teachers' continuous professional development." (P11)

This is also evidenced by the findings of Mat Rahimi and Mohd Yusri (2015) findings that the principal instructional leadership of principals contributes significantly to the teaching competence of teachers.

• *Managing Changes*

Organizational change is necessary in many sectors, including education, to improve existing systems and develop quality human capital for the future (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; Khalid & Norhafezah, 2011; Santhidran et al., 2013; MEB, 2013). Schools must actively participate in implementing educational reforms because these changes influence teaching and learning practices, classroom environments, and the roles of teachers and learners (Tan, 2010).

However, implementing organizational change can be challenging and requires strong school leadership (Hallinger, 2009; Fullan, 2007; Schein, 1996). School leaders must serve as effective change agents who guide and motivate teachers toward desired goals. Their leadership capacity significantly influences the successful adoption of educational changes

and innovations (Tai, 2013; Jamelaa, 2012; Izani, 2012; Mohammed Sani & Izham, 2012; Leithwood & Strauss, 2009; Hoy & Miskel, 2008; Fullan, 2007).

✓ *Some Participants Shared the Following Experiences:*

"Being resilient, flexible, adaptive and committed to make change for the betterment of the students, the teachers and the school as a whole. I have dealt the challenges by simply being adaptive to change. Although this is so drastic but gradually I know I can handle it to the cooperation and collaboration of the internal and external people in the institution." (P2)

"Being patient, cautious and always believing that the best has yet to come. Its just a matter of time that everybody would be able to adjust. Allow ourselves to be open-minded in changes and adjustments that we need to adopt. Participate in trainings, webinars and other activities that offers spiritual, mental, psychological, and social development and awareness." (P11)

"Innovating changes to adapt in the new normal set up. (Crafted the BE-LCP of the school, contingency plans and etc.) Facilitate resiliency program on school operations, curriculum implementation and stakeholders' participation." (P12)

"Adapt trends and always be updated with the instructional activities given by the authorities. Always keep updated of teaching strategies." (P13)

Willingness to change is the initial phase of Lewin's Change Model (1951) and is essential in reducing resistance to organizational change. Organizations may struggle to implement reforms when members are not prepared to change (Armenakis et al., 1999). Hallinger (2003) noted that when teachers view instructional leadership as appropriate for implementing reforms, they are more likely to support and commit to the changes (Sheppard, 1996). Jamelaa (2012) found a significant relationship between instructional leadership and principals' attitudes toward change, with three variables contributing 61.8% significantly ($p < 0.05$) to principals' attitudes toward change in secondary schools in Pahang. Similarly, positive attitudes among instructional leaders encourage teachers to support and become ready to implement changes (Nor Azni, 2015).

Readiness for change should also be supported by continuous development of leaders' and teachers' knowledge and skills. Principals who lack adequate knowledge and skills may find it difficult to implement changes effectively (Suseela & Sim, 2010). As instructional leaders, principals should model continuous learning and serve as guides for teachers who encounter difficulties during the implementation of reforms (Leithwood & Day, 2008). Previous studies have consistently linked instructional leadership with successful educational change, particularly in Malaysia (Nor Azni, 2015; Shafinaz, 2014; Rahimi, 2014; Yusri, 2012; Jameela, 2012; Rohilah, 2010; Azhan, 2009). Thus, instructional leadership remains an important factor in supporting and sustaining educational changes.

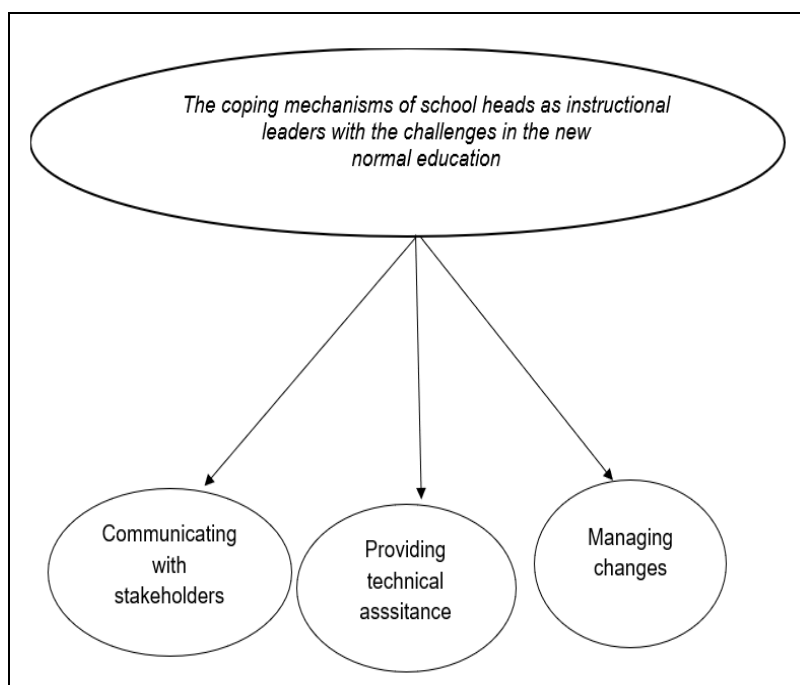


Fig 4 Emerging Themes on the Coping Mechanisms of School Heads as Instructional with the Challenges

➤ *Educational Insights Drawn from the Challenges and Coping Mechanisms of School Heads as Instructional Leaders in the New Normal Education*

The challenges and coping mechanisms experienced by school heads as instructional leaders during the new normal provided valuable perspectives on instructional leadership. Despite significant changes in school management, teaching, and learning, school heads discovered various strategies to strengthen instructional practices and address emerging challenges. These experiences contributed to improved leadership performance and the delivery of quality instruction.

The key insights shared by the participants were carefully analyzed and are presented as follows:

- *Having Adequate Pedagogic Knowledge and Capacity-Building Skills*

Leadership involves influencing others to achieve organizational goals, with leaders' beliefs about causality, fairness, intelligence, consequences, and control shaping how they guide and influence members of the organization (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). In pedagogical leadership, principals are expected to possess knowledge of research-based curriculum and instruction, apply varied teaching practices, organize schools to promote student learning, and provide teachers with opportunities for professional growth (Bottoms, 2003). However, Stimpson and Jordan (2007) noted that limited attention has been given to the subject knowledge and pedagogical beliefs of school leaders responsible for curriculum, staffing, school vision, and stakeholder communication.

Effective educational leaders are often grounded in strong teaching experience. Borba (2009) emphasized that becoming an effective teacher is an important foundation for developing the skills needed for effective school leadership

and instructional programs. Similarly, MacNeill et al. (2003) stressed that school leaders should understand how students learn and support the design, implementation, and assessment of educational activities that respond to learners' diverse needs. The importance of developing knowledge and skills is reflected in the following participants' responses:

"Attend training to improve oneself. Always update oneself at all times." (P3)

"To champion a school, it must be a good strategic planning for implementation. Use tools to monitor and evaluate improvement." (P9)

"Continue being persistent to policies and guidelines set by the department and never limit myself to possible learnings to become an effective instructional leader." (P11)

"Coping with technological demands (the need to upgrade skills in manipulating online applications to fit the demand of millennial education)." (P12)

Further, MacNeill et al. (2003) found principals with strong pedagogical knowledge and capacity building skills were dynamic and successful in developing places for teaching and learning versus schools whose principals lacked those qualities or attempted to quickly acquire them, therefore making uneven progress. Research by Ylimaki (2007) has confirmed the pedagogic leadership excogitation of MacNeill et al.

- *Collaborating with Stakeholders*

Educational leadership is a collaborative effort that requires unity and teamwork among school leaders and stakeholders (Ottestad, 2013). As school heads, fostering collaboration among teachers and other stakeholders is

essential to achieving school goals and improving educational outcomes.

Collaborative relationships among teachers and their commitment to their work contribute significantly to learners' academic achievement (Agasisti et al., 2012; Steyn, 2005). Similarly, Waweru et al. (2013) found that instructional leadership practices of school principals play a fundamental role in influencing learners' academic performance. The importance of collaboration with stakeholders is reflected in the following participants' remarks:

"To improve the teaching-learning process based on my instructional leadership practices, there should be collaborative efforts among teachers, school head, pupils and parents." (P5)

"Engage stakeholders in addressing the needs of the learners in school. Gather the parents, community and stakeholders for sharing the policies and guidelines and for conducting general assembly. The school is managed well when all have done and engaged in all undertakings of the school and the school has progresses and developed." (P8)

"Increase school partners and collaborate for school improvement by producing learning materials for children. Always look for ways to improve school learning environment and invest in partnership. We need partners to improve learning outcomes." (P9)

"Coordination with the external stakeholders is crucially important." (13)

Parental involvement encompasses communication, parenting, volunteering, learning support at home, decision-making, and collaboration with the community and school (Epstein et al., 2011; LaRocque et al., 2011; Mutch & Collins, 2012). School leaders play an important role in strengthening these partnerships by actively engaging parents in matters related to teaching and learning.

Parents are essential partners in their children's education because they can provide valuable information about learners' needs and challenges at home while also supporting school programs. Their active participation in instructional matters can strengthen school-home collaboration and contribute to better learning outcomes.

• *Leading in a Democratic Way*

Democratic leaders initiate plans and decisions while actively seeking input from their team members. Rather than relying solely on their own ideas, they consult teachers and other stakeholders on issues that require attention. This participatory approach encourages shared responsibility and promotes more inclusive decision-making in educational settings.

Loiseau (2005) emphasized that democratic leaders provide members with opportunities to express their ideas and concerns and consider these perspectives before making

decisions. When leaders work collaboratively with their teams, members tend to develop greater satisfaction, participation, and a sense of ownership of the decisions made. Some participants expressed the following views:

"Allow active participation of School Planning Team with the participation of PTA officers to promote school and learners as well. Conduct regular meeting and discuss the different programs to teachers." (P4)

"Establish common vision for the school and implement instructional processes that involve teachers and stakeholders. Deal with dedication and commitment. Lead in democratic way. Learn from failure. Be transparent. Open-minded and always positive." (P5)

"Democratic leadership is important. Gauge the do's and don'ts. Engage master teachers in instructional leadership, classroom observation and supervision. Never pretend that you know all. Get some insights from fellows." (P7)

"Establish a long-range plan with the participation of the stakeholders and create a tool to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the plan." (P9)

Democratic leaders consider their people in initiating such plans and actions by having a proper coordination of leaders and subordinates and by making a unified step in such concern rationality in the decisions can be an outcome. Democratic leadership is one of the most effective leadership styles because it allows lower-level employees to exercise authority which they'll need to use wisely in future positions they might hold (Becker, 2020).

• *Motivating Teachers*

The leadership role of school heads extends beyond supervision and monitoring; they are also expected to motivate and inspire teachers by promoting positivity and reinforcing the school's mission and goals. A positive organizational perspective should therefore be reflected in school leaders' plans and decisions (Aslanargun, 2012). Effective principals motivate their colleagues and foster leadership practices that support improved teaching and learning (Agasisti et al., 2012; Farah, 2013).

School heads can further motivate teachers by understanding their personal and professional needs, listening to their concerns, showing empathy, and building positive relationships. Such support can strengthen teachers' commitment and encourage them to perform effectively. Participants shared the following experiences on how they inspired and motivated teachers:

"Give positive feedback, help the teachers in improving their crafts by providing their needs, send them to join orientations and virtual enhancement." (P8)

"Encourage teachers to attend online seminars and learn the new method of teaching in the new normal." (P9)

“Good motivation and cooperation of the parents is good insight of the good learning result. To become more effective, school leaders must be the good motivation and good model by showing respect to each individual differences.” (P10)

Instructional leadership is essential in influencing teachers' behavior, improving the quality of teaching and learning, and strengthening academic management (Alimuddin, 2010). Effective instructional leadership can also enhance teachers' self-efficacy and readiness to implement educational changes (Shafinaz, 2017; Yusri, 2012). When teachers develop greater confidence in

managing changes, their commitment to implementing school reforms is likewise strengthened. Azni (2015) found a positive relationship between instructional leadership and teachers' commitment to implementing school-based assessment.

Thus, instructional leadership plays a significant role in shaping teachers' attitudes, readiness, and commitment toward educational change. As key change agents, school heads and teachers are expected to work together in implementing reforms that enhance learners' potential, achievement, and overall development.

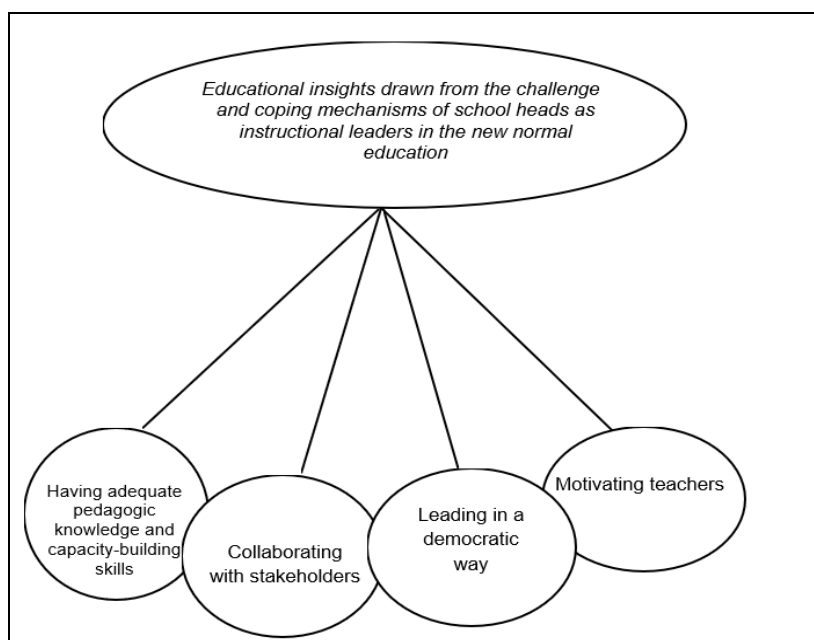


Fig 5 Educational Insights Drawn from the Challenges and Coping Mechanisms of School Heads as Instructional Leaders in the New Normal Education

IV. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

➤ Implications

This study provides insights into the challenges, coping mechanisms, and educational lessons gained from the experiences of school heads as instructional leaders in the new normal. School heads need to adapt to changing educational conditions and manage increasing responsibilities while effectively performing their leadership functions. Regular monitoring of teachers' performance and learners' progress is also essential to ensure quality teaching and learning. They should likewise maximize and mobilize available resources to address the needs of the school.

Effective communication and collaboration with stakeholders remain essential in delivering quality education. School heads should establish strong partnerships with teachers, parents, community members, and other stakeholders to strengthen support and cooperation. They should also provide appropriate technical assistance and continuous support to teachers to improve their instructional

practices and help the school respond effectively to educational changes.

Furthermore, school heads need sufficient pedagogical knowledge and continuously develop their leadership competencies to strengthen their instructional leadership practices. Continuous professional development can enhance their ability to support teachers and learners, motivate school personnel, and promote collaborative decision-making. Through effective leadership, collaboration, and capacity building, school heads can contribute to improved school performance and quality education.

➤ Future Directions

The findings of this study should be properly communicated and utilized by the key stakeholders for whom the research was intended. For policymakers, the findings may guide the development of appropriate policies, programs, and support systems that address the needs of school heads as instructional leaders. Strengthening the work environment, professional support, and leadership development opportunities can help school heads effectively

perform their responsibilities and improve learner outcomes in the new normal.

For school principals, the study emphasizes the need to continuously develop their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to make sound decisions and provide effective instructional leadership. They should lead by example, provide technical assistance to teachers, and strengthen stakeholder participation in school decision-making. For teachers, the findings may encourage improved professional performance, positive relationships with stakeholders, and the development of a supportive school climate conducive to effective teaching and learning.

Future researchers may further explore instructional leadership in different educational contexts and levels, including junior high school, senior high school, tertiary, and vocational education. Comparative studies may also examine the challenges and coping mechanisms of school heads across different settings. In addition, a case study focusing on a school head with exemplary instructional leadership practices may provide deeper insights and context-specific recommendations for strengthening educational leadership.

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