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Research Article

Challenges and Coping Strategies of School Administrators and Elementary Teachers During Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative correlational study determined the challenges and the coping strategies during the pandemic of the 12 school administrators and 94 elementary teachers in Sindangan South I and II Districts, School Year 2020-2021. Specifically, it discussed the trainings and webinars attended; seriousness of the technological, financial and pedagogical challenges encountered; and acceptability of the coping strategies. A questionnaire-checklist was used and analyzed using five-point Likert scale. Reliability test using Cronbach alpha was determined using SPSS. The Mann-Whitney U and Spearman rho tests were used in statistical inference. The study disclosed that the school heads have set their highest priorities in preparing their constituents in times of eventualities, and security and health of the school's stakeholders. Both groups of participants noted the serious challenges they encountered during the pandemic in terms of technology, financial and pedagogies. They had very acceptable coping strategies in terms of technological, financial and pedagogical challenges. The two groups of participants agreed on the challenges they encountered. They have conflicting views and perceptions on coping financial challenges. The trainings and webinars attended were not vital and contributory to their views on challenges. The acceptability of coping strategies was not associated with their attendance to trainings and webinars. The study recommends for the provision of trainings and webinars on ICT skills and utilization; better equip their schools with educational technology; strengthen collaboration with stakeholders; and future researches to venture on psychological factors contributing to teachers' willingness to use technologies.

Keywords: *challenges, coping strategies, school administrators, elementary teachers, pandemic*

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Introduction

The leadership of the school has undergone significant and maybe irreversible shifts as a result of the tumultuous times. The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in China and spread to practically every country in the entire world, is one of the most recent and concerning public health problems on a worldwide scale. Self-care and respect for others should be the first priority for those in administrative positions in schools. They are required to choose digital items with care and find a middle ground between the use of technology and traditional teaching methods. These things contribute to a fresh perspective on how school leadership should be seen.

The change in the structure of the educational system has presented difficulties for the administrators and teachers of schools. The challenges educators face could be technological, financial, and pedagogical. The pandemic was also responsible for an increase and shift in the amount of labor that teachers had to do. This scenario encouraged the researcher to identify the challenges and coping strategies of school administrators and elementary teachers in this pandemic. This study is an attempt to enrich the compendium of facts on strategic educational leadership, as this kind of leadership is much needed in this difficult time. Thus, this investigation into the challenges and coping strategies during this pandemic of the school administrators and teachers of Sindangan South I and II Districts, School Year 2020–2021 was conducted.

Methods

This study utilized the quantitative-correlational research design in gathering the necessary data from the school administrators and elementary school teachers of Sindangan South I and II districts, School Year 2020–2021.

This research design was used to gather the data pertaining to the teachers and school administrators' seminars and trainings attended, the perceived level of challenges and the perceived acceptability of coping strategies of the technological, financial and pedagogical challenges the participants have encountered during the pandemic.

The quantitative-correlational design was also employed as the study sought to establish significance of the relationship between the perceived level of challenges and acceptability of coping strategies. A questionnaire-checklist was used as the main instrument in collecting the needed data from the participants of the study. The five-point Likert scale was used to analyze and interpret the challenges and acceptability of the coping strategies.

Reliability test was established for the researcher-made questionnaire by calculating the Cronbach alpha for internal reliability of the items. The SPSS system was used to treat the data for the reliability as well as for the test statistics.

The frequency counts, percentage and Weighted Arithmetic Mean (WAM) were used in the descriptive questions while the Mann-Whitney U and Spearman rho tests were employed for the tests of inference using SPSS.

Results and Discussion

Trainings and Webinars Attended by the School Administrators and Teachers

Table 1 shows that in terms of the field-related trainings and webinars, the highest number of participants from the school administrators and teachers attended the 1st Quarter National Simultaneous Earthquake Drill. This implies that most of the school leaders have placed top priority on preparing and being ready in cases of eventualities. It is opined that school administrators may create a comprehensive, all-hazards emergency plan and implement earthquake drills to instill in the minds of the students and teachers the correct procedures to be followed during the actual occurrence.

The Parents and Teachers in a Home-Based Learning Setting – Mindanao Regions was also participated by eight school administrators or 66.67 percent. As the front-liners in the implementation of the Learning Continuity Plan, the school administrators deemed it very necessary that they should have the concrete and functional knowledge on how to deal with parents in terms of challenges and problems they encountered in implementing the modular instructional modality as well as to assist them in ensuring pupil engagement with the learning

tasks. Through efforts like trainings and webinars like parents and teachers in home-based learning, they are able to provide leadership in fostering strong interaction and ties between the parents and teachers to best assist the parents in providing facilitation to their children's learning tasks.

In terms of safety and wellness, all school administrators attended the Orientation and Information Drive on DepEd Vaccination Plan as well as the Guidelines on the Required Health Standards in Basic Education Offices and Schools. Both seminars intend to ensure safe protocols and standards in their respective schools as part of the learning continuity plan. The orientation on vaccination plan aimed to ensure that stakeholders are accurately informed on the COVID-19 vaccine, the government's vaccination program. However, the teachers' side pointed out that a little more

than half of them, 64 or 68.09 percent and 48 or 51.06 percent participated in Orientation and Information Drive on DepEd Vaccination Plan and Guidelines on the Required Health Standards in Basic Education Offices and Schools, respectively.

Several studies have emphasized the contributions of trainings and seminars in further enhancing the professional skills of employees. Among the studies were conducted by Gunu (2013), Farooq (2011), Jehanzeb (2012) and Sultana (2013). The researchers noted that more attendance to trainings empowers the employees to be less supervised and directed, increases their knowledge and skills, achieves more successful workplace projects and increases their effectiveness. It gives premium on considering employees as the best assets for the organization they are working.

Table 1. Trainings and Webinars Attended by the School Administrators and Teachers

Trainings and Webinars	School Heads		Teachers	
	F	P	F	P
A. Field-Related				
1. Strand Interface on Programs and Guidelines (SIPAG) Conference 2021	6	50.00	16	17.02
2. 1 st Quarter National Simultaneous Earthquake Drill	10	83.33	51	54.26
3. International Webinar Marathon on Education	6	50.00	5	5.32
4. Division Online Training of Trainers for the Learning Activities Cells (LACs) on the Developed MAPEH: Road Safety Modules	6	50.00	36	38.30
5. Pilot Orientation and Application to the Microsoft Education Ambassadors of 2021	4	33.33	9	9.57
6. TAYO NAMAN! Tulong, Alaga, Yakap at Oras para sa mga Tagapagtaguyod ng Edukasyon	4	33.33	16	17.02
7. International Multidisciplinary Webinar Series	2	16.67	8	8.51
8. Learning Delivery Modalities Course 2	6	50.00	66	70.21
9. Parents and Teachers in a Home-Based Learning Setting – Mindanao Regions	8	66.67	29	30.85
10. Webinar on Philippine Professional Standards for Supervisors and Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads	8	66.67	9	9.57
11. Teachers' Training on "Predicting Ending of Story"	6	50.00	18	19.15

Trainings and Webinars	School Heads		Teachers	
	F	P	F	P
B. Safety and Wellness				
1. Breast Cancer Awareness Webinar	8	66.67	34	36.17
2. Orientation and Information Drive on DepEd Vaccination Plan	12	100.00	64	68.09
3. Webinar on the Guidelines on the Required Health Standards in Basic Education Offices and Schools	12	100.00	48	51.06
4. 2021 National Drug Education Program (NDEP) Webinar Series	10	83.33	52	55.32

Seriousness of the Technological, Financial and Pedagogical Challenges Encountered by the Two Groups of Respondents

Table 2 shows that the school heads and teachers experienced serious challenges on technology as attested by the average weighted values of 3.87 and 3.81. The serious challenges were due to the limited or absence of technological tools and the lack of internet access. Technological tools could be computers and printers, individual laptops, smartphones, LCD and smartboard and internet connection. Internet connections allow the teachers to further enrich their instructional activities to be able to maximize pupils' engagement with the learning expectations. Angara (2020) reinforced these serious challenges as due to internet connectivity which are deemed essential for teachers to provide quality of educational material contents.

In the same context, Edison (2020) reinforced the above findings that technological challenges like internet connectivity especially for places without signals can be the greatest obstacle in teaching and learning continuity.

Thus, he added that the alternative models of learning during the pandemic should be supported by a well-designed technical and logistical implementation plan.

The utilization of educational technology has long been emphasized in most educational institutions, however, the paradigm shift caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has even elevated the need for teachers to maximize their use of educational technology.

As regards financial challenges, the school heads noted that they considered financial challenges as very serious. This is reflected in the weighted mean of 4.23 which is interpreted as "Very Serious." On the other hand, the teachers noted that their financial challenges were "Serious," as shown in the weighted mean of 3.78. The school administrators claimed that their MOOE does not suffice the needs of the teachers and learners in the teaching and learning continuity during pandemic. The additional technological requirements add up to the budget of the schools which they have not anticipated.

Table 2. Seriousness of Challenges of the Respondents

Statements	School Heads			Teachers		
	WAM	SD	I	WAM	SD	I
Technological Challenges						
1. Limited or absence of technological tools is a problem.	4.67	0.49	VS	4.29	0.76	VS
2. Lack of internet access is a challenge to me.	4.67	0.49	VS	4.41	0.82	VS
3. Insufficient knowledge in using the technology bothers me.	3.33	0.98	A	3.62	1.16	S
4. The idea on the importance of technology in support to learning puzzles me.	3.67	0.98	S	3.61	1.12	S
5. Nobody can assist on problems related to technology.	3.00	1.35	A	3.11	1.26	A

Overall Mean	3.87	0.86	S	3.81	1.03	S
Financial Challenges						
1. Insufficient financial support from the LGU limits school operations.	4.00	0.85	S	3.94	1.07	S
2. School MOOE cannot answer all the needs of the school.	4.50	0.52	VS	3.74	1.25	S
3. Community and other stakeholder support is not enough.	4.33	0.78	VS	3.82	1.13	S
4. The barangay didn't give enough support to the school.	4.00	0.85	S	3.44	1.30	S
5. The school income-generating project (IGP) cannot augment the school finances.	4.33	0.78	VS	3.95	1.14	S
Overall Mean	4.23	0.76	VS	3.78	1.18	S
Pedagogical Challenges						
1. The teachers didn't get enough training in teaching in the new modality.	4.00	0.60	S	3.29	1.30	A
2. Teachers show decreased quality of content delivery.	4.00	0.85	S	3.18	1.22	A
3. COVID-19 has afforded limited social interaction among learners.	4.67	0.49	VS	4.47	0.77	VS
4. Learning assessment seems difficult.	4.00	0.85	S	3.88	0.94	S
5. The teaching-learning process becomes complicated.	4.17	0.94	S	3.96	0.98	S
Overall Mean	4.17	0.75	S	3.76	1.04	S
Grand Mean	4.09	0.79	S	3.78	1.08	S

Legend: 4.20 – 5.00 Very Serious (VS); 3.40 – 4.19 Serious (S); 2.60 – 3.39 Average (A); 1.80 – 2.59 Less Serious (LS); 1.00 – 1.79 Not Serious at All (NS)

Coping Strategies and Its Acceptability by the School Administrators and Teachers

The two groups of participants have very acceptable practices in coping with their technological challenges as shown by the weighted average means of 4.53 and 4.31. Their coping strategies included conducting webinars for teachers especially enhancing their skills in module preparation, content and methods in a modular instruction, utilization of ICT and virtual interaction among teachers, school administrators and pupils. According to Boss (2008), most educators are excited about the role technology may play in boosting learning, but many are yet unprepared to use digital tools in the classroom. The ongoing obstacles are a shortage of computers, technical support, and professional development. The National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers issued "Access, Adequacy, and Equity in Education Technology" with numerous

broad proposals for long-term improvement. Some of these initiatives are: improving classroom access to technology such as computers and the Internet; increasing technical support; and encouraging teachers to campaign for technology funding and support.

In addition, the participants have very acceptable coping strategies in relation to financial challenges. These very acceptable strategies include prioritizing school needs, strengthening community and other stakeholders' support as well as tapping the barangay officials for needed support.

There are very acceptable coping strategies related to pedagogy. These strategies were acknowledged by both school administrators and teachers as very acceptable. Very acceptable strategies to cope with pedagogical challenges included providing webinars to enhance the teachers' skills, improving the quality of subject content delivery, using social media for

better interaction and re-orientating the teachers' role in the new normal.

Amadi (2010) states that teachers might improve their teachings by attending trainings and seminars. This permits them to adapt their teaching approaches and incorporate new

ideas into the classroom. It teaches them to work with students who have different learning styles. It also encourages teachers to adopt new teaching approaches based on genuine educational research.

Table 3. Coping Strategies and Its Level of Acceptability by the School Heads and Teachers

Statements	School Heads			Teachers		
	WAM	SD	I	WAM	SD	I
Technological Challenges						
1. Maximize the use of computer room and its facilities.	4.17	0.72	A	4.11	0.90	A
2. Look for a cheaper internet provider.	4.40	0.52	VA	4.08	1.06	A
3. Conduct webinars for teachers.	4.67	0.49	VA	4.54	0.58	VA
4. Provide webinars highlighting the use of technology in teaching in the new normal.	4.67	0.49	VA	4.55	0.56	VA
5. Schedule a webinar on basic troubleshooting.	4.67	0.49	VA	4.29	0.80	VA
Overall Mean	4.53	0.54	VA	4.31	0.78	VA
Financial Challenges:						
1. Establish good rapport with the LGU.	4.83	0.39	VA	4.13	0.92	A
2. Prioritize school needs.	4.83	0.39	VA	4.52	0.73	VA
3. Strengthen community and other stakeholders' support.	4.67	0.49	VA	4.46	0.68	VA
4. Tap the barangay officials for needed support.	4.83	0.39	VA	4.39	0.77	VA
5. Revitalize the IGP to address the school needs.	4.67	0.49	VA	4.12	0.90	A
Overall Mean	4.77	0.43	VA	4.32	0.80	VA
Pedagogical Challenges:						
1. Provide webinars to upskill the teachers.	4.83	0.39	VA	4.44	0.70	VA
2. Look for ways to help improve the quality of teachers' content delivery.	4.58	0.51	VA	4.51	0.64	VA
3. Encourage the use of social media to develop social interaction among teachers and learners.	4.50	0.80	VA	4.39	0.69	VA
4. Provide a webinar on assessment.	4.67	0.49	VA	4.37	0.66	VA
5. Re-orient the teachers on their role in the new normal.	4.75	0.45	VA	4.47	0.64	VA
Overall Mean	4.67	0.53	VA	4.43	0.66	VA
Grand Mean	4.66	0.50	VA	4.35	0.75	VA

Legend: 4.20 – 5.00 Very Acceptable (VA); 3.40 – 4.19 Acceptable (A);
2.60 – 3.39 Fairly Acceptable (FA); 1.80 – 2.59 Less Acceptable (LA);
1.00 – 1.79 Not Acceptable at All (NA)

Tests for Significant Difference Between the School Administrators and Teachers' Seriousness of the Challenges Encountered

The t-test tool was used to establish the significance of the difference between the

school administrators and teachers' seriousness of the challenges encountered in terms of technology, financial and pedagogy. The summary of the results is illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of Tests for Significant Difference Between the Perceptions of the School Heads and Teachers on the Seriousness of the Challenges Encountered

Variables	<i>U – Test</i>	p-value	CV	Decisions
Seriousness of the Technological Challenges	0.782	0.435	1.96	Not Significant
Seriousness of the Financial Challenges	1.022	0.308	1.96	Not Significant
Seriousness of the Pedagogical Challenges	2.109	0.035	1.96	Significant

Ho: There is no significant difference between the perceptions of the two groups of participants on the seriousness of the challenges encountered.

The test statistics using Mann-Whitney U test reveals U-values of 0.782, and 1.022 which are below the critical value of 1.96. This suggests that the null hypothesis is not rejected. However, the computed U-test value of 2.109 exceeds the critical value 1.96 and is significant at 0.035 p-value indicating that the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant difference between the perceptions of the school administrators and teachers as regards their pedagogical challenges.

Both groups of participants perceived that their challenges were generally serious espe-

cially the challenges on technology, and financial. The participants noted that the paradigm shift in instructional delivery caused by the pandemic have brought significant challenges in the educational system. Schools are confronted with leveling up their technology infrastructure which necessitates increase budgetary expenses or allocation and equipping the teachers to sustain the learners' needs and to implement learning continuity plan in education.

Tests for Significant Difference Between the School Administrators and Teachers' Acceptability of the Coping Strategies

In Table 5, the test statistics using Mann-Whitney U-test results are shown.

Table 5. Summary of Tests for Significant Difference Between the Perceptions of the School Heads and Teachers on the Acceptability of the Coping Strategies

Variables	<i>U – Test</i>	p-value	CV	Decisions
Acceptability of Coping Strategies in terms of Technological Challenges	1.65	0.099	1.96	Not Significant
Acceptability of Coping Strategies in terms of Financial Challenges	2.139	0.032	1.96	Significant
Acceptability of Coping Strategies in terms of Pedagogical Challenges	1.13	0.26	1.96	Not Significant

Ho: There is no significant difference between the perceptions of the two groups of participants on the acceptability of the coping strategies.

The school administrators and teachers have varied outlooks and perceptions on how they should manage their financial challenges arising from the pandemic and in the new normal of education. It can be understood as the school administrators are addressing financial problems of the entire school with the end goal

of providing technology for all teachers possible and addressing pedagogical enhancement of its constituents.

Both groups of respondents adhered to the complementary roles between technology and pedagogies. The teachers' utilization of technology applications especially in enriching discussions, examples, illustrations, activities and exercises in their modules are deemed very vital during this pandemic. Thus, they considered it a priority to overcome their technology and pedagogical challenges.

Ottenbreit-Leftwich, et al. (2018) suggest that school authorities engage educational technology and information technology professionals to help teachers use technology. As instructors gain proficiency in using educational technology, they may need administrative and peer support to create and implement new uses in their classrooms. Professional learning groups can give this type of assistance through regular conversations, trainings, and webinars on new, domain-relevant technological usage. Like the present study, both groups of participants saw the value of trainings and seminars or webinars in improving teacher quality.

Tests for Significant Relationship Between the Trainings and Webinars Attended by the Participants and the Seriousness of the Challenges Encountered

The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to establish the significance of the relationship between the trainings and webinars attended by the school administrators and teachers and the seriousness of the challenges they encountered in terms of technology, financial and pedagogies.

Table 6. Summary of Tests for Significant Relationship Between the Trainings and Workshops Attended by Participants and the Seriousness of the Challenges Encountered

Variables	<i>Spearman rho</i>	t-value of r	p-value	Decision
Trainings and Workshops Attended by Participants and the Seriousness of the Technological Challenges	0.143	1.474	0.143	Not Significant
Trainings and Workshops Attended by Participants and the Seriousness of the Financial Challenges	0.221	2.311	0.0225	Significant
Trainings and Workshops Attended by Participants and the Seriousness of the Pedagogical Challenges	0.101	1.035	0.303	Not Significant

CV = 1.98

Ho: There is no significant relationship between the trainings and workshops attended by participants and the seriousness of the challenges encountered.

The findings suggest that not all trainings and webinars may be useful and relevant to the teachers especially in addressing their challenges during the pandemic. In this light, it may be useful to identify first the training needs of the teachers and from their suggestions, school leaders may propose for professional enhancement to their teachers.

The pandemic which have brought a paradigm shift in education challenged teachers to

address diverse needs of learners, when some students preferred the printed modules while few expressed willingness to have virtual classes. Seminars and trainings most especially with the seminar on home-based learning setting which focused primarily on the different facets of the Learning Continuity Plan prepared the teachers and school heads with tools and strategies to cope with the challenges in continuing to provide quality education among the students. The trainings equipped and enhanced the teachers with the functional knowledge in delivering modular instruction as well as effective utilization of technology in the preparation of instructional materials.

Tests for Summary of Tests for Significant Relationship Between the Trainings and Seminars Attended by the Participants and Acceptability of Their Coping Strategies

Table 7. Summary of Tests for Significant Relationship Between the Trainings and Seminars Attended by the Participants and Acceptability of Their Coping Strategies

Variables	<i>Spearman rho</i>	t-value of r	p-value	Decision
Trainings and Workshops Attended and Coping Mechanisms in Technology	0.242	2.543	0.01	Significant
Trainings and Workshops Attended and Coping Mechanisms in Financial	0.217	2.267	0.026	Significant
Trainings and Workshops Attended and Coping Mechanisms in Pedagogical	0.24	2.52	0.012	Significant

CV = 1.98

Ho: There is no significant relationship between the trainings and workshops attended by the participants and the acceptability of their coping strategies.

School administrators and teachers have ways of overcoming and addressing their challenges during the pandemic. Their high level of resiliency enables them to search for ways to become creative and innovative to address the technological, financial and pedagogical challenges they encountered. The teachers' and school administrators' creativity and resourcefulness as well as the inspiration and

commitment to their pupils' learning served as their encouragement to provide continuing education despite compulsory staying and learning from home of their pupils. These educators' qualities are innate among them that even with less assistance for professional development in the form of trainings and workshops, teachers find their ways to enhance themselves to surpass their challenges. Teachers may have resorted to other means of enriching themselves such as peer tutoring from among their colleagues who are advantaged with technology utilization, and self-learning and practice.

Tests for Significant Relationship Between the Seriousness of the Challenges Encountered by the Participants and the Acceptability of Coping Strategies

Table 8. Summary of Tests for Significant Relationship Between the Seriousness of the Challenges Encountered by the Participants and Acceptability of Their Coping Strategies

Variables	<i>Spearman rho</i>	t-value	p-value	Decision
Seriousness of the Challenges and Coping Mechanisms in Technology	0.36	3.935	0.000	Significant
Seriousness of the Challenges and Coping Mechanisms in Financial	0.359	3.923	0.000	Significant
Seriousness of the Challenges and Coping Mechanisms in Pedagogical	0.235	2.466	0.015	Significant

CV = 1.98

Ho: There is no significant relationship between the challenges encountered and the acceptability of coping strategies.

There is a significant relationship between the challenges encountered by the school administrators and teachers and the acceptability of coping strategies in terms of technological

and financial challenges. Klapproth et al. (2020) identified the link between teacher problems and coping techniques. Klapproth et al revealed that teachers had moderate to high levels of stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While most of them faced technical obstacles, they felt functionally able to overcome them. Teachers employed more practical coping

techniques when faced with external elements like technology.

There is a significant relationship between the pedagogical challenges encountered by school administrators and teachers and the acceptability of their coping strategies. The challenges encountered by school administrators and teachers in relation to pedagogy are significantly related to their coping strategies. This implies that teachers may have benefited from their pedagogical skills gained through years of experience and in-service training. Their challenges may still be high owing to the infusion and utilization of technology to deliver instruction in distance education or modular instruction.

Conclusion

1. The school heads have set their highest priorities in preparing their constituents like the security and health of the school's stakeholders by ensuring the stricter implementation of basic health standards in their respective schools and offices. The school administrators were also protective of their constituents by ensuring that everyone has vaccinated themselves against COVID-19 virus.
2. Generally, the school administrators and teachers noted of the serious challenges they encountered during the pandemic be it in terms of technology, financial and pedagogies.
3. Both the school administrators and teachers claimed that they had very acceptable coping strategies to address the technological, financial and pedagogical challenges.
4. The two groups of participants have similar views as regards the challenges they encountered during the pandemic.
5. The school administrators and teachers have conflicting views as regards the coping strategies with financial challenges. However, their views with coping strategies in relation to technological and pedagogical challenges were almost the same.
6. The trainings and webinars attended by the two groups of participants were not vital and contributory to how they viewed the challenges they encountered during the pandemic.

7. The acceptability of coping strategies of the participants were not associated and reflective of their attendance to trainings and webinars.
8. When the participants felt very serious challenges during the pandemic in line with technology, financial, and pedagogical aspects, they tend to have high acceptance of coping strategies to counter their challenges.

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