



LEADING WITHOUT LIMITS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS DURING PANDEMIC

Aimee Joy C. Conejero¹, Hilda A. Opeña²

¹Master of Arts in Education Major in Educational Administration,
Assumption College of Nabunturan, Nabunturan, Davao de Oro, Philippines

²Doctor of Education, Education Program Supervisor, Professor,
Assumption College of Nabunturan, Nabunturan, Davao de Oro, Philippines

ABSTRACT

The global outbreak of COVID-19 has prompted widespread inquiries regarding the possibility of continuing educational practices amidst a climate characterized by unpredictability and instability. The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the lived experiences, challenges encountered, coping mechanisms, and realizations of the elementary instructional leaders of Mawab District as they strive to lead their respective schools, assist their teachers, and overcome obstacles amidst the COVID-19 outbreak. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the study gathered comprehensive narrative data by conducting in-depth interviews with ten instructional leaders purposively identified by the researcher. Findings revealed that instructional leaders encountered multifaceted challenges, including abrupt shifts to remote learning, maintaining academic standards, and resource constraints. Despite these challenges, participants exhibited remarkable resilience and adaptability, showcasing their different coping mechanisms. Additionally, the study discovered that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a positive effect on instructional leaders. This study concludes with recommendations and realizations that would help instructional leaders deal with unprecedented crises and areas for further research.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19 education, leadership, instructional leaders, lived experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, realizations, suggestions, recommendations, phenomenological research

INTRODUCTION

If teachers and students are struggling, what more are the instructional leaders in charge of the school, the teachers, the students, and anyone else? Did we hear anything from them? Did someone acknowledge their accomplishments, successful strategies, and intervention schemes in combatting the pandemic? The Corona Virus Disease 2019 or COVID-19 struck and affected everything, most especially our educational system. Everyone was struggling. Unknowingly, more than them, there were these unseen personnel who works the most - the instructional leaders, commonly known as the school principals, school administrators, or school heads. These personnel faced difficulty steering the course of education amidst the crisis since COVID-19 limited our lives. But this didn't hinder them from leading their respective school without limits. They think beyond their limits and have managed to configure ways and means to sustain and continue the education of our school children in their respective areas.

In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education (MOE) decided to close all schools in the country due to the Movement Control Order (MCO), forcing school principals to examine novel approaches and initiatives to guarantee the stability and uninterrupted provision of educational services to the indigenous people amidst pandemic (Lopez et al. 2022). Also, Aytac

(2020) found that Turkey's school administrators' biggest challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic were keeping students motivated, the lack of capacity among parents to establish a conducive learning environment at home, coupled with the students' limited ability to gain entry to and engage in real-time transmissions via EBA education site.

Consequently, within the context of the Philippines, Villanueva et. al (2023) conducted a study and revealed that school administrators had encountered several challenges, the unpreparedness of the school for the new learning modality, the cooperation, and involvement of parents, as well as barriers related to communication and monitoring, have been identified as significant factors affecting the students, and the efficacy of modular distance learning during the height of New Normal Education due to COVID-19 pandemic.

In the municipality of Mawab, the pandemic had a significant impact on all Mawabenyos. To ensure that Mawabenyos received continuous learning, we were told to implement modular learning. Which, we encountered challenges such as a shortage of self-learning modules, printing materials like bond papers, inks, printers, and even manpower to staple the modules, and many other problems. The responsibility for overcoming all of these obstacles was squarely placed upon the shoulders of the instructional leaders. These experiences made all Mawabenyos appear to be drifting toward the void.

need to document the instructional leaders' different experiences in the context of the present COVID-19

All of the given situations above stipulated the



situation to address the research gap since it is unlikely known and explored by many.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this phenomenological investigation was to explore and understand the lived experiences, challenges encountered, coping mechanisms, and realizations of the elementary instructional leaders of Mawab District as they strive to lead their respective schools, assist their teachers, and overcome obstacles amidst the COVID-19 outbreak.

METHODS

This study was a qualitative study employing a phenomenological approach as it sought to explore the lived experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and realizations of instructional leaders amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. This research study utilized phenomenology as the research design. Giorgi (2012) said phenomenology is a qualitative research tool describing how people respond to a particular phenomenon.

Furthermore, the researcher utilized the one-on-one In-Depth Interview (IDI) in gathering the data needed for the study. In-depth interviewing is a research tool for data collection that aims to understand people better, (Minichiello et al., 2008).

In selecting the participants in this study,

purposive sampling techniques were utilized through selection criteria and the personal judgment of the researcher. The selection criteria include: a.) designated as a school principal or head teacher before the crisis b.) experience leading a school during the crisis and c.) no. of years as a school principal or head teacher. This is following one of the phenomenology's features.

With the approval of the Division of Davao de Oro, this research was undertaken in the district of Mawab, Davao de Oro. The researcher identified 10 instructional leaders from Mawab District to participate in the one-on-one in-depth interview. The participants were asked to sign a consent form. They were also provided with an in-depth overview of the study and were informed that they will go through an In-Depth Interview (IDI) as a method of data collection.

The data collected from the participants were obtained through a semi-structured interview, in which validated interview questions were utilized as the primary instrument. This was used in a form of an interview guide that was made by the researcher itself, which encapsulated all the necessary questions.

After the interview, the researcher proceeded to data analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the transcripts of the interviews. Pseudonyms were utilized as a means of safeguarding the anonymity of the individuals involved in the process of data analysis and subsequent reporting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1
The formulated theme and central ideas on the lived experiences of instructional leaders during the pandemic

Themes	Central Ideas
Initial Reaction when the Department of Education Announced the Closure	Instructional leaders exhibit primarily negative emotions toward the announcement of school closures.
Experiences Encountered with Regard to Modular Learning	Instructional leaders strengthened the home visitation program of DepEd and created programs, interventions, and resolutions for reading.
Experiences Encountered on the Requirements of Vaccinated Teachers and Students Before Going to School	Instructional leaders conducted a vaccination campaign for students and parents in the form of parents' orientation.
Experiences with Regard to Blended Learning	Instructional leaders initiated some interventions for their teachers and learners.
Experiences Encountered with Limited Face-to-Face Classes Started	This brings so much happiness to all of us, the parents, instructional leaders, teachers, and students.

Initial Reaction when the Department of Education Announced the Closure

The emerging themes in this structured theme are negative emotions, being challenged, just following orders, and feelings of happiness. These were the initial reactions of the instructional leaders when the Department of Education announced the school closures.

The results revealed that instructional leaders tend to exhibit primarily negative emotions toward the announcement of school closures.

“Well, during lockdown, I am worried for the learners. What will happen to them knowing that they can't have face-to-face classes with their teachers? As a school leader, I am worried. Since our purpose is to give quality education to our school children.” – Informant 7

Harris (2020) posits that instructional leaders experience a range of negative emotions and encounter various challenges amidst the ongoing pandemic, such as frustration, and unpredictability associated with navigating a global health crisis. Furthermore, educational administrators have openly shared their individual and occupational challenges on public digital platforms such as Twitter and Facebook.



Moreover, they have expressed that it was a big challenge for them. Since it's the first time that we had encountered a pandemic.

On the other hand, others were also happy since they were with their family to combat the pandemic.

Experiences Encountered with Regard to Modular Learning

The emerging themes in this structured theme are home visitation, creating a program, creating a resolution, making arrangements with parents, asking for assistance from Purok Leaders, making funds and resources for modules, preparing materials for modular learning, and no problem on materials reproduction. These were the experiences of the instructional leaders with regard to modular learning.

"My teachers did a house-to-house visit to monitor the students, especially those who didn't get their modules. So, at that time, the teachers take risks in visiting the students in their homes to follow up with the students." – Informant 3

"We initiated creating a resolution to conduct a face-to-face remedial class for those students at risk in reading. We called this reading program Project RISSK or Reading Intervention to Save Struggling Kids." – Informant 7

"So, for those students who weren't able to get their modules, we asked assistance from our Barangay, through our Purok Leaders. They will be the ones to deliver the modules to the students' houses." – Informant 5

DepEd implemented various learning modalities, one of which was Modular Distance Learning, to ensure the continuity of education and to achieve the Department of Education's mission and vision, which is to provide quality education to every Filipino learner.

Modular Learning is the most prevalent form of Distance Learning among the various modalities. It will be prepared by the teacher. The self-learning modules must be completed by the learner in a week. After which, the parents will submit it back to the teacher and get another set of SLM. (Codamon, 2020).

According to FlipScience (2020), the modules encompass comprehensive sections on motivation and assessment based on the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCS), providing a comprehensive guide for teachers and students to develop their desired competencies. In the DepEd survey, all public schools here in the Philippines used Modular Distance Learning Modality.

The latter was the commonly used method here in Mawab District. The teachers together with their school principal, monitored the learners by visiting them in their homes. As Pangilinan (2021) emphasized that school heads must offer comprehensive support to educators, as well as create effective educational programs for parents and learners.

In line with this, instructional leaders in Mawab District create programs, interventions, and resolutions about reading. To further help the learners in their reading skills.

Experiences Encountered on the Requirements of Vaccinated Teachers and Students Before Going to School

The emerging themes in this structured theme are conduct orientation, educating pupils and parents on vaccination, a higher percentage of vaccination, teachers being fully vaccinated, parents being afraid of vaccination, some declining for vaccination, and respect for teachers' and parents' decisions. These were the experiences of the instructional leaders with regard to requiring teachers and students to be vaccinated before going to school.

"The first thing that we do, we call up all the parents to attend the orientation then we oriented the parents regarding the benefits. To erase also some of their negative assumptions with regard to vaccination." – Informant 1

"Of course, as school leaders, we have to emphasize the importance of having vaccinated before going to school. So, we also help the government in sending the correct information to the parents through parents' orientation." – Informant 9

After the vaccines became readily available to the public, Fore (2020) quoted "UNICEF is calling for teachers to be prioritized to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. This will help protect teachers from the virus, allow them to teach in person, and ultimately keep schools open." And luckily, this was heard by the Philippine Government.

Prior to reaching out to parents and students, DepEd (2021), launched the "Vacc2School: Ligtas na Bakuna, Para sa Balik-Eskwela" campaign which aims to disseminate information, provide education, and garner support for the vaccination campaign.

Fukuda et. al (2021) stated that teachers who are vaccinated can positively influence hesitant parents or students in their decision to accept vaccination. In line with this, schools conducted a parents' orientation along with the campaign of RESBAKUNA KIDS: Vaccination Rollout for 5-11 years, in order to educate and discussed the importance and benefits that they can get from being vaccinated.

In particular, the University of Rizal thru the Health Services Unit led by Dr. Edna Maycacayan conducted an online orientation on the COVID-19 vaccination via Google Meet.

Likewise, the Lawang Bato Elementary School conducted an online parents' orientation about pediatric COVID-19 vaccination via Facebook Live.

Additionally, in Davao, the Davao City COVID-19 Task Force conducted school-based vaccinations in public schools every Friday, (Davao City.Org, 2022).

Moreover, the City Government of Isabela through the City Health Office (CHO) conducted a special orientation on pediatric vaccination with PTA Presidents of all 66 elementary schools in the city, (City of Isabela, 2022).

Experiences with Regard to Blended Learning

The emerging themes in this structured theme are initiating some interventions, so much preparation,



conducting an online reading, using modular learning only, home visitation, conducting limited face-to-face, and make monitoring. These were the experiences of the instructional leaders with regard to blended learning.

"Yes, in MES, I told the teachers to conduct a class so they will make the child read and then make a video call... Video call them to see what he is reading. So, the teachers still monitor the progress of the children's rating, only those who have gadgets that can access the internet." – Informant 3

With the improvement of the health situation, students transitioned back to in-person classes, resulting in the emergence of blended learning (BL) that integrates traditional face-to-face instruction with online learning strategies (Batista-Toledo et al., 2022).

As reported by Sucena et al. (2022), in Portugal, while utilizing blended learning, they have developed an intervention program aiming to intervene in the reading skills of kindergartens, first graders, and second graders. This is called the RSCP or Reading Skills Competency Program. The RSCP comprises a series of ten activities, designed to be implemented across five sessions, with the objective of enhancing decoding proficiency.

Cited by Hernando-Malipot (2022), the Department of Education (DepEd) expressed commendation for the Schools Division Offices (SDOs) of Navotas, Isabela, Bacolod, Mandaluyong, and Negros Occidental for their demonstration of innovative instructional methods in implementing blended learning.

Conversely, the Department of Education (SDO) in Isabela and Bacolod has implemented radio-based instruction (RBI) and protocols for ensuring quality assurance.

The utilization of Facebook Messenger was employed by the Schools Division Office (SDO) Mandaluyong for the purposes of facilitating class discussions and conducting parent consultations. They have also introduced several initiatives. These include the implementation of Mandunong TV Pilipinas, Gabay at Guro, Frontlearners Training for Teachers, Data Analytics, and E-commerce Pilot classes, as well as the adoption of Frontlearners LMS for specific grade levels.

Furthermore, the Senior Education Program Specialist of the Division of Negros Occidental, Rebonie Emboltorio, provided information pertaining to Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) tools, sheets, and schedule guides, which aimed to improve the reading level of the students.

All of these initiatives were done in order to make blended learning work. For the benefit of our learners.

Experiences Encountered with Limited Face-to-Face Classes Started

The emerging themes in this structured theme are feelings of happiness, learners are excited, parents were happy, following the mandate, initiated reward system, created monitoring checklist, a difference, and complaints. These were the experiences of the instructional leaders with regard to limited face-to-face classes started.

"The children were so excited. They were so happy seeing their teacher and their classmates." – Informant 9

"So, during limited face-to-face learning, we really follow what is mandated by our department, that the capacity inside our classroom is only 50%. Likewise, the teachers' capacity also is 50%. So, we really divided the days in school. Like, the learners, weekly. So, this week 50% SET A then another week for SET B." – Informant 2

DepEd (2022), mandated the conduct of limited face-to-face classes pursuant to the approval of the President for progressive face-to-face expansion in both public and private schools. Provided that the schools should follow the guidelines, which will be assessed through a School Safety Assessment Tool (SSAT).

In particular, during the conduct of one of those guidelines, the instructional leaders with their teachers, felt the happiness of the parents while getting their consent. They were very excited, so as did their children. They feel like, they can sense a little bit of normalcy amidst the pandemic.

In Mawab District, it was agreed that we will implement the Set A and Set B arrangements for our learners following the 1-meter social distancing.

DepEd Davao de Oro (2022) mandated the strong implementation of the WINS Program during the limited face-to-face classes. Wherein, the school must have a washing facility, where students can wash their hands before they can get inside the school. Another is that schools must have handwashing, cleaning, and disinfection supplies.

In April 2022, the Mawab District officially welcomed the Set A learners. We have conducted a short welcome program during our flag-raising ceremony. The teachers prepared gifts as a reward for their students.

This is anchored to an interview conducted by D'Souza (2021) with the school principals, where one said, extrinsic rewards have the potential to cultivate children's interest in reading, foster motivation, and instill an intrinsic desire to engage in reading activities, independent of any external incentives.



Table 2
The formulated themes and central ideas on the challenges encountered by instructional leaders during the pandemic

Themes	Central Ideas
Challenges Encountered When School Was Used as an Isolation Center	Instructional leaders felt afraid and threatened by the effect of the virus on them with their classrooms being vulnerable to airborne transmission.
Challenges Encountered in Facilitating Modular Learning	Schools don't have enough resources to reproduce the Self Learning Modules (SLMs).
Challenges Encountered in Facilitating Blended Learning	Instructional leaders have difficulty implementing blended learning since not all students have internet connections and even smartphones.
Challenges Encountered when Teachers and Learners were required to be Vaccinated	Instructional leaders faced difficulty educating parents about being vaccinated.
Challenges Encountered during the Official Reopening of Classes in a New Normal Setting	Instructional leaders and teachers faced the reality of students having learning gaps and changes in behaviors.

Challenges Encountered When School Was Used as an Isolation Center

The emerging themes in this structured theme are threatened by the virus, difficulty with water resources, and worries about what to provide. These were the challenges encountered by the instructional leaders when their school was used as an isolation center.

“So, when the school is being used as an evacuation center. The number 1 challenge on our part is that there is a threat. So, the teachers are somewhat afraid because their classrooms will be used by the CoVid19 positives. Our second challenge is our resources. Resources in terms of what we call water because our supply is slow.” – Informant 1

“So, during that time, are the facilities there in the school likewise complete because it was closed immediately, and the teachers weren't ready at that time? The things inside the classrooms, was it safely packed? How safe is the equipment because it was just left right away!” – Informant 6

Leonor Briones, the Education Secretary, provided clarification that schools should only be utilized as a measure of last resort in emergency circumstances, such as the ongoing health crisis. Due to the shortage of medical facilities, schools were utilized.

In the statement of Pascua, the undersecretary of education, a total of 1,212 public schools underwent conversion of their classrooms, as well as other facilities including gyms and laboratories, in order to be utilized as isolation facilities for individuals diagnosed with COVID-19 (Deiparine, 2021).

In an interview conducted by Lacerna (2023) on one of the teachers whose classroom was used as an isolation/evacuation center, she said that the evacuees used her modules to make a fire so that they can cook food.

Another situation was published by Inquirer (2022), wherein four (4) teachers were allegedly molested by one of the evacuees while they were preparing their classrooms for the re-opening of classes. With this, the government is considering discontinuing the utilization of schools as quarantine

areas.

Additionally, in the study conducted by Persico (2019), elevated levels of air pollution have been found to increase the susceptibility of individuals to contract and experience fatal outcomes from COVID-19. Therefore, with proper school ventilation, children will be protected against COVID-19. Existing research also indicates that the transmission of COVID-19 within educational institutions is more likely to occur where there are inadequately ventilated school facilities.

As a result, instructional leaders felt afraid and threatened by the effect of the virus on them. With their classrooms being vulnerable to airborne transmission, (Tupper et al., 2021).

Given these instances, we cannot deny the fact that instructional leaders really faced difficulties when their schools were used as isolation centers or quarantine areas during the CoVid19 pandemic.

Challenges Encountered in Facilitating Modular Learning

The emerging themes in this structured theme are the availability of materials for module reproduction, some printers cannot be used, parents cannot pick up/submit modules, no quality education, assistance for learners, and internet connectivity problems. These were the challenges encountered by the instructional leaders with regard to modular learning.

“During the reproduction of the modules, we experienced a shortage of budget at that time.” – Informant 3

“So, reproduction is very crucial. Where will we get the materials? So, what we did was, the school borrowed money. Because the MOOE is not available yet, and we need to distribute the modules. The school is really in debt with supplies likewise with the equipment that we used.” – Informant 1

“The only problem we have is the cooperation of the parents. The parents don't cooperate. But we can't blame them either because it's their work. That's where they get their daily food.” – Informant 6

Anzaldo (2021) described Modular Distance Learning as the utilization of self-learning modules (SLMs) developed by educators, which encompass a



range of tasks and learning activities aligned with the fundamental learning competencies (MELCs). This presented additional challenges for school personnel in delivering quality education, most especially instructional leaders.

Since the beginning of classes for the academic year 2020-2021, the Department of Education (DepEd) has mandated the allocation of resources from each school's Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE) towards the prioritization of module reproduction. This measure aims to enhance the efficiency of module reproduction for the benefit of learners (Montemayor, 2021). However, a significant issue arose in relation to the insufficiency of the Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE) budget allocated to schools, particularly those of substantial size. A scarcity of printed modules was observed.

This was supported by the study of Boholano et al. (2022), wherein one of the problems during the implementation of MDL is the limited availability of resources like printers. The quantity of printers available is insufficient to meet the needs of the entire teaching staff at the school.

Another issue that arises pertains to the distribution and retrieval of modules. Due to the imposed limitations on students' mobility, their parents or guardians have assumed the responsibility of procuring their educational materials.

Melorin (2021) also mentioned that a large percentage of parents did not adhere to their designated schedule for obtaining and returning the instructional modules.

Moreover, Guiamalon et al. (2021) stated that many parents, particularly those residing in remote areas, often lack the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively explain the educational modules provided to their children.

Additionally, there are students who do not have parents who could assist them with their studies, (Bernardo, 2020). With these challenges in place, instructional leaders' role to ensure the delivery of quality education to students was hampered.

Challenges Encountered in Facilitating Blended Learning

The emerging themes in this structured theme are the cost of internet connectivity, poor internet connection, and did not employ. These were the challenges encountered by the instructional leaders with regard to modular learning.

"Internet loads remain the number one inconvenience. It's the burden of data communications through telecommunications or even what is called virtual activity. It is very costly, especially for under privilege learners." – Informant 1

In light of the global impact of COVID-19, educational institutions worldwide have begun to transform efforts, leading to the emergence of blended learning as a prevailing paradigm. Blended learning, a pedagogical approach that integrates

conventional in-person teaching with online instruction, has been in existence for a considerable duration. This aims to offer students a combination of traditional face-to-face instruction and online learning opportunities in order to optimize their educational experiences.

DepEd (2021), Secretary Briones said that they are preparing for a "higher level of dependency on technology,". Since they do not want to encourage the widespread use of printed learning materials due to their impact on the environment. And they have started distributing gadgets to students in remote areas.

However, Melorin (2021) said that the lack of access to electronic devices and inadequate internet connectivity were identified as key obstacles that hindered the organization's ability to fulfill its mission of providing high-quality education to students.

In a separate report by Nicholls (2020), an enormous percentage of students opt for printed modules or lessons as an alternative learning delivery modality due to limited access to gadgets or an internet connection.

A study conducted across the Philippines revealed that 32% of the 3670 Filipino students surveyed encountered challenges in adapting to new learning methodologies, while 22% lacked consistent access to internet connectivity, (Alvarez, 2020).

Challenges Encountered when Teachers and Learners were required to be Vaccinated

The emerging themes in this structured theme are negative feedback from parents, teachers' beliefs and health conditions, fare cost, and no problem. These were the challenges encountered by the instructional leaders when teachers and learners were required to be vaccinated.

"The parents are really negative. They get scared because of the news that something is going to happen. Those who are very close-minded, who are negative about vaccination, we don't force them." – Informant 7

"The reactions of the parents are very negative because they have other views that the vaccine might harm the children." – Informant 10

After battling the COVID-19 epidemic for more than a year, the promise of vaccines has taken us to the edge of a brighter future. Vaccines are readily available, but the problem is, parents are not into vaccination. They are hesitant of allowing their children to be vaccinated due to some reasons.

The educational system was one of the most severely affected by the pandemic. In order to alleviate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the educational pursuits of children and young adults, it is imperative to achieve a higher percentage of vaccination coverage, (Sabat, 2020).

Fisher et al. (2022) concluded that resistant parents mentioned safety concerns such as immediate, long-term, and unknown side effects of the vaccines on their children.

Contemporary parents are susceptible to the impact of social media and online content, which disseminate misleading information or foster skepticism



towards vaccines (Suran, 2022).

On the other hand, Cahapay (2022) relayed, a substantial percentage of educators expressed uncertainty regarding their inclination to receive the COVID-19 vaccination due to its potential adverse effects.

Challenges Encountered during the Official Reopening of Classes in a New Normal Setting

The emerging themes in this structured theme are struggling with the learning gaps of the students, challenges on learners' behavior, provision of health protocols, so much preparation, and no challenges. These were the challenges encountered by the instructional leaders during the official re-opening of face-to-face classes in a new normal setting.

"We struggle so hard. Most especially from the primary grade, the kinder, grade 1, grade 2, and grade 3. We really struggle so hard, especially in reading and writing... learning gap." – Informant 9

"We are doing backward learning. We couldn't follow the module. Because they can't read and write." – Informant 4

After the country lifted most remaining COVID-19 restrictions, millions of students have resumed attending classrooms, marking their return after a hiatus of over two years.

In the article cited by Al Jazeera (2022), Vladimir Quetua said that "generally, the impact of these two years has been the quality of education. Some of our grade eight students, [do not know] how to write, how to compute numbers. And many of our students lack interest in studying at all,"

Moreover, Hernando-Malipot (2022) stated that teachers have identified deficiencies in reading and writing skills, behavioral challenges, as well as separation anxiety among Kindergarten and Grade 1 students in relation to their parents.

In addition, Jackaria (2022) revealed that during the reopening of classes, school principals and teachers faced instructional challenges such as an increasing number of pupils who are illiterate and unprepared socially and intellectually, the difficulty of upholding health regulations, the necessity for new teaching methods, and difficulties with time management.

Table 3

The formulated themes and central ideas on the coping mechanisms of instructional leaders in leading their respective schools during the pandemic

Themes	Central Ideas
Management Styles and Roles Employed as an Instructional Leader in School	The instructional leaders employed various management styles in dealing with the COVID-19 situation.
Practices of Instructional Leaders in Keeping Sane During Pandemic	Instructional leaders constantly communicate with their teachers, always look on the brighter side, take vitamins, and always trust God.

Management Styles and Roles Employed as an Instructional Leader in School

The emerging themes in this structured theme are democratic management style, transformational management style, and mandate-driven management style. These were the management styles and roles employed by instructional leaders during the pandemic.

"Of course, I have to be democratic. Because we should understand the teachers, the parents, as well as the stakeholders, especially the parents at that time." – Informant 3

"The keyword is empowerment. I'm not a person of authority but I am a person to empower our teachers. So, that is my management style. I empower the teachers to implement or to give also their initiative." – Informant 2

Leading through periods of uncertainty can present significant challenges. As per the findings of a study conducted by the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (2020), the ability to effectively navigate periods of adversity necessitates the possession of adaptability and a repertoire of strategic approaches.

Heffernan (2019) said leaders undergo a natural process of evolution and transformation throughout their professional trajectories as they navigate diverse educational settings and contexts.

Molaodi (2021) highlighted that it is imperative for school leaders to maintain cohesion among the team, regardless of whether teachers are physically present at the school or working remotely, in the context of a lockdown. This action was in alignment with the principles of the Democratic Management Style.

Another kind of management style emphasized by East Central University (2019), is the transformational management style. This fosters a sense of trust, enabling educators to feel at ease when approaching school administrators with their ideas or concerns.

Moreover, Cheatham (2020) conveyed, to be a school leader during the pandemic means seeking out opportunities to heal, repair, and transform. So instructional leaders transform negative situations into great opportunities.

Practices of Instructional Leaders in Keeping Sane During Pandemic

The emerging themes in this structured theme are keeping strong faith in God, constant communication with teachers, looking to the brighter side, and taking vitamins. These were the practices of instructional leaders in keeping their selves mentally, emotionally, and physically healthy during the pandemic.

"I offered everything to God because our plans will not be realized without the guidance of our most powerful. He is the only one who can decide everything and what he wants to happen to us." – Informant 5

"What I did is constant communication. I think I have



a gift for communicating with other people.” – Informant 8

“Taking vitamins to boost our immune system will help us fight this pandemic.” – Informant 10

The global pandemic posed unforeseen challenges that even the most well-prepared administrator could not have predicted.

Ehrkamp (2020) mentioned that the pandemic offers lessons in faith and hope for teachers, students, and school heads.

Uncertainty and fear are common during a pandemic. By maintaining open lines of communication, school leaders can provide

reassurance to the school community. Clear and timely communication helps ensure that everyone is well-informed and can adapt to the evolving situation.

Another way of keeping their selves healthy is taking care of their selves. Numerous principals amidst the pandemic recognize the importance of preserving certain aspects of their lives, particularly engaging in activities outside of their professional responsibilities that promote relaxation. According to Heubeck (2021), exercise and other conventional recreational activities are commonly regarded as means of engagement by a significant number of individuals.

Table 4
The formulated themes and central ideas on the realizations of instructional leaders in leading a school during the pandemic

Themes	Central Ideas
Positive Effects of the Pandemic on the Instructional Leaders	During the pandemic, instructional leaders learned to manipulate technology, created innovations, realized life, improved their leadership skills, and became health conscious.
Negative Effects of the Pandemic on the Instructional Leaders	The COVID-19 pandemic brought drastic changes in students’ learning and was a burden on the part of instructional leaders.
Realizations in Leading a School During Pandemic	The COVID-19 pandemic enables instructional leaders to have realizations about their lives, the community, their teachers, and their learners.
Suggestions of the Instructional Leaders to the Department of Education	Instructional leaders had varied suggestions about the COVID-19 pandemic.

Positive Effects of the Pandemic on the Instructional Leaders

The emerging themes in this structured theme are learning to manipulate technology, creating innovations, realizing life, improving leadership skills, and becoming health conscious. These were the positive effects of the pandemic on instructional leaders.

“Oh, I’m now good at manipulating gadgets. You will learn because you will be left behind.” – Informant 6

“During the pandemic more on using the gadgets. You communicate with them so I’m used to using GC. I’m also used to using a laptop, having meetings, and google meet. So that’s where I enhanced my skill in ICT.” – Informant 7

“It was there that we came up with the realization that we do a lot of initiative which is quite out of this world, we can do an initiative as if we never did it before.” – Informant 1

Individuals in positions of leadership enhanced their leadership abilities by establishing virtual connections with their colleagues and stakeholders, adapting their approach to leadership during the crisis, and prioritizing the continuity of learning and teaching.

The study conducted by Yaseen et al. (2020) unveiled that the Covid-19 pandemic has prompted numerous innovations within the education sector. Educators are progressively acquiring technological proficiency and acquiring novel knowledge to enhance their pedagogical abilities.

The integration of technologies into the education system has been identified as a positive outcome of the pandemic, as discussed by Magomedov et al. (2020).

On the other hand, Collet et al. (2023) revealed that school administrators in the United States who are immersed in the Marshallese families had increased their cultural awareness as an effect of the COVID-19 remote learning. They believed that being culturally aware of the family background of your students helps them effectively respond to their educational needs.

Negative Effects of the Pandemic on the Instructional Leaders

The emerging themes in this structured theme are drastic changes in students’ learning, adjustment to facemasks, health conditions, MOOE being wasted, missed school beautification, and no negative effects. These were the negative effects of the pandemic on instructional leaders.

“The negative effects of the pandemic for me, as a school leader, are those children who cannot read.” – Informant 7

“I get a headache reading GCs, updating, reading reports because it’s all online. Your eyes will hurt.” – Informant 8

One of the negative impacts of the pandemic on instructional leaders is the learning gaps of the students. Most especially their reading skills. Since they were the ones responsible for the overall learning of the students. But due to the pandemic, this problem is inevitable and beyond control.

The global health crisis exacerbated the pre-



existing issues within the Philippine education system, resulting in a decline in its overall quality. Educators are currently faced with the task of accommodating students at their current level of understanding, while also addressing the educational disparity that has emerged as a result of the pandemic.

The importance of reading cannot be overstated (Blomert et al. 2010). The presence of this impairment can result in a chronic disability that significantly impacts various aspects of an individual's quality of life.

In the article of D'Souza (2021), there was a significant decline in reading fluency among second and third-grade students. The study compared data from Fall 2020 to Fall 2019 and found that the students were approximately 30% below the standard benchmark.

Another negative effect is on the health and well-being of the school principals. Argyropoulou et al. (2021) contended that the well-being of leaders is being adversely affected by the managerial demands brought about by the pandemic.

This was supported by De Matthews et al. (2021) who conveyed that the available evidence indicates that principal burnout has been intensified by the pandemic.

Realizations in Leading a School During Pandemic

The emerging themes in this structured theme are realizations about life, realizations about thyself, realizations about the community, realizations about the teachers, and realizations about the learners. These were the realizations of the instructional leaders in leading their schools during the pandemic.

"Because of the circumstances, you need to go beyond your limits for the benefit of your learners." – Informant 1

"School heads should be prepared one step ahead in everything. You must be visionary." – Informant 8

"We can learn a lesson from it. Because during that time, we can see the collaboration of the different agencies." – Informant 5

Instructional leaders have so many realizations about their leadership skills. Constantia et al. (2021) argued that the emotional behaviors and leadership attributes of school principals have a substantial impact on school leadership and management during periods of crisis.

The emergence of the coronavirus pandemic has presented various challenges in the field of education. However, public schools have been able to address these issues through collaboration both within and outside their institutions (Gregorio, 2020). This is true as seen in the responses of the instructional leaders. They have realized that the community is very concerned with the education of the students. Hence, they were very much willing to collaborate with schools just to ensure the safe and quality delivery of education to the students.

Suggestions of the Instructional Leaders to the

Department of Education

The emerging themes in this structured theme are to conduct a series of training for teachers and instructional leaders, to provide a budget for digital teaching, to provide the needs of the school, to include the pandemic in the history books, and to provide an intervention plan. These were the realizations of the instructional leaders in leading their schools during the pandemic.

"So, this should be a part of history. Through learning the history, the next generation can be capacitated. Because he has the possibility to come back." – Informant 2

"The Department of Education will provide also a budget for the digital teaching-learning of the teachers." – Informant 1

Constantia et al. (2021) suggest that principals must receive comprehensive training to effectively navigate crisis situations, such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, with a particular focus on addressing challenges associated with remote instructional technology.

Moreover, Deiparine (2021) also suggested that having a bigger budget and better tools might end the learning crisis. The ACT party list was seeking an additional budget for the improvement of the schools' infrastructure as well as its quality of learning and teaching, (Magsambol, 2020).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Based on the findings, the following implications for practice are offered.

On the lived experiences of instructional leaders in leading their schools during the pandemic. The lived experiences of instructional leaders during the pandemic have several implications for teaching. The first is on crisis preparedness and planning. Since the pandemic has highlighted the importance of having comprehensive crisis preparedness plans in place. Instructional leaders should focus on developing robust strategies to handle unforeseen events, including clear protocols for remote learning, communication plans, and contingency plans for future disruptions.

The second is on technology integration and digital literacy. The rapid shift to remote and hybrid learning has emphasized the need for instructional leaders to prioritize technology integration and digital literacy among teachers, students, and even themselves. This experience underscores the importance of providing ongoing professional development and support in utilizing digital tools and platforms effectively for instruction.

The third one is on flexible instructional models. The pandemic has necessitated a shift from traditional classroom instruction to more flexible instructional models, such as modular distance learning, online learning, and blended learning. Instructional leaders should explore and promote innovative teaching approaches that allow for individualized instruction, active engagement, and student-centered learning both



in-person and remotely.

On Challenges Encountered by instructional leaders in leading their schools during the pandemic. As indicated in the results of the study, instructional leaders faced different difficulties during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This implies that the instructional leaders were not well-capacitated on how to deal with those situations. So, there is a need for the Department of Education to conduct more training for instructional leaders.

On the coping mechanisms of instructional leaders in leading their schools during the pandemic. During the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, instructional leaders were put under pressure. As the findings revealed, school principals have utilized different management skills as well as different coping mechanisms in addressing the situation they are in. Such management skills and coping mechanisms enable them to effectively lead their schools and surpassed the pandemic.

On the realizations of instructional leaders in leading their schools during the pandemic. In view of the realizations of the instructional leaders, they have realized that truly, no man is an island. This implies that collaborations with the community, other stakeholders, and teachers greatly affect the situation of their school during the pandemic. therefore, there is a need to strengthen partnerships and collaboration with external stakeholders to better address problems in the future.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Given the limited size of the study, which focused solely on responses provided by instructional leaders in Mawab District, the following implications for future research are taken into account:

First, future studies may be conducted by identifying additional instructional leaders from the same districts. Second, a similar study could be conducted in a different location to investigate the same phenomenon in the lived experiences of instructional leaders during the pandemic. Third, a follow-up interview with the same research participants and informants may be done to determine whether their realizations of their lived experiences during the pandemic have changed over a period of time.

Fourth, this investigation was conducted in a public elementary school. Further studies could be done to explore exactly the same phenomenon within the context of private elementary schools. Finally, the study's findings are analyzed through the perspective of the

chosen research participants, who are instructional leaders, as well as informants. Another potential avenue for research could involve exploring the lived experiences of instructional leaders during the pandemic among the instructional leaders from other districts in Davao de Oro.

CONCLUSIONS

Exploring the instructional leaders' lived experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms and realizations in leading their schools during the pandemic is the main focus of this investigation. The understanding of the lived experiences of instructional leaders in leading their schools during the pandemic could reinforce the Department of Education to improve the readiness of instructional leaders in dealing with adversities.

The advent of the "new normal" has posed significant challenges for educators, students, parents, and particularly instructional leaders. Educators encountered various challenges and obstacles when it came to facilitating learning during the ongoing pandemic. In order to address this matter, it would be highly beneficial to provide instructional leaders with diverse training opportunities focused on effectively managing schools during periods of disruption, as well as familiarizing them with various online platforms and resources. This would enhance their knowledge and skills, enabling them to navigate any uncertainties that may arise within the realm of education.

In line with this, the findings of this study also elucidated the distinction in the management approaches employed in small-scale educational institutions compared to larger educational institutions. In general, school principals assigned to larger schools tend to face greater challenges in comparison to their counterparts assigned to smaller schools. They were a lot more stressed and pressured by the circumstances surrounding their educational institutions.

Furthermore, the implementation of a program aimed at facilitating the adjustment process during sudden transitions or changes would prove highly beneficial. In light of prevailing public health emergencies, it is imperative for educators to consistently engage in innovative practices and cultivate unconventional pedagogical approaches to effectively support students in achieving proficiency across diverse learning domains.

Indeed, instructional leaders during the pandemic lead their schools without limits. Since they were able to go beyond their limits in planning, innovating, and implementing different methods, techniques, and solutions to surpass the pandemic without compromising the education of the learners.



REFERENCES

1. Al Jazeera (2022). *Philippine schools reopen after one of the world's longest shutdowns*
2. Alvarez, A., Jr. (2020). *The phenomenon of learning at a distance through emergency remote teaching amidst the pandemic crisis*. *Asian Journal of Distance Education*, 15(1), 144-153. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3881529>
3. Anzaldo, Geraldine. (2021). *Modular Distance Learning in the New Normal Education Amidst Covid-19*. *International Journal Of Scientific Advances*. Volume 2. 263-266. 10.51542/ijscia.v2i3.6.
4. Argyropoulou, E., C. Syka, and M. Papaioannou. 2021. "School Leadership in Dire Straits: Fighting the Virus or Challenging the Consequences?" *International Studies in Educational Administration (ISEA) (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM))* 49 (1): 18–27
5. Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). (2020). *The role of school leadership in challenging times*. *Spotlight*.
6. Aytac, T. (2020, December 30). *The Problems and Opinions of School Administrators during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Study from Turkey*. *European Journal of Educational Sciences*, 07(04). <https://doi.org/10.19044/ejes.v7no4a5>
7. Batista-Toledo, S., & Gavilan, D. (2022). *Implementation of Blended Learning during COVID-19*. *Encyclopedia*, 2(4), 1763–1772. MDPI AG. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/encyclopedia2040121>
8. Bernardo, J. (2020, August 31). *Module delivery, parents answering activity sheets: Challenges seen in distance learning simulations*. ABS-CBN News.
9. Blomert L. (2010). *Multi-sensory learning and learning to read*. *International Journal of Psychophysiology*
10. Boholano, H., Jamon, B. E., & Caqbanes-Jamon, M. G. (2022). *Modular-Distance Learning Experiences of Public School Teachers in the Philippines: A Phenomenology*. *London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences*, 22(13).
11. Cahapay, M. B. (2022). *COVID-19 Vaccine and Vaccination Misinformation and Disinformation: Repositioning Our Role as Educators in Pandemic Times*. *European Journal of Environment and Public Health*, 6(1), em0095. <https://doi.org/10.21601/ejeph/11498>
12. Cheatham, J. P. (2020). *Becoming a School Leader During COVID-19*
13. City of Isabela (2022, February 21). *COVID-19 Pediatric Vaccination Orientation with PTA Presidents*. Isabela City Official Website.
14. Codamon, Daniel B. (2020). *Understanding the Distance Learning Delivery Modalities*. *Public Information Agency*.
15. Collet, V. & Berman, E. (2023) "It will change traditional school in a very positive way": *Educators' perspectives of the Marshalllese experience during spring 2020 remote learning*, *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 45:2, 121-147, DOI: 10.1080/10714413.2021.1873005
16. Constantia, C., Christos, P., Glykeria, R., Anastasia, A.-R., and Aikaterini, V. (2021). *The impact of COVID-19 on the educational process: the role of the school principal*. *J. Educ.* 2021:220574211032588. doi: 10.1177/00220574211032588
17. DavaoCity.Org (2022). *Private schools can request school-based vaccination: Davao covid-19 TF*,
18. DepEd (2021). *Launches Vacc2School campaign to support gov't's vaccination effort*
19. DepEd (2022). *On requiring vaccination for teachers handling face-to-face classes*
20. Deiparine, C. (2021). *DepEd: 1,212 schools converted into isolation facilities*,
21. De Matthews, D., P. Carrola, P. Reyes, and D. Knight. 2021. "School Leadership Burnout and Job-related Stress: Recommendations for District Administrators and Principals." *Clearing House*, 1–9. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2021.1894083>.
22. D'Souza, K. (2021, August 18). *What impact will the pandemic have on early literacy?*
23. East Central University Online Programs (2019, October 11). *What Makes a Great Principal? | East Central University Online*. ECU Online.
24. Ehrkamp, A. & Media G. (2020). *Pandemic offers lessons in faith and hope for teachers and students*,
25. Fisher, C. B., Bragard, E., Jaber, R., & Gray, A. (2022). *COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy among Parents of Children under Five Years in the United States*. *Vaccines*, 10(8), 1313. <https://doi.org/10.3390/vaccines10081313>
26. FlipScience. (2020, October 5). *'Tagapagdaloy': How Filipino parents can help ensure successful modular distance learning*. *FlipScience - Top Philippine Science News and Features for the Inquisitive Filipino*.
27. Fore (2020). *Teachers should be prioritized for vaccination against COVID-19*
28. Fukuda Y.S., Ando K., Fukuda, P.R. Shankar (2021). *Knowledge and preventive actions toward COVID-19, vaccination intent, and health literacy among educators in Japan: An online survey*, *PLoS ONE*, 16 (9) (2021), p. e0257552
29. Giorgi, A. (2012). *The descriptive phenomenological psychological method*. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 43(1), 3–12. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156916212X632934>
30. Gregorio, X. (2020, October 1). *Public schools coping with pandemic through community collaboration, administrators say*. *Philstar.com*.
31. Guiamalon, Tarhata & Alon, Sittie & Camsa, Sofia. (2021). *Teachers Issues and Concerns On The Use Of Modular Learning Modality*. 10.46529/socioint.202115.
32. Harris E.A. (2020, April 27) *It was just too much: How remote learning is breaking parents*. *The New York Times*.
33. Heffernan, A., Longmuir, F., Bright, D., & Kim, M. (2019). *Perceptions of teachers and teaching in Australia*. *Monash University*.
34. Hernando-Malipot, M. (2022). *Students, and teachers encounter various challenges during pilot face-to-face classes*. *Manila Bulletin*.
35. Hernando-Malipot, M. (2022). *PH schools to open SY 2022-2023 with face-to-face classes*. *Manila Bulletin*.
36. Heubeck, E. (2021). *Principals and Stress: Strategies for Coping in Difficult Times*,
37. *Inquirer.net* (2022). *Gov't eyes to stop use of schools as isolation facilities, long-term evac centers, Following alleged molestation of 4 Camarines Sur teachers*,
38. Jackaria, P. M. (2022). *Elementary teachers' experiences and instructional challenges during the return to school after the COVID-19 closure in the Philippines*. *International Research Journal of Science, Technology, Education, and Management*, 2(2).
39. Lacerna, S. A. (2023). *Why the Philippines needs to stop using schools as evacuation centers*,
40. Lopez, J., Salim, S. S., Zaremohzabieh, Z., & Ahrari, S. (2022, February 14). *The Role, Experience, and Challenges to Headmasters of Indigenous Primary Schools amid Covid-19 in Malaysia*. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 18(1), 231. <https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v18i1.17191>
41. Magomedov, I. A., Khaliev, M. S. U., & Khubolov, S. M. (2020, November 1). *The negative and positive impact of the pandemic on education*. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, 1691(1), 012134. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1691/1/012134>
42. Magsambol, B. (2020, September 22) *Fast Facts: DepEd's modular learning*. *Rappler*.
43. Melorin, M. (n.a.). *Module Distribution and Retrieval: A Challenge*,
44. Minichiello, Victor & Aroni, Rosalie & Hays, Terrence. (2008). *In-Depth Interviewing: Principles, Techniques,*



Analysis.

45. Molaodi, V. & Kwatubana, S. (2021). *Leadership Styles that Would Enable School Leaders to Support the Wellbeing of Teachers during COVID-19*
46. Montemayor, T. (2021, February 26) *DepEd supports teachers under distance learning program*. Philippine News Agency.
47. Nicholls, A.C. (2020, October 23). *41 errors in self-learning modules monitored by DepEd*. CNN Philippines.
48. Pangilinan E. (2021). *Vital Roles of the School Head in Distance Learning*
49. Persico, C. (2021). *Now is the time to invest in school infrastructure*,
50. Sabat, I., Neumann-Böhme, S., Varghese, N.E. P.P. Barros, W. Brouwer, J. van Exel (2020) *United but divided: Policy responses and people's perceptions in the EU during the COVID-19 outbreak*, *Health Policy*, 124 (9) (2020), pp. 909-918
51. Schools Division of Davao de Oro. (2022, January 10). *WINS Monitoring Program for SY 2021-2022*
52. Sucena, A., Silva, A.F. & Marques, C. *Reading skills intervention during the Covid-19 pandemic*. *Humanit Soc Sci Commun* 9, 45 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01059-x>
53. Suran M. *Why Parents Still Hesitate to Vaccinate Their Children Against COVID-19*. *JAMA*. 2022;327(1):23–25.[doi:10.1001/jama.2021.21625](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2021.21625)
54. Tupper, P., Colijn, C. & Maini P.K. (2021). *COVID-19 in schools: Mitigating classroom clusters in the context of variable transmission*, 17 (7) p. e1009120
55. Villanueva, H. D., & Buenbrazo, J. A. (2023). *Challenges Encountered by School Administrators During the New Normal Education: A Phenomenological Study*. *EduLine: Journal of Education and Learning Innovation*, 3(1), 8-16. <https://doi.org/10.35877/454RI.eduline1338>
56. Yaseen, S. F. M., & Joshi, S. S. (2021, June). *The positive impact of Covid-19 on Education*. *International Research Journal on Advance Science Hub*, 03(06S), Article 2582–4376.