

Lived Experiences of the Principals in Senior High School Curriculum Implementation in Western Visayas, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This paper explored the lived experiences of the principals who were the heads of the Senior High School (SHS) program implementation in each school. This study used the qualitative research design, employing the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the data analysis method. Five principals from private and public Senior High School institutions in Negros Occidental, Western Visayas, Philippines were involved in the study. The data gathering procedure was through a one-on-one, face-to-face interview using a semi-structured guide which was reviewed and validated by research experts. After an intensive interpretation and analysis of the data, three superordinate themes emerged: (a) principals as curriculum designers, (b) principals as curriculum quality auditors, and (c) principals as reinventors. Findings revealed that the principals had resiliently played some roles that showed their strict adherence to the mission, goals, and values set by the Department of Education (DepEd.). Their resourcefulness and initiatives led the program's positive impact to outweigh some problems during the implementation. Therefore, the Senior High School implementation has been favorably progressing. For future studies, researchers may focus on the lived experiences of the principals under the command of their supervisors.

Keywords: Educational management, Senior High School program implementation, K to 12 curriculum, lived experiences, principals, phenomenology, Negros Occidental, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is among the three nations around the world with an educational system composed of a ten-year primary education until 2012 (Oxford Business Group, 2021). With the previous educational system, students from the Philippines were always behind in international achievement scores (Abueva, 2021). Fortunately, the Philippines made a brave leap and enacted RA 10533 or the Enhanced Basic Education Act that paved for the implementation of the K to 12 programs starting 2016-2017. The enhanced curriculum covered kindergarten and twelve years of primary education: six years preceding four years in Junior High School and two years in Senior High School (Barcelo, 2019; Rivera, 2017). Senior high school graduates may join the workforce using their gained skills, establish small businesses using entrepreneurial skills, or pursue college to earn a degree (Okabe, 2013). The new educational shift was done to upgrade the Philippines' quality of education and align it with other country's educational standards. According to Abueva (2021), the K to 12 programs helped the Filipino graduates be automatically recognized abroad as professionals, for the country they came from followed the international standard of education as adopted by all the nations worldwide. However, the success of the educational system shift depended greatly on the combined effort of the stakeholders with the leadership of the principal (Sumalinog, 2019).

At the school level, the K to 12 program implementation, particularly the Senior High School program, was entrusted to the hands of the principals, who were also managers and overseers of the development of the program. DepEd Order 19, s. 2016 stated that there would be Senior High School principals who shall set the direction and strategy of the school. The principals needed to ensure that students gained an in-depth knowledge of the curriculum (Dizon et al., 2019; Fioriello, 2020). They took charge of everything that the school could decide to thrive. They should facilitate, manage, coach, mentor, and supervise the school staff to maintain the effectiveness and efficiency of the school's system. They should monitor and assess the school's curriculum, for

they were responsible for achieving the school's learning outcomes. Principals should also serve as representatives during conversations and meetings with the external and internal stakeholders. They were accountable and responsible for creating and realizing the standards that would gauge the proper behavior of the students and teachers. They should implement and monitor the learning institutions' Result-Based Performance Management System (RPMS), including all the staff. Also, the principals take the responsibility of making recommendations to the Schools Division Office (SDO) about the programs that the schools may offer (DepEd Order 19, s. 2016).

The roles and responsibilities of the principals are necessary for implementing the Senior High School programs as part of the primary education curriculum since they were the ones handling the entire learning force (McCarthy, 2017). The principal's ability to establish a satisfying and lasting relationship with the school officials and the government was critical in creating positive impacts towards the learners (Brooks & Sutherland, 2014). They should ensure that collaborative and meaningful participation of the stakeholders for the students to get full support (McCarthy, 2017). Accordingly, Rogayan and Villanueva (2019) agreed that the Senior High School program implementations should be monitored by the administrator, the government, the academe, and other stakeholders. The principals and the supportive teachers and staff might spot the flaws by themselves, but the observation and evaluation from outsiders should also be considered.

However, Docquier and Rapoport (2012), as cited in Jaca (2018), mentioned that the school leaders, including the principals, were not equipped with the needed skills to handle the new educational reform. Many of them did not have enough experience and training. In addition, Combalicer (2016) believed that teachers were not equipped with techniques and strategies, so they needed training and recalibration activities. Another study, Barcelo (2019), revealed that some schools lacked basic facilities such as classrooms, computer rooms, and laboratories. Some courses had many competencies that the students had to undergo (Atienza, 2020; Sumalinog, 2022). In a study conducted by Perez (2018), it was mentioned that the Department of Education had tried its best to support the senior high school implementation with the needed resources. DepEd also provided the principal and teachers with seminars and training. Moreover, the parents were informed and educated about the K to 12 programs and the promising career and employment opportunities their children would soon embark on after completing the program.

The implementation of the Senior High School (SHS) program has been evaluated differently by various researchers. Despite the clear display of the principals' roles and responsibilities, there were ups and downs. The literature has also given out inconsistent results regarding the SHS program, so this research has been considered. So, there is a gap of knowledge to be filled, and that is to find the reality about the implementation, which only the principals can give. In the previous studies, policies could hardly be formulated since some of the problems were not directly shared with authorities, such as the principals, who can develop policies and recommendations for immediate solutions. This present study delved into the significant experiences of the principals as Senior High School administrators.

Several studies on the K to 12 implementations had been carried out, specifically the SHS program, but most of them focused on quantitative research with teachers and students as their respondents. In this study, the principals are the center of the inquiry, for they have in-depth knowledge of the entirety of the implementations. The principals were responsible for running the learning institution. They also had no chance of neglecting any part of the program since reports sent to the DepEd regarding the SHS program would be asked from them. Moreover, knowing the realities through the principal's lenses would be more reliable than any respondents because they were expected to know everything inside the campus. Consequently, getting the significant lived experience of the principals could contribute to the body of knowledge that other upcoming and promising principals may benchmark from.

RELATED LITERATURE

The strength of a nation greatly depends on the strength of its education system. The Philippine government ideally adheres to this belief. A revisiting of the 1987 Philippine Constitution reminds us that the organized machinery of the State gives primacy to education as a fundamental human right (Sergio, 2018).

The implementation of the K to 12 (Kindergarten and 12 years of basic education: six years of primary education, four years of Junior High School, and two years of Senior High School) Program in 2012 was significant education reform to address the challenges of the Philippine society amid globalization, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) integration, and changing education quality standards (Abulecia, 2019).

The Philippines implemented a new curriculum which started last school year 2012-2013. This is the shift from the Basic Education Curriculum to the new K to 12 Curriculum. The said innovation in Philippine education has been made legal by the Republic Act 1033 or the Enhanced Basic Education 2013. Many innovations are introduced to the curriculum, such as extending years spent in school. The old 10-year scheme, Grade 1 to 10, has been modified to 12 years (Montebon, 2014).

Moreover, the power in educational systems is delegated to school principals, and if the latter are encouraged and trained to be autonomy-supportive toward their educational staff, these steps may potentially facilitate teachers' autonomous motivation, satisfaction, and well-being (Eyal & Roth, 2011). Also, the educational importance of the information relates to administrator preparation and in-service development (Hauserman et al., 2013).

School administrators' leadership is related to guiding teachers, implementing plans, and motivating teachers. On the other hand, job satisfaction denotes employees' perceptions of the workplace, their relationships with colleagues, income, and promotion opportunities. Many factors' including school administrators' leadership style, demographic characteristics, and work environment, can affect employees' job satisfaction (Cansoy, 2019).

The principal as the key actor in the program implementation at the lower level of education bureaucracy: (1) needs effective leadership qualities; (2) practices principal empowerment; (3) believes that political will as necessary component for effective implementation of education reform; (4) serves as an effective communicator of change; (5) accepts that resistance as a feedback mechanism; (6) asserts that stakeholders' participation in K to 12 Program; and (7) needs a support system. The study was conducted in Manila, Philippines, which employed a phenomenological approach with 6 participants in six public secondary schools (Abulencia, 2019).

In order to uphold instructional leadership, principals assumed agency by engendering perspectives and actions that viewed instructional leadership as grounded in learning, influenced by teachers and staff, requiring time and planning for principals, teachers, and staff, and calls for teacher and staff empowerment (Terosky, 2016).

Hipp and Bredesqn (1995) disclosed that principal leadership behaviors most strongly related to general teaching (GTE) were models behavior, providing contingent rewards and inspiring group purpose. Modeling behaviors and providing contingent rewards were also significantly related to personal teaching efficacy (PTE).

In terms of student outcomes, school principals affect grade 12 English test scores. Principals take a few years to affect a school and affect graduation rates to a lesser extent. Hence, policy's role is to improve the retention of good principals (Coelli & Greene, 2012).

The reform faces challenges in redesigning the curriculum, deploying and training teachers at the start of the program's implementation, ensuring the program's sustainability, and meeting the required infrastructure (Sergio, 2018).

Montebon (2014) discoursed that now that the K12 is being implemented for about three academic years, some issues are raised, like the lack of training of teachers to implement the new program. With these, Senator Antonio Trillanes makes a move to stop implementing the K12 program, which he referred to as overly ambitious because of perennial issues in the education system of the Philippines.

Domain of Inquiry

This study explored the lived experience of the Senior High School (SHS) principals overall overseer of the Senior High School program implementation.

METHODOLOGY

This section discussed the research design, informants, context, instrument, data gathering procedure, and data analysis steps.

Research Design

This study utilized the interpretive phenomenology research design, for it extracted meaning, not from numbers, but of words from the verbatim of the informants. It is phenomenological since it revolved around the lived experience of the identified individuals. In this paper, the informants were asked to share how the Senior High School of the K to 12 programs have been implemented as leaders of their respective schools.

Phenomenology is known as an educational qualitative research design (Creswell, 2013). The philosophical basis of qualitative investigation stems from phenomenology (as philosophy), from hermeneutics, and from existentialism (Lucca Irizarry & Berrios Rivera, 2009). Phenomenology has become a valuable and meaningful design for researchers of educational and social science. Most of them have understood that phenomenology is a genuine manner of representing the realities that participants experiences in their lives (Padilla-Diaz, 2015).

Research Informants

This paper involved five (5) Senior High School principals from the Province of Negros Occidental, Western Visayas, Philippines. They were chosen based on the extent of their implementation of the K to 12 programs, particularly the Senior High School program. These SHS principals have been in service for more than three years. So, it was expected that these principals had a clear and in-depth understanding of how the new curriculum was run and should be run. This group of informants was composed of two (2) private and three (3) public schools principals. They were assigned pseudonyms to hide their identity and to maintain anonymity throughout the study

Table 1. Research Informants and their Pseudonyms

Pseudonyms of the Informants	Type of Senior High School Institution
1. Pearly	Private
2. Ann	Private
3. Joy	Public
4. Girly	Public
5. Roy	Public

Research Environment

The study was conducted in the various public and private schools (located both in the rural and urban areas) offering the Senior High School program in Negros Occidental, a province in the Western Region of the Philippines. Negros Occidental is one of the country's provinces with a good number of fully established Senior High School institutions. Despite the pandemic, the interview was done in a face-to-face mode with high observance of health protocols.

Research Instrument

The researchers used a semi-structured interview guide composed in the English language. The contents of the interview guide underwent a validation process by experts to determine whether the questions were acceptable and fitted to the identified participants. The revisions undertaken were based on the comments and suggestions of the validators. The changes include relevance, domain, and technicality of the questions. Possible prompt questions were also prepared to maintain the fluidity and spontaneity of the interview process. The interview guide contained questions about the experiences of the principals in the implementation of the K to 12 Enhanced Basic Education program in the aspect of planning or design, performance, and in terms of supervision and monitoring. The questions were asked in no particular order. The participants were not obliged to speak in

English. They were informed that they could talk about any language they were comfortable using. Fortunately, most of the informants' answers were in English.

Research Procedures

After the study's concept was conceived, the participants were then chosen, and how to include them in the study and permission to conduct the study was obtained from the various Schools Division Superintendents in Negros Occidental Province. They then issued an endorsement to the school heads signifying the approval of the study. For the private schools, permission was obtained from the school management and the principal. After which, the principals were emailed a letter explaining the study's purpose, introducing its purpose, and asking for their permission to be part of it. They were also instructed to email back if they decided to participate voluntarily. Informed consent forms were then sent to the participants, asking them to sign, collecting their preferred interview time, and informing them of the possible risks and benefits. The letter also indicated that they could freely withdraw from being an informant. With the informants' preferences, the interview was conducted in face-to-face mode. The conversation was recorded, transcribed, and kept until the entire paper shall have been published. All the data were stored and kept confidential, ensuring that they would be inaccessible to anybody, except the researchers who would refer back to the transcripts during the interpretation of the data.

Data Analysis

The responses during the interview were transcribed and translated. The answers expressed in the informants' dialect were translated into English. Their responses were then analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method of Smith and Osborn (2007), which has five steps: 1) looking for themes in each case; 2) looking for connections; 3) compiling a table of themes; 4) compiling a master list of themes for the group, and 5) writing reports. Initially, the researchers familiarize the data corpus by reading, and re-reading the transcripts. Then generation of initial codes was done. Then, they capture something significant or interesting about the data and/or research question. At the end of this step, the codes were organized into broader themes that seemed to say something specific about this research question. Then they read the data associated with each theme and considered whether the data really did support it. The next step is on thinking about whether the themes work in the context of the entire data set. Saturation was achieved when they are no new codes that was found in the data.

Ethical Considerations

The study was started after the researchers had obtained approval from the University of Cebu Academic Research Ethics Committee and reviewed the ethical soundness of the research protocol. The participation of the informants in this investigation was entirely voluntary, but they received tokens of appreciation. They would be receiving a copy of the paper to be their reference in improving their implementation of the K to 12 programs, particularly at the Senior High School level. The informants were informed of their rights to either stop or continue their participation in the study.

During data gathering, the field interviewers thoroughly explained the study's objectives and purpose to the target informants before proceeding with the interview. The principal and field researchers were assured of the safe-keeping of the data for privacy protection. As part of the adherence to the provisions of the Data Privacy Act, the raw data were not shared with anybody or any organization. Only the study's final results were allowed for sharing with other parties and during research conferences. Additionally, the study's findings would be shared only with the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), the Department of Education (DepEd), and the proponents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

After a thorough analysis and interpretation of the informant's responses, three (3) supordinate themes with two (2) subthemes emerged. These themes revolved around the principals' lived experiences as leaders of their respective schools. The themes were: (1) Principals as Curriculum Designers; (2) Principals as Curriculum Quality Auditors; and (3) Principals as Curriculum Reinventors.

Theme 1: Principals as Curriculum Designers

Running a school is a massive responsibility that school leaders must master. They needed to have expertise in designing a curriculum, and such tasks required skills in curriculum development and presentation skills. In the context of the Senior High School institutions in the province of Negros Occidental, the principals who were also identified as informants shared that they have voluntarily served as curriculum designers. As designers, they were expected to become crafters and presenters of the curriculum. The curriculum was defined as the description of what, how, why, and how well the students should be learning intentionally and systematically (UNESCO-IBE, 2022). In simpler terms, the curriculum is anything that the students may encounter as they learn. As principals, they were responsible for crafting the entirety of the students' learning experiences and presenting what they had come up with to the implementers.

Crafters

The principals were the prime movers of the schools where they were assigned. So, the tough job of crafting the students' learning experiences has been heavily placed on their shoulders. According to the informants, they led in crafting the curriculum from the planning stage to writing the salient points. As crafters, they prepare the strands and subjects that come with it. Strands were not just offered without extensive deliberation because the community's needs and the student's preferences had to be considered. Most of the time, the informants would also craft a long list of their available school facilities and equipment necessary for the inclusion of the strand in the list of the strands to be offered. According to Barcelo (2019), some schools lacked classrooms, computer rooms, and laboratories. The teachers assigned to handle the subjects must also be identified while the crafting was going on. According to Jaca (2018), some teachers were assigned to subjects that did not align with their area of specialization. Pearly and Ann mentioned:

"I prepare the course offering, making sure that everything is considered, such as the teachers and facilities."

"I prepare Annual Implementation Plan (AIP). The materials needed to execute the AIP should be listed. It was tough."

The informants' responses showed how tremendous and critical their job was as crafters. These principals also shared that crafting also entailed an intensive review of the curriculum to see where the implementation of the Senior High School went wrong and where it went well. According to Migallos et al. (2020), the review of curricular programs offered per unit was the support felt most by teachers in curriculum restructuring. Joy shared her observation and experience and said:

"We revisited and reviewed our existing curriculum to fit it to the changes happening right now and most importantly to cater to the needs of the students as they prepare themselves to enter their college life."

Joy's remarks only proved the complexity in crafting the curriculum because it also had to fit with the present time, conditions of the students, and the environment. As the informants carried out their job, they did not just sit and write but extended their minds to review the past learning experiences and foreplan the upcoming circumstances. So, the informants were constantly confronted with issues related to the past or connected to the present. According to Jaca (2018), well-planned subject offering, organized curriculum, and collaborative thinking could produce positive development and changes. Based on the informants' observation of the job they have at hand, crafting a curriculum was never a piece of cake and would never be too easy to do, no matter how adept the principals were. Their experiences would always be varied, for the learners they catered to were unique and different. Their lived experiences as crafters should also be shared with the master teachers and facilitators. In most cases, principals have also worked closely with the training facilitators and their master teachers, for these people also had in-depth knowledge of the type of students they have in their school.

Presenters

Part of the curriculum designer's job was to present what was crafted. Entwined to the informants' duty was to orient and inform the teachers on the details of the curriculum. In reality, the teachers were the ones who would

directly interact with the students during the implementation stage. The formal relaying of the curriculum also reached the level of the students during occasions determined by the principal. As presenters, the informants expressed that they needed to understand and interpret the curriculum to the best of their ability to avoid wrong execution caused by misinformation. They must initiate a forum or any proper venue for disseminating the curriculum. Commonly, they would gather the teachers through a training called "INSET." Topics during the INSET were all planned and prepared by the informants. They would then invite speakers and facilitators to get their messages across. Teachers are expected to pay attention to the presented curriculum and note the details in a gathering like this. Teachers were also asked to present or demonstrate a lesson to show their understanding of what was transpired. The informants would also call for meetings with the teachers and subject coordinators to reiterate the content of the crafted curriculum. Girly, Ann, and Roy stated:

"Meetings were held frequently, and questions were dealt with understanding."

"Yearly, we conduct the curriculum review with the subject area chairs and teachers as part of our INSET training."

"Through meetings and LAC sessions, we discuss the curriculum of our school."

The principals never failed to present the curriculum to the teachers to be ready and prepared for their instruction task. The informants were also responsible for presenting and transmitting the crafted curriculum to the teachers under their supervision during specialized training before the school year started. They should be knowledgeable about the content that they were obliged to impart. This act of the principals coincided with the statement of Migallos et al. (2020) when they said that one of the significant preparations that school leaders did before the classes opened for senior high school teachers was to make the teachers ready. Besides informing the teachers, the principals also tried more significant information platforms for curriculum dissemination purposes. They shared that they also resorted to posting the curriculum on social media since most students had access to such a platform. This massive information drive was helpful to all the stakeholders who were part of the Senior High School learning institution. The informants also initiated a general orientation where the students, their parents, the community people, and the other members of the society were invited, so their queries may be answered right away. Joy and Girly gave these answers during the interview:

"We are fully utilizing our social media to cascade our course offering and curriculum. I make sure that we do an aggressive marketing campaign to highlight our curriculum and target our market audience."

"General orientation is also initiated to inform the teachers, students, and others about our Senior High School program."

The informants did well in presenting the curriculum as part of their job as designers. They had meaningfully used social media to reach a wider audience's scope. They had fully executed and served as a representative during conversations and meetings with the external and internal stakeholders (DepEd Order 19, s. 2016). The informants had successfully reached out to other stakeholders and made them part of the dissemination process. According to McCarthy (2017), school leaders should make sure that collaborative and meaningful participation of the stakeholders for the students to get full support. The principals, as designers, had exhausted everything they could contribute and mindfully established a better information initiative for the stakeholders.

Theme 2: Principals as Curriculum Quality Auditors

The curriculum constantly changes, and it also alters based on the need of the time. Despite its development, it should maintain its quality so that the desired learning outcomes can still be achieved. To gauge its quality, it would need auditors to weigh the success of the implementation. In the study, the informants had become more exposed to how curriculum quality should be maintained and achieved. With their years of practice, they had personally committed themselves to sustaining curriculum quality, following the guidelines provided by the Department of Education. So, the teachers have identified themselves as supervisors and assessors of the curriculum in the schools where they were assigned. The informants had generally supervised the wholistic implementation of the curriculum as they monitored its progress. They had also assessed the program and had

known the curriculum by the heart through their responsibilities and tasks. They had embraced their role and slowly became accustomed to it, despite the vast accountability entrusted to them. There being curriculum quality auditors had come out of them naturally.

Supervisors

The principal's ability to establish cordial and lasting relationships with the teachers through close supervision was critical in creating positive impacts in the program's implementation stage (Brooks & Sutherland, 2014). The informants supervised the teachers to ensure the curriculum implementation quality in the study. They diligently supervised the teachers during the newly-hired teachers' training and orientation, including INSET training days as part of the school year's launching. The informants had also been supervising the teachers while crafting the modules for the learners. They tried to ensure that errors and misalignment of the activities and objectives were corrected immediately. The informants were selflessly empowering the subject coordinators as they worked on the monitoring checklist to gauge the teachers' performance. The informants also scheduled a "surprise visit" to the teachers' classrooms to ensure that instruction was delivered as expected. They prepared an appointment for the regular supervising and monitoring roles that they performed. Ann, Roy, and Pearly expressed:

"DepEd conducts training for newly-hired teachers. So, my role is to be there and see to that it's done well."

"We supervise the In-Service Training of Teachers (INSET), which is done at the start and the middle of the School Year."

"A quarterly School Monitoring, Evaluation, Adjustment is done to assess the reason and find a solution to problems that affect School Performance Indicators. This needs close supervision. Sometimes, I do a surprise visit. During INSET and orientation, I am always there."

The informants' supervisory skills were prevalent in their responses. Their presence in all the school activities has been hastening the success of the Senior High School implementation. The tasks they performed were all part of the responsibilities that they had sworn before the Department of Education. However, the passion that they have invested had been more than enough to improve the system of the schools they were manning. The impactful actions of the informants jibed with what was stated in one of the DepEd Orders. The principal should facilitate, manage, coach, mentor, and supervise the school staff to maintain the effectiveness and efficiency of the school's system (DepEd Order 19, s. 2016). However, in reality, training and daily instruction could flow seamlessly without the presence of the informants. Workplaces were not the same, and so were the characteristics of the teachers. Some teachers would be a bit lax when not supervised, and some would not perform when bosses were away. The worst, some teachers would leave their posts and go elsewhere to tend to their personal needs without the principals' knowledge. So, the informants' diligence in knowing how each of the teachers carried out their work could encourage the teachers to be at their best all the time. In addition, when teachers were aware of the informants' presence, they would walk the extra mile. According to Cabasag (2014), the K to 12 implementations should be closely monitored to achieve the desired goals. So, the informants were never wrong in following their duties.

Assessors

Curriculum implementation has to be assessed by experts such as the principals. The principals who were informants at the same time should evaluate and assess everything from the materials used in the instruction, delivery of the lessons, and impact of the curriculum on the learners. On the same note, Rogayan and Villanueva (2019) suggested that the review and evaluation of the K12 materials and instructional resources should be considered to evaluate its alignment to the intended learning outcomes set by the Department of Education (DepEd). According to DepEd Order 19, s. 2016, the principals should monitor and assess the school's curriculum, for they were responsible for achieving the school's learning outcomes. So, assessing what had been done was already part of the informants' duties. However, it was good to remember that the informants were very conscious and honest in assessing and grading their teachers following the RPMS-IPCRF standards of public-school teachers. As shared by the informants, RPMs was an organization-wide procedure in ensuring that

employees were gearing towards achieving DepEd's vision, mission, and values. With this tool, the informants would check the alignment of targets and roles with DepEd's direction give feedback about the progress and accomplishments of the employees and others. With all their dedication and willingness to maintain excellence, the informants used the tool in fairly grading the teachers. According to Ann and Girly:

"I assessed the teachers of the Senior HS based on the standardized IPCRF. No other tool, but this"

"We follow the RPMS-IPCRF as standards of public school teachers. We honestly adhere to it."

The informants have strictly followed the RPMS-IPCRF to see whether or not each teacher adhered to the standard set by the Department of Education. In addition, the informants also conducted regular and graded class observations. The informants have witnessed their teachers' creativity, resourcefulness, and competence during observation. The informants also offered their time as coaches and mentors for the teachers. They gave constructive criticisms, salient points for improvement, positive points to be remembered, and suggestions on handling unforeseen circumstances. The informants were remarkable when they consciously motivated and encouraged the teachers to work with less supervision. They transpired that quality instruction and excellent performance should linger even when no one watched them. Pearly, Ann, Joy, and Roy answered:

"I never failed to observe because I know that it will help the teachers improve their teaching. It is a requirement on my part, so I am obliged to grade their performance." Afterward, I mentor and coach them."

"A requirement of a four (4) graded observation across four quarters in a School Year. The teachers may opt for either a graded observation as a requirement or for the self-improvement of teachers. This is usually twice a month per teacher or more. In my case, I always make sure to cover all the observation periods." I usually ended it with a coaching session."

"We also strengthen our mentoring and coaching program to guide them on what they should do and not do in the classroom. This is paired with observation."

"A mentoring partner will help the new teacher in addressing the needs and challenges in teaching as well as the culture of the school after the observation sessions."

The assessment has been going on for years, and the informants had carried out the tasks well, performing them consistently and excellently. So, the informants should continue applying the same standard as prescribed by DepEd unless new guidelines are released. According to Jaca (2018), it would take several years before an accurate evaluation of the success of the K to 12 implementations could be meaningfully captured. However, Rogayan & Villanueva (2019) insisted that the review and evaluation of the K12 materials and instructional resources should be considered to evaluate its alignment to the intended learning outcomes set by the Department of Education (DepEd). Fortunately, the suggested evaluation scope has been included in the RPMS tool.

With the informants' supervisory and assessors' roles, they generally acted as auditors since they were guided by a tool that thrived on aligning the teachers' performance to the direction set by the Department of Education (DepEd). The informants have considered all the aspects while auditing the efficiency and effectiveness of the Senior High School program.

Theme 3: Principals as Curriculum Reinventors

Any curriculum could not be perfectly implemented, and it might fail at any point, especially since that time just kept changing, and the needs of the society could not stop varying. However, curriculum implementation could be reinvented when challenged by inevitable circumstances. It could be tweaked from its planned direction through people who could reinvent it. Reinventors were problems solvers and strategists at the same time. During the interview, the informants had indirectly represented themselves as reinventors when they carefully planned ways to solve the problems of their students and teachers. Moreover, they had become strategists, for they never stopped finding new ways and strategies to implement and assess the curriculum effectively. While the sharing of lived experiences went on, problems that needed to be solved came from the informants' responses.

Solvers

The Senior High School implementation had also bumped against problems that needed lasting and sometimes temporary solutions. The Department of Education has been confronted with issues on the lack of infrastructure before and during the implementation (Barlongo, 2015; Refugio et al., 2020). The informants as overseers had identified some challenges. According to them, they had observed the students' absences because a few of them were employed. Some students had difficulty accomplishing voluminous school tasks because the Senior High program has a demanding curriculum with many competencies that students could not realistically perform and learn. In consonance, studies revealed that the challenges in teaching emerged due to time constraints and mastery issues of contents (Rogayan & Villanueva, 2019; Jaudinez, 2019). There was also a shortage of classrooms. Even the number of teachers to handle highly-specialized courses was fewer than needed. According to Jaca (2018), some teachers were assigned to subjects that did not align with their area of specialization. According to Ann and Pearly:

"Resources like classrooms were not available, including other facilities. The school maximized every possible space, rehabilitated some classrooms, and halted the services of the canteens and faculty rooms to be learning spaces. In between areas were roofed and walled to be a learning area as well."

"Facilities and teachers to teach specialized subjects are always our struggle in the department. We were not also provided with enough facilities and equipment."

With the enumerated challenges that had been hurdling the success of the implementation, the informants strived hard enough and acted as solvers. To address the students' attendance, the informants trained the teachers and instructed them to give them a realistic number of tasks. The focus had been shifted to the inclusion only of the Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) and other tasks that would not consume the students' time since most subjects would also give other tasks. As the lack of teachers to handle specialized subjects persisted, the informants abruptly submitted requests to DepEd for additional teachers. While waiting, the informants paired the new teachers with the experienced ones for mentoring purposes to enable them to handle and teach the specialized subjects. There should be specialized teachers to handle the significant subjects (Gamboa et al., 2020; Dacanay & Oracion, 2020). Since there was also a shortage of buildings, classrooms, laboratories, and equipment, the informants temporarily held the activities in vacant rooms. The informants had also tried letting classes share some laboratories or sometimes borrow equipment so that the learning would not be hampered. Here are Roy's, Joy's, and Girly's statements:

"The school maximized every possible space, rehabilitated some classrooms, and halted the services of the canteens and faculty rooms to be learning spaces. In between areas were roofed and walled to be a learning area. We also trained the teachers to teach specialized subjects."

"We sometimes borrow materials/equipment from Junior High School, e.g., science lab. We also accept teachers from other schools to teach some of our subjects."

"Non-major teachers were partnered with a specialized teacher to serve as a mentor."

The informants never ran out of solutions to anything that may ruin the flow of instruction and learning. One of their best practices was to solve the problem using research-based solutions. The informants required the teachers to conduct actions researches, making the challenges they had met the topics of inquiry. The informants could quickly address classroom problems from this initiative in case the same dilemma happens again.

Strategists

Despite the existing problems encountered by the Senior High School institutions, the informants have transformed themselves into strategists. They had applied their skills in planning so that the students could be better served. They had developed strategies to resolve issues. When the informants found out that the curriculum had not responded to the students' needs, they revised and recalibrated it. They tried matching the curriculum with the skills that students could not live without. Revision needed careful planning skills. In another instance,

when classrooms were insufficient, the informants tried the 3-day schooling but returned to normal after the shortage was addressed. Now that the pandemic had struck, the informants motivated their teachers to manipulate online learning tools and management systems. The retooling and upgrading of the faculty skills were one of the support initiatives that school leaders, such as the principal, had given to the teachers (Migallos et al., 2020). The strategies applied by the teachers were very prevalent and commendable. Ann, Girly, and Roy said:

“Due to limited classrooms, we ventured into a 3 to 3 class days but went back to the regular 5 class days. This strategy did work.”

“I strategized. I trained them to use google classroom to meet the need of the time.”

“We planned well just to revise and calibrate the curriculum. It’s always good to strategize every time a problem arises.”

The strategies used by the informants only proved and showcased their dedication, passion, and creativity. Therefore, the informants should be given due recognition of the job well done. Since they were the head of the flock, the informants maybe sometimes forced to perform. On the other hand, whether they were sincere or not with their effort, the diligence they have put in still deserved applause. It could be further concluded that the job as principal was not a simple one. It needed an extraordinary skill since the stakeholders involved were living humans with life and dignity.

CONCLUSION

The Senior High School Implementation had already journeyed long enough since the first day it was adhered to and accepted as the most recent curriculum of the Philippine Educational System. From the principals' responses, the program's success could be doubted, but seeing it developed slowly from the traditional one to what it is now, anybody could spot the big difference. In a more generic observation, the implementation was successful because it had diligent principals who exhaust all means to perform the duties and responsibilities entrusted to them by the Department of Education. The principals went the extra mile because they were pressured by their desire to lead excellently, and they had embraced their job with dignity. Being the head of the institutions, the principals had played various roles well. They were actively involved in the implementation from the designing stage to the quality auditing stage and straight to the reinventing stage, where problems were fixed, and issues were tweaked to match the needs of the time. Despite the continuous progress of the implementation, there were still problems that the principals had met. However, the significant successes of the program outweighed the challenges encountered. So, the principals had sustained their resilience and resourcefulness. They had trusted their leadership skills and had become reliant on their ability to lead. After all, there is no perfect leadership, so the principals' leadership should not be discredited because they knew their flock better than anybody else.

Moreover, these leadership experience, comprising of both best practice and challenges in the implementation of the Senior High School is a useful input in the enhancing the SHS curriculum that respond to the current needs in the educational arena and the labor market where the graduates will be employed after completion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department of Education may hire more principals, like the identified informants, for they are the key to successfully implementing the Senior High School program. The principals should be supported with anything that their schools need. After all, they are just stewards, and the sole responsibility of financing the institution belongs to the state. DepEd officials from the regional level may also initiate a reward system that will motivate the principals more, for they are entrusted with huge responsibilities.

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