

Navigating Private School Teachers' Lived Experiences towards Educational Management Approach ¹⁷⁰

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Abstract

Effective school leadership is a cornerstone of educational success, influencing teacher engagement, institutional planning, and student outcomes. As educational institutions adapt to evolving demands, understanding how teachers experience management practices becomes essential—especially in private school settings where leadership structures may differ. This qualitative study explores private school teachers' lived experiences of educational management approaches in a private school in Tacloban City. Using a phenomenological design, the study involved four purposively selected teachers across preschool and elementary levels. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. Findings revealed three themes regarding teachers' lived experiences: *Leadership in Financial Decisions*, referring to centralized control over financial decisions; *Management in School Development Planning*, indicating top-down planning in infrastructure development; and *Leadership in Professional Growth*, reflecting the nature of professional growth led by school leaders. In addressing the challenges faced, two themes emerged: *The Pressure of Event Management*, where teachers navigated multiple roles in event facilitation, and *Curriculum Misalignment and Limited Voice*, which pointed to curriculum misalignment and limited voice in planning. Lastly, coping mechanisms were captured in one theme: *Strength in Professional Collaboration*, showing strength through peer collaboration. The study contributes to educational management literature and offers practical implications for private school administrators seeking to enhance teacher engagement and professional growth.

Keywords: educational management approach; teacher's lived experience; private school; phenomenological study; eastern visayas

1. Introduction

Educational management refers to the systematic process of planning, organizing, leading, and evaluating educational resources and operations to achieve learning goals and institutional effectiveness (Bush, 2020). Historically, it evolved from early 20th-century theories such as Frederick Taylor's scientific management, which emphasized efficiency and control, toward more inclusive models of leadership that value collaboration and professional dialogue (Bush, 2008). Recent studies emphasize both structural and participative practices; for instance, Vatanasapt (2022) elucidated how empathetic leadership marked by compassionate communication, collaborative relationships, and empowerment can foster collegiality among private school teachers, while Santos and Nocum (2020) noted that many private schools in the Philippines still operate under hierarchical and role-based systems. This study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which promotes inclusive, equitable, and quality education through collaborative and effective school leadership (Boeren, 2019). Furthermore, it supports Republic Act No. 9155, the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, which establishes a framework for participative and school-based leadership, and reflects the Department of Education's Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP) 2030 that prioritizes strengthened leadership and school management nationwide.

This study is anchored on the concept of the Educational Management Approach, which encompasses the ways in which school leaders exercise authority, make decisions, and foster collaboration within educational settings. Leadership in education involves shaping direction, influencing teaching and learning, and managing organizational structures to achieve shared goals. According to Torres et al. (2024), effective leadership in Philippine schools involves strategic principal training, decision-making autonomy, and supportive structures—demonstrating how administrative efficiency and structured governance significantly influence teacher capacity and educational outcomes. Shengnan and Hallinger (2020) found that when teachers are involved in planning and leading activities, it enhances their professional development and ownership over instructional practices. Shand and Goddard (2024) bolster this by showing that collaborative teaching environments contribute to improved instructional practices, a healthier school climate, and strengthened professional trust, highlighting the broader benefits of collective work on educational quality. Moreover, Fernando (2024) and Manglallan and Tagadiad (2024) demonstrate that participative practices in leadership can motivate teachers and support openness to change.

Challenges also arise within these approaches. Magtalas and Eduvala (2024) report that private school teachers often face role overload due to overlapping instructional and event-management responsibilities. Likewise, Pepito et al. (2024) found that multitasking significantly impairs teaching effectiveness, with heavy workloads negatively impacting performance even in public schools. Moreover, Pangan et al. (2020) identify curriculum implementation hurdles such as inadequate support systems and misaligned instructional practices that hinder effective teaching and cause confusion among educators. On the other hand, Khasawneh et al. (2023) highlighted that collaborative peer support and open professional dialogue significantly enhance teachers' well-being and resilience, particularly when facing demanding school environments. Similarly, Patan et al. (2025) found that institutional support and collaboration positively influenced teachers' preparedness and coping effectiveness during periods of remote learning. Overall, this framework positions the educational management approach as both a structured and participative process that affects how teachers experience, respond to, and navigate school leadership. It provides a foundation for understanding the lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of private school teachers within the context of school leadership in the Philippines.

School leadership significantly shapes teacher performance, collaboration, and alignment with school goals. As schools strive to build inclusive and effective learning environments, how leaders manage and support teachers becomes crucial. The chosen educational management approach affects decision-making, role distribution, and professional growth. While studies like Magboo et al. (2023) and Daquioag (2020) explored leadership's impact on public school settings, less is known about private schools. Recent research by Fernando (2024) and Andaya and Qunito (2025) highlights the significance of democracy and collaboration in leadership underscoring how teacher agency enhances instructional quality even as there remains limited insight into how private school teachers in the Philippines perceive and experience these leadership styles. This gap calls for deeper exploration.

This study aims to explore how private school teachers experience the educational management approach within their institutions. It seeks to understand their lived experiences, identify the challenges they face, and examine the coping mechanisms they employ. By investigating these aspects, the study aspires to offer practical insights that can help improve leadership strategies in private schools. Moreover, the findings are expected to support educational goals outlined in Republic Act No. 9155, which promotes participatory governance, and contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4, which focuses on inclusive and equitable quality education.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research design

This study used a qualitative descriptive design with a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experience of private school teachers towards their leaders' educational management approach. Phenomenology was chosen because it helps uncover the deeper meaning behind lived experiences, allowing teachers to express their thoughts and feelings in their own words (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Given its focus on depth rather than quantity, a small number of participants, usually between 3 and 10, is considered appropriate (Englander, 2012). Through semi structured interviews, the study captured how leadership practices influence teachers' daily tasks, sense of involvement, and professional development (Vagle, 2018).

2.2. Research locale

This study was conducted in a private school located in Tacloban City, Philippines, which offers basic education from preschool to elementary level. Since private schools often have distinct administrative structures and more flexible governance compared to public schools, they present a meaningful space to explore Educational Management Approach practices in action. With a relatively small teaching staff, this school allows for close professional interaction between teachers and administrators, making it an ideal setting to examine how leadership is practiced, experienced, and perceived in everyday school operations.

2.3. Research participants

This study involved four private school teachers from Tacloban City, Leyte, selected through purposive sampling. Participants were required to be currently teaching in a private school with at least one year of teaching experience to ensure sufficient exposure to school leadership practices. The small sample size is consistent with qualitative research, which prioritizes depth over breadth (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Tacloban City was chosen as the locale due to its diverse private schools with varied educational management approaches, providing a meaningful context for exploring leadership dynamics.

2.4. Research instrument

The primary instrument was a semi-structured interview guide adapted from Creswell (2012) and aligned with the study objectives. It contained three main questions addressing the research problems and five follow-up questions to encourage deeper reflection. Each interview lasted 15–20 minutes. To ensure clarity and relevance, the guide underwent content validation by two experienced school heads, whose feedback led to minor revisions for improved flow and credibility.

2.5. Data gathering procedure

Data collection began after securing approval from the school principal and obtaining informed consent from participants. Only teachers who signed the consent form were interviewed. A semi-structured interview guide was used, and each session was recorded with permission. To ensure anonymity, participants were assigned codes (e.g., P1, P2). All recordings and transcripts were securely stored with access limited to the researcher. For accuracy, transcripts were returned to participants for validation before proceeding to analysis.

2.6. Data analysis

The data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. The researcher first transcribed and familiarized with the interviews, then manually generated initial codes using Colaizzi's (1978) method of identifying significant statements. Related codes were clustered into themes, which were subsequently reviewed, refined, and clearly defined to capture participants' lived experiences. The final phase involved presenting the findings with narrative descriptions supported by direct participant quotes, ensuring both thematic depth and authenticity.

2.7. Ethical consideration

The study was conducted with full regard for ethical standards, ensuring participants' rights, dignity, and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained, highlighting the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and the right to withdraw anytime without consequence. Risks were minimal, limited to possible discomfort in sharing experiences, while anonymity was protected through participant codes. Benefits included contributing insights to educational leadership research and informing school management practices. All data were securely stored in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, and transcripts were returned for validation to ensure accuracy and authenticity. Findings will be shared with participants and the school head upon request, promoting transparency and respect.

2.8. Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher followed strategies that upheld the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the findings. Credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement with participants and careful member checking, allowing them to review and validate the transcribed responses. Dependability was supported by keeping detailed notes on how the data were collected and analyzed, ensuring consistency throughout the process. To maintain confirmability, the researcher practiced reflexivity, setting aside personal biases and focusing on the participants' genuine experiences. Transferability was addressed by providing rich descriptions of the school setting and participant context, allowing readers to determine the relevance of the findings to similar environments. These steps helped ensure that the voices of the participants were presented truthfully and respectfully.

2.9. Reflexivity

Throughout the research process, the researcher maintained a conscious awareness of personal beliefs, biases, and prior experiences related to educational management to ensure that these did not influence the interpretation of participants' responses. Being a graduate student in Educational Management, the researcher acknowledged a potential inclination toward certain leadership styles but remained committed to letting the participants' voices guide the findings. Field notes and reflective journaling were used to regularly examine the researcher's thoughts, assumptions, and reactions during data collection and analysis. This ongoing reflection allowed the researcher to approach the study with openness and fairness, ensuring that the insights shared by the participants were interpreted as authentically and objectively as possible.

3. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings based on the participants' responses, organized according to the research questions. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework was applied to analyze patterns and recurring ideas. This section explores the experiences of private school towards their school leader's Educational Management Approach.

3.1. Lived experiences of private school teachers towards educational management approach

This part of the study explores how private school teachers experience the educational management approach practiced by their leaders. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, three key themes emerged reflecting their experiences of how leadership operates in school-based decisions, resource distribution, and professional growth. These experiences highlight both structured decision-making and participative engagements that define educational management in private institutions.

Theme 1: Leadership in Financial Decisions

Participants shared that decisions regarding school finances, such as setting tuition fees and allocating staff salaries, were handled exclusively by school heads. These top-level financial matters were not open for discussion among teachers, emphasizing a centralized decision-making structure. Pilapil et al. (2019) similarly found in a Philippine study that financial responsibilities, including budgeting, are typically kept by school heads and accounting personnel, excluding teachers from the process. Similarly, Torres et al. (2024) emphasized that strategic leadership in Philippine schools often involves strong administrative control and structured governance in financial matters, reinforcing centralized authority but also highlighting the need for balanced participatory mechanisms.

Significant Statement 1: "When it comes to mga importante nga matters... kuan... the decisions comes from the head like uhm... tuition fees." ("When it comes to important matters, the decision comes from the head like for example the tuition fees." - P1)

Significant Statement 2: "Kun about salary nga mga decisions and uhhh... tuition fees gihap... uhm... it becomes formal management." ("When it comes to salary decisions and tuition fees, it becomes formal model management." - P2)

Significant Statement 3: "Iton sweldo... uhm... increase han sweldo ngan tuton fees." ("The salary, the increase of the salary and the tuition fees." - P4)

Theme 2: Management in School Development Planning

Teachers described how infrastructure planning like classroom construction or facility renovations—was carried out by school leaders without teacher consultation. While teachers were directly affected by these changes, they were not involved in the decision-making process. This mirrors findings in curriculum design contexts as well; Weber (2019) emphasized that teachers are often reduced to mere implementers with no role in planning decisions, highlighting how exclusion undermines engagement and effectiveness. Similarly, Gulac (2023) showed that active stakeholder involvement in strategic school planning, including teacher input, correlates strongly with commitment to implementation and improved school performance highlighting the importance of inclusive, teacher-supported development.

Significant Statement 1: "Kuan... pag add hin mga classroom and uhm... other nga school facilities, it comes from them." ("Adding of classrooms or other facilities, it comes from them." - P1)

Significant Statement 2: "Iton uhm... pag-ayad han ma facilities." ("The rehabilitation of the facilities." - P4)

Theme 3: Leadership in Professional Growth

Participants also noted that their school leaders organized professional development programs such as seminars and workshops, which were seen as directed and structured from the top. These initiatives aimed to build teacher competence and align practices with school goals. Estiani and Hasanah (2022) emphasized that such programs are essential for instructional leadership and staff development. Alarcon and Monterola (2024) also found that private school teachers often engaged in professional development programs organized by school leaders, which were typically structured in a top-down manner.

Significant Statement 1: “I think uhm.. we do the formal like kun may mga trainings, diri ngani, seminars gihap para ha mga teachers.” (“I think we do the formal if there are trainings, seminar for the teachers.” - P3)

3.2. Challenges encountered by the private teachers toward educational management approach

In this part presents the challenges private school teachers experienced under their school’s educational management approach. Although the approach provides space for participation and innovation, several difficulties emerge, particularly regarding overwhelming responsibilities and limitations in curriculum alignment. Through thematic analysis, two key themes were developed to reflect these experiences.

Theme 1: The Pressure of Event Management

Teachers expressed that while they were trusted to facilitate school events, this responsibility often came with pressure and added workload. Planning monthly culminating activities, while meaningful, placed extra demands on their time and energy alongside their teaching responsibilities. According to Magtalas and Eduvala (2024), teachers in private institutions often carry overlapping duties beyond their instructional roles. Similarly, Pepito et al. (2024) emphasized that teachers experiencing high levels of multitasking responsibilities suffered decreased teaching performance, underscoring the drawbacks of overlapping duties and role overload.

Significant Statement 1: “Pirmi kami uhm... mafacilitate hin events like mga culminating activities every month,” (“We are asked to facilitate an event or a culmination activity every month...” - P1)

Significant Statement 2: “Pag may mga uhm... kuan... like school activities sugad mga culminating programs ngan bisan ano nga mga... uhm... school-related activities nga involved an mga teachers ngan students.” (“When it comes to school activities like culminating programs and any school-related activities, that involves the teachers and the students.” - P4)

Theme 2: Curriculum Misalignment and Limited Voice

Some teachers noted that while they are given space to adjust their instructional plans, they sometimes struggle when curriculum frameworks are not fully aligned with actual teaching needs. Others found that although professional development sessions were held, the feedback process lacked depth and consistency. Pangan et al. (2020) observed that curriculum planning without structured guidance can lead to uncertainty among teachers. Likewise, Gonio and Bauyt (2024) underscored that meaningful professional growth depends on collaborative feedback mechanisms, reflective practice, and mutual support without which enhancement remains surface-level.

Significant Statement 1: “Kun nag kakamayada kami professional development session kada lunes ngan martes... uhm... we hear feedback from the teachers.” (“When we are having a professional development session every Monday and Tuesday, where we hear feedback from the teachers...” - P3)

Significant Statement 2: “An mga services for example... uhm... the way the curriculum is uhm... implemented kun narelata ba hiya ha mismo nga school curriculum.” (“The services, for example, the way the curriculum (is implemented), if it’s really related to the school curriculum.” - P4)

3.3. Coping mechanisms of private school teachers towards the educational management approach

This part explores the ways private school teachers cope with the demands and challenges they face under their school’s educational management approach. Despite heavy workloads and varying expectations, teachers adapt by relying on collaboration, professional dialogue, and self-directed instructional adjustments. Thematic analysis resulted in two major themes that highlight how teachers stay resilient and effective.

Theme 1: Strength in Professional Collaboration

Teachers shared that regular collaboration with colleagues during professional development sessions provided them a platform to express concerns, share insights, and offer suggestions to school management. These sessions not only allowed them to contribute to planning but also helped them feel heard and supported. According to Khasawneh et al. (2023), collaborative peer networks and professional dialogue play a vital role in enhancing teachers’ coping mechanisms and sustaining their morale in challenging school contexts. Likewise, Patan et al. (2025) emphasized that open communication within teacher groups increases emotional resilience and promotes well-being.

Significant Statement 1: “... I do prefer like collegial nga approach kay iton teachers uhm... nakakagdecide hira what do, nga diri la decisions from the head.” (“... I do prefer a collegial approach because teachers get to decide what to do—not only a decision from the head.” – P1)

Significant Statement 2: “Gusto ko nga collegial or may teamwork kay uhmm... since ngatanan kami... like we want to be heard ha planning... dapat we will also raise our concerns.” (“I really like collegial or having teamwork, since all of us want to be heard in planning—we must also raise our concerns.” – P4)

This study examined private school teachers’ experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms regarding the educational management approach in a private school in Tacloban City. Through qualitative inquiry and thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006), themes emerged for each research objective. The results revealed how leadership practices in educational management shape teacher participation, workload, and adaptability. Findings from the first research objective highlighted that private school teachers experienced centralized decision-making in financial management and infrastructure planning, such as setting tuition fees and building school facilities. Although school leaders initiated professional development, teacher involvement was limited, reflecting structured leadership approaches consistent with studies by Torres et al. (2024), Pilapil et al. (2019), and Estiani and Hasanah (2022). Under the second objective, teachers encountered challenges related to role overload and limited input in curriculum implementation. While they facilitated school events and instructional tasks, the pressure of multitasking and lack of clarity in curriculum planning became apparent, aligning with findings by Pepito et al. (2024) and Pangan et al. (2020). Despite these challenges, results for the third objective showed that teachers coped through collegiality, mutual support, and collaboration during professional development sessions. They valued open communication and shared planning, echoing the findings of Patan et al. (2025) and Khasawneh et al. (2023) on the benefits of collaborative coping in sustaining motivation and workplace resilience.

4. Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of private school teachers toward the educational management approach in a mainstreamed private school in Tacloban City. The findings revealed that school leadership practices significantly shape teacher engagement, decision-making participation, and overall professional experience. In terms of lived experiences, teachers reported that financial decisions, school infrastructure planning, and professional development activities were primarily handled by school leaders, reflecting structured and top-down management practices. Challenges emerged in the form of role overload, particularly in managing school events and aligning curriculum implementation without consistent guidance. Despite these difficulties, teachers demonstrated resilience by engaging in collegial collaboration, actively participating in professional development sessions, and expressing their desire for shared leadership and open communication. Overall, the results suggest a need for more participative and inclusive educational management strategies that empower teachers in decision-making processes. A balanced approach that combines structured leadership with collaborative practices may enhance teacher morale, instructional quality, and the overall school environment.

5. Recommendation

Based on the findings, it is recommended that private school administrators adopt a more balanced educational management approach that values both structural organization and participative leadership. While centralized decisions are necessary in areas such as finance and infrastructure, involving teachers in consultations can promote transparency and shared accountability. School leaders should provide adequate support systems when delegating event facilitation and curriculum-related tasks. This includes clear guidelines, collaborative planning opportunities, and workload management to prevent teacher burnout. Encouraging regular professional development sessions with open feedback mechanisms can strengthen teacher agency and instructional effectiveness. Lastly, institutions may consider developing internal policies that formalize teacher involvement in decision-making processes, aligning with national directives such as the Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP) 2030 and RA 9155. Future research is encouraged to explore educational management practices in diverse school settings to further enhance inclusive and effective school leadership in the Philippine context.

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