

Sagas of Triumphs of Leading School Heads' Organizational Landscape Initiatives

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ABSTRACT

Outstanding school leaders play a vital role in creating a successful educational environment that can positively impact organizational landscape initiatives. Thus, exploring the stories of triumphs of leading school heads who implemented innovative and effective initiatives is essential. The study purposively selected five (5) outstanding school heads who have outstanding performance in leadership. They have been awarded by the School Division Office of Laguna during the Awarding of Gawad Marangal Year 2020-2023. The data were analyzed using a Narrative Case study. It aimed to capture the narratives of these school heads and gain insights into the strategies, challenges, and outcomes of their organizational landscape initiatives.

The study revealed that these leading school heads demonstrated exceptional leadership skills and strategic thinking in implementing organizational landscape initiatives. They were able to create a transformative educational environment by effectively engaging stakeholders developing innovative programs and fostering a culture of collaboration. Their initiatives resulted in improved student performance, enhanced teacher effectiveness and satisfaction, increased parent and community involvement, and overall positive changes in the school's organizational landscape.

They had set high standards of success for their schools by cultivating a proactive and collaborative learning environment. Their optimism, resiliency, and being a relational type of leader have seen them through the myriad of difficulties as school leaders. They stressed that they should be the agents of change in their schools, inspiring others to work hard to achieve their goals and continuously improve. Outstanding school heads typically use one of two approaches: transformational or democratic leadership. With their leadership philosophies, they were more successful at managing employees and creating an atmosphere that is favorable to accomplishing educational objectives. Because of pragmatism and progressivism – the leading school heads' educational ideologies – they were able to strike a balance between ideas and uphold a clear, consistent vision for their schools.

Keywords – democracy, leading, optimism, organizational landscape, transformational

INTRODUCTION

A school organization, like any other organization, needs strong leadership and management. Both set the way the school organization will go. The application of different management and leadership principles and practices in school setting complement each other. School leadership and management of activities challenge everyone in the field to promote the culture of lifelong learning and teaching (Cruz et al., 2016). Over the years, the changing landscape of schools and their management have shown an ever-bigger job to do for all the stakeholders.

Organizations are composed of various elements that combine in able to make an action. The organizational landscape is comprised of categories that include but are not limited to culture, conditions, capital, behavior, and other elements (Zentner et al, 2018). It describes both the design and management of an organization's environment which aids in attaining its goals and objectives efficiently and effectively. Further, the

organizational landscape emphasizes the areas of importance in the work and education that affect the development and attainment of positive outcomes.

Concerns have been raised regarding the principal's role in school leadership in the Philippines, where political factors and current posting practices have resulted in situations where a principal is assigned to a school for a short period—many times less than a year. The fast turn-over of principals in schools has resulted in the failure to fully implement great and promising endeavors (Levin & Bradley, 2019).

School heads as leaders are one of the most important elements of the educational system (Farid et al., 2020). Their educational qualification, experience, and skills can therefore play a vital role in optimizing the educational process. The school heads are the drivers of their schools. They set directions for where the school is going. They are basically responsible for the overall operation of the school. The success and failure of the school depend upon its leaders. In addition, Simkins (2015) further emphasizes that leadership is one of the major factors, sometimes the only factor that determines whether the organization succeeds or fails. Schermerhorn et al. (2018), likewise observed the expectation that school heads are leaders who must possess the qualities of a good and successful leader to be able to exude competence in the discharge of his duties and responsibilities and insofar to promote the success of all students through leading people likewise managing the school.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM / RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study utilized a Narrative Case Study approach to describe and explore the significant achievements, management practices, contributory qualities, leadership styles, perspectives, and philosophies of the leading school heads in SDO Laguna that made a remarkable impact on their school performances.

Four research questions were provided to attain the purposes of the study:

1. How do the accomplishment and the management practices of leading school heads contribute significantly to their triumphs and have led to the best performance of the schools they are handling?
2. How do the contributory characteristics/qualities of leading school heads in SDO Laguna lead them to the acquisition of the award?
3. How do the leadership styles employed by the leading school heads influence their school personnel?
4. What are the educational perspectives and philosophies of the leading school heads that guide them to achieve significant recognition of their school?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

School management is one factor that determines the quality of education (Lessa, Spier, and Felipe, 2018) since it indirectly determines the effectiveness of the curriculum, learning facilities and infrastructure, time, and learning process (Salmagundi, 2015). Seen from a management perspective, effective schools seek optimal utilization of all school components (Kompri, 2017). In order to achieve the desired level of educational quality, it is important for schools to have effective management systems in place. This plays a crucial role in ensuring that resources are efficiently utilized, teachers are supported in their work, and students receive a quality education.

According to Ibrahim (2016), the concept of effective schools could be pursued through effective and efficient organizational procedures implemented by school principal in school organization managerial. Effective management is characterized by the functioning of a good organizational structure in order to meet schooling services. Research states that the principal leadership style could determine the performance of the teacher under their leadership (Nurbaya, Harun, & Djaelani, 2015).

In the study of Aquino, Afalla, and Fabelico (2021), school heads were found to regularly show impressive leadership strategies in the fields of planning, organizing, regulating, directing, and unifying. Teachers exhibited a very satisfactory teaching quality. The explanations made by school heads and teachers on the excellent

leadership strategies of school heads are unparalleled. This underscores the importance of effective school leadership in driving positive educational outcomes.

According to a study conducted by Abraham, Kusi, and Mensah (2018), principals are also charged with the responsibility of encouraging career development among staff. As cited by the three outstanding school heads, the democratic style of leadership they employed helped them empower their teachers and gain valuable input that helped them accomplish their goals. This emphasizes the importance of principals adopting a democratic leadership style in promoting teacher empowerment and creating a collaborative and supportive school environment (Brown & Wynn, 2015).

Among the educational management practices of the principals is the constant observation and assessment of the interests and progress, including shortcomings of teachers, with the purpose of helping them enrich their skills, attitudes, and potential. Singh et al. (2017) mention in their study that classroom assessment practice has received a lot of attention in recent years as it is an inseparable aspect of the teaching and learning process. Assessment provides a record of how much new skills and knowledge have been absorbed by the students and facilitated by the teachers.

According to Mizell, as cited in Haramain (2019), the educational management practice of providing quality professional development that is research-based, consistent, convenient, and relevant, as well as differentiated, has become an essential part of the teacher's professional development. In education, research has shown that teaching quality and school leadership are the most important factors in raising student achievement. Current research has established that the difference between the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of leadership styles is the appropriateness of the leader's behavior to the particular situation in which it is used. There is no one-size-fits-all leadership style for a high-performing school administrator or manager; rather, a combination is recommended and should be applied depending on the situation demanded (Mshelia & Emmanuel, 2022). For teachers and school and district leaders to be as effective as possible, they continually expand their knowledge and skills to implement the best educational practices.

An organization which does not allow their staff to embrace change will slug behind and finally will collapse. Thus, it is the work of the human resource manager in any organization to encourage the staff to develop their career for the benefit of both the individual and the organization. Hence, as the principals carry out the role of a human resource manager in their school, they should ensure that they encourage the staff to develop their careers. By investing in comprehensive and tailored leadership development programs, educational leaders can equip themselves with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively lead their schools towards sustained success (Obligado et al., 2023).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The study utilized a Narrative Case Study. A narrative case study methodology involves using stories or narratives to explore and analyze a particular phenomenon or situation. It aims to uncover the unconscious origins of the situations being studied and find solutions to them. This methodology often utilizes metaphoric objects and movement to awaken an inner dialogue within unconscious intelligence. It also emphasizes the importance of detailed study and does not rely on statistical samples or artificial comparisons enforced by quantitative research methods. The collection of data in narrative case studies is typically done through in-depth interviews and the analysis involves identifying themes and patterns within the narratives (Themes, 2016). This methodology allows for a deep exploration of individual experiences and can provide concrete evidence for the effectiveness of certain interventions or approaches

Further, this study utilized a thematic narrative technique of Riesman (1993, 2000), which is a method of analysing qualitative data through analysis of texts, interviews, and transcripts, as the analytical framework. In a study on feedback mechanisms of school heads on teacher performance, conducted by Congcong and Caingcoy (2020), a thematic narrative was used to study the transcript closely and detect themes. The researcher grouped the narratives and excerpts according to the themes that they had identified. In this stage, the researcher was able

to immerse deeply in the text. Lastly, the similarities and commonalities derived from the narratives were used to support the discussed themes.

Participants/Respondents

A purposive selection of participants was the sampling technique of the study. Purposive sampling is defined by Scott and Morrison (as cited in Taip, 2019) as sampling to refer to the activities involved in selecting a subset of persons or things from a larger population. Purposive sampling is commonly associated with qualitative approaches and aims to be both principled and systematic.

To reflect a purposeful sampling, the participants must meet the following criteria:

1. Individuals must be a Gawad Marangal Awardee – Outstanding Schoolhead
2. Individuals must have at least five (5) years of experience as a school head
3. Individuals were promoted to the next rank like Principal II, Public Schools District Supervisor, or Education Program Supervisor after he/she garnered his/her award.

Gawad Marangal—an award given by the Schools Division of Laguna—is a prestigious honor given to teachers and school heads who have shown exemplary dedication, commitment, and innovation in the field of education. It recognizes their outstanding contributions and impact in shaping the lives of their students, as well as their significant role in promoting educational excellence. Teachers and school heads who receive the Gawad Marangal Award are seen as role models and inspirations for others in the education sector in the Schools Division of Laguna.

The purpose is to describe the sagas and triumphs of five leading school heads' organizational landscaping initiatives. The reason for the focus was based on the fact that it would yield descriptions that provide adequate data for the study, thus getting the thickness of the phenomenon: Yin (as cited in Taip, 2019), as a small sample, it allowed exploration and thus reliable information.

Instrumentation

The researcher designed this study to follow “the narrative case study,” which would allow for a thorough investigation of the experiences and learnings of the five leading school head participants. An independently created interview guide that has been approved by multiple experts both inside and outside the university served as the research tool for this study. The researcher sought to explore the personal experiences and perspectives of participants on a specific topic with the interview guide, which was semi-structured in nature, allowing for open-ended responses while also maintaining a degree of structure to ensure coverage of the research objectives.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection that occurred through face-to-face semi-structured individual interviews is projected to expose the participants' reflections on their significant accomplishments and unique practices that led them to be considered as outstanding or leading school heads. The interviews focused on open-ended questions with the specific content of the questions related to achievements, accomplishments, unique management practices, leadership style, and educational philosophies.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a Narrative Case study. The narrative case study is a qualitative research method that involves examining the stories and experiences of individuals or groups to gain an in-depth understanding of studying and analyzing the stories people tell about their lives and experiences. This method focuses on the way individuals construct their stories, the language they use, and the contexts in which they are shared. The goal of it is to understand the meaning that individuals attach to their experiences, and how their stories relate to broader social and cultural contexts.

The analysis is based on the premise that stories are central to human experience and understanding. Through storytelling, individuals create meaning and construct their identities, beliefs, and values. Therefore, examining stories can provide valuable insights into individuals' experiences and perspectives. In this sense, a narrative case study is a useful tool for qualitative research in various fields such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, and education (Doran et al., 2021). The rest of the paper explores narrative case studies in qualitative research.

The narrative case study was the selected methodology in this study, as it is concerned with capturing the rich and nuanced experience of individuals, specifically school heads. This also allows for a deep exploration of their achievements, unique practices, leadership style, and educational philosophies and how the school heads positively influence their colleagues in the educational setup. Semi-structured interviews will be the chosen method for this research, as the Narrative Case Study is suited to a data collection approach that understands how research participants construct stories and narrate from their personal experiences.

Another analysis method used in this study is thematic analysis which emphasizes the "what" rather than the "how" it is said. The thematic analysis covers deductive and inductive practices. Braun and Clarke (2014) provide a six-step process for the thematic analysis method which includes: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating codes, (3) generating themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) locating exemplars. Thematic analysis establishes a systematic procedure for the generation of code and themes for qualitative data analysis.

The transcripts of the interviews were taken a long time to complete. The transcribed documents were saved on a desktop computer and given to participants for evaluation, comments, and approval. The researcher reflected on the purpose of the study, the review of literature, and the potential themes that emerged from the data as the transcription of the interviews with the participants was completed, combining transcribed interview data with initial data analysis to allow for more efficiency and reflection in data analysis. Transcripts were created, and the participants were provided a chance to examine the accuracy of the data.

The summary at the end of the interview session was prepared by the researcher. This was conducted to ensure that participants' views fully corresponded. Moreover, the interviewee was given the chance to add any additional points when necessary. Instruction and orientation on the nature and purpose of the research was given to all potential participants. Consent was signed by the participant prior to the data collection.

The transcripts of interviews were arranged and structured prior to the data analysis. Organizing the data is the first step in data analysis. It includes an initial understanding of facts and organizing data. Coding of data into themes is the second step. Finally, the interpretation of the data was conducted.

As the interviews were conducted, the researcher used the qualitative results to determine the different sagas and triumphs of the school heads' organizational landscaping initiatives. The results from the interviews were given the researcher's assumptions on the contribution of the triumphs and sagas of the school heads in their initiatives in organizational landscaping towards the attainment of the best performance of the school. The answers to each question were based on the experiences and events that happened to the participants and the connections between the other teachers.

Ethical Consideration

The researcher took into consideration the ethical aspects of conducting research. Prior to starting the research, the researcher got the approval of the University for the conduct of the study. Permission to conduct from the Schools Division Office of Laguna is necessary to conduct the study in the district. Upon approval, a communication letter for the school heads was sent.

Once permitted, the researcher asked the respondents if they were willing to participate in the study. With their expressed agreement, the researcher explained the rationale of the study for the participants to understand the research problem the study would address.

Research involving human subjects poses ethical issues because of questions that might require divulging personal and confidential information. To protect participants in the study, the site of the research was not named,

instead a pseudonym was used.

The purpose of the study was communicated in easily understood language. Any ambiguities were clarified so that participants had a clear understanding of the study's scope and what was expected from them. Finally, participants are aware that participation is voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions.

The researcher believed that the data gathered from the selected school heads provided relevant information on the commendable practices that may be adopted by other school heads to improve the performance of the school.

Consent from the participants was secured before the collection of data. Interviewee's rights were secured throughout the conduct of the study. This means that participants' rights and confidentiality were considered before, during, and after the research process. The purpose of the study, research questions, risks, and benefits of the study, were informed to the participants. The interviewee's option to discontinue participation was allowed at any time. The researcher took the necessary steps to ensure participant anonymity and protect their personal information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Narrative and Thematic Reflections on Stories of the Leading School Heads

The narrative and thematic analysis carried out in this study shed light on the experiences and perspectives of school heads, providing valuable insight into the sagas and triumphs in their leadership journeys. Thematic analysis refers to a method of analyzing qualitative data that involves identifying patterns, themes, and concepts within the data. The data gathered underwent a rigorous process of thematic analysis to uncover the underlying themes and meanings embedded within the narratives of the leading school heads.

1. Significance of Leading School heads' Accomplishments and Management Practices to the Best Performance of the Schools

All of the outstanding school heads' accomplishments are a result of their exceptional leadership abilities and management practices. These school heads were able to achieve School-Based Management (SBM) Level III and Best Brigada Eskwela Implementers and were recognized at the Division and Regional Levels. The majority of the outstanding school head participants believe that empowering people (teachers, students, and parents) is essential to their success. Proactively managing talents in their organizations by recognizing each of their teachers, non-teaching personnel, students, and other stakeholders' strengths and harnessing them for the benefit of the school is a key component of their leadership and management practices.

Theme 1.1. Collaborative Management and People Empowerment

Common to all outstanding school heads is their ability to foster a collaborative environment and people empowerment, which led them to achieve SBM Level III and Best Brigada Eskwela Implementers. Their management practice emphasizes the importance of teamwork, shared decision-making and planning, and working hand-in-hand with all school stakeholders.

"...in Brigada, of course, we were able to show them that we are now Brigada implementer in SDO Laguna. It is like a domino effect, the stakeholders who come to us, in the school just to reach out. The more schools become partners just because these are the accomplishments of the school, the more we sell." Jane

Theme 1.2. High Performance in Academic Contests and Piloting School Program

The outstanding school heads revealed that their key accomplishments contributed to their school's high performance in academic contests, leading to improved learning outcomes and school programs that fostered student achievement.

"... By winning in these academic contests, we are able to market the school, even if we will not market it outside."

When they see it on the posters, they see our accomplishments.” Jane

Theme 1.3. Hands-on Planning, Organizing, and Monitoring of School Activities

In recalling how the outstanding school heads management practices were able to contribute to their school’s best performance, it is clear that the key focus of their practice is being hands-on in planning, organizing, and managing the school in a way that they are visible to teachers and students alike. These school leaders not only understood the importance of being present and hands-on in the school. They ensure that there is proper organizing and planning of the academic and non-academic school activities.

“...I always organize and do planning in all of our activities. We follow the TQM Total Quality Management. When we plan what we do every day, we can assure that it's not just good -- it's impact will be bigger. That's what I learned at CI, even the simple managing of papers, managing people.” Jane

Theme 1.4. School’s High Level of Access, Efficiency, and Quality and Relevance

School leaders serve as catalyst for change and improvement in education. The outstanding school heads maintained high access, efficiency, and quality in their institutions. Through effective leadership, they have set standards for best practices, which led to a significant increase in enrolment, improved academic performance by means of mean percentage scores, and created a conducive learning environment for their learners and teachers alike.

“...In terms of enrollment -- because we have already marketed our school to the community -- when I was in ABC school their population was only 450, but after we implemented some of our projects, the number of enrollees increased to 700. In enrollment, in development, in dropout, we are always zero because we maximize the different projects that we have in the school through the school governance, the SGC, and the stakeholders.” Jane

Theme 1.5. Culture of Collaboration and Excellence

Where a school head goes, so does the school follow. This sentiment captures the essence of institutional leadership. Common to the answer of the outstanding school heads is the cultivation of a culture where collaboration and excellence are key pillars. Being organized – planning activities ahead of time -- and innovatively create a fertile ground for success, but it is the intangible elements of leadership - the ability to inspire, motivate, and bring out the best in individuals - that truly set transformational leaders apart.

“...When things are organized, everything goes well.” Jane

“... In terms of their professional growth, the teachers become more enthusiastic about improving their teaching strategies that positively impact their current positions. This manifested not only the school but also the people, the teachers, the teaching and non-teaching staff.” Jane

2. Contributory Characteristics/Qualities of Leading School heads

All of the outstanding school heads have an unwavering commitment to providing excellent leadership to their teachers, staff, and learners. Their management practices have been instrumental in driving their institutions to success. They described themselves as optimistic, being always motivated, and leading by example. Being optimistic means having a positive and hopeful attitude, which has helped them inspire teachers and learners to excel. They strive to foster a collaborative environment where the entire school community shares a common purpose of achieving the best outcomes for the school and the students.

Theme 2.1. Leadership and optimism, fostering supportive relationships in education

The responses of the outstanding school heads highlight the role of leadership and optimism in fostering supportive relationships within the educational context. Their positive attitude and emphasis on fostering supportive relationships are instrumental in creating a school culture that is conducive to positive change and a

positive school-working environment.

“...For me, being an optimistic. Because when they say that the work is a bit heavy, I'm like, okay, I don't really accept heavy things. Maybe that's why the way I give instructions to the teachers at school doesn't become burdensome to them either.” Jane

Theme 2.2. Positive Relationships in Driving Educational Excellence and Fostering Community Engagement and Support

All the outstanding school heads emphasize how being able to relate to students, staff, and stakeholders is instrumental in driving positive school outcomes. Along with being an optimistic and compassionate leader, one must be able to build positive relationships with others in the school community (De Matthews, 2014).

“...I always ensure that my teachers will feel loved and cared for so that they will also love their pupils and the school. This domino effect of my care will ensure that the school will have a better school performance.” John

Theme 2.3. Optimism and Resilient Leadership is the Key to Attain Goals

Common to the responses of the outstanding school heads is citing optimism and resiliency as the key in attaining their schools' goals. To put themselves in the best position to navigate through challenges, schools must cultivate an environment that nurtures a caring community with a focus on gratitude, kindness, and reflection. This approach helps the school develop resilient students and teachers who are better equipped to withstand adversity and achieve success.

“... I never refuse tasks, activities, or whatever is assigned; I'm submissive. I believe that they are giving us these tasks for us to become better. That's why I'm a good follower of them.” Maria

“...my hard work and being optimistic compensate for what I am having now.” Margaret

Theme 2.4. Strengthening Support and Collaboration among Stakeholders Via Open Communication

In recalling the situations where the personal characteristics of the outstanding school heads were showcased, there was a profound emphasis on their ability to foster robust support and collaboration among the key stakeholders in their school communities. They described how they communicated openly and transparently with teachers, parents, students, and other community members, creating an environment of trust, understanding, and shared investment in the school's success.

“...to deliver quality education to our learners through the help and support of everyone, communication skill is really important.” Jane

Theme 2.5. A Culture of Positive Working Environment Radiating a Healthy, United and Cooperative Learning Community

A leader's ability to cultivate a positive working environment is constantly being done by outstanding school heads. By embracing a multifaceted approach to leadership and management, school leaders foster a culture that is conducive to positive change, collaboration, and a faculty commitment to serving the diverse needs of the school. Some of the reflected answers of the outstanding school heads, they have built trust between administrators, teachers, and the whole school community — a happy workforce is a productive workforce.

“...Being optimistic and patient, so we just have to put it into practice. There is a positive learning environment. Because when the teacher is happy with his work, it also affects the learners.” Jane

3. Leadership Styles Employed by the Leading School heads

The leadership style and strategies employed by school principals can significantly impact the overall quality and performance of their educational institutions. Democratic and transformational leadership styles are the two

common approaches employed by outstanding school heads. They emphasize the value of open communication, soliciting feedback, and involving personnel in decision-making. This approach empowers teachers and encourages them to take ownership of their work, leading to higher levels of job satisfaction and commitment.

Theme 3.1. Transforming Schools Through Democratic and Transformational Leadership

Considering the customers' voice and transforming the school towards quality are critical working responsibilities of a school head. This is further emphasized by how they shared their leadership styles and how it impacted their teachers, staff, learners, and school community as a whole. As cited by the outstanding school heads, the democratic style of leadership that they employed helped them to empower their teachers and gain valuable inputs that helped them accomplish their goals.

“...Democratic in a sense that I listen to them all. I encourage the participation of everyone in decision making.”
Maria

Theme 3.2. Boosting Teachers' Moral through Democratic and Transformational Leadership Styles

The leadership style employed by the school heads can significantly impact teachers' behavior and morale. Democratic and transformational leadership styles—as practiced by outstanding school heads—can be particularly effective in empowering teachers and fostering a positive work environment.

“... Because of my democratic leadership, that boosted the morale of the teachers. As a result, they perform better since I am considering their voices.” Jane

Theme 3.3. Teacher's freedom to embrace technological Change and to Decide on Effective Teaching and Intervention

Embracing effective transformation in education requires a multifaceted approach that empowers teachers to participate actively in the process of change. Through democratic and transformational leadership styles employed by outstanding school heads, they have experienced the benefits of it. Transformative leaders are instrumental in championing this critical shift as they facilitate collective deliberation to co-create solutions aligned with the contextual needs of the school community (Heenan et al., 2023). Teachers actively participated and contributed to work decisions, empowering them and making them feel that their efforts are valued.

“...teachers are more motivated and inspired because they know that they are trusted. Thus, a better working environment is built.” John

Theme 3.4. Blended Leadership Style for Diverse School Needs, Situations and Qualities of Teachers

This theme emerged based on the answers of the outstanding school heads. They described their leadership as mainly transformational or democratic but also employing blended styles. The school heads revealed that their leadership style adapts to the needs of the school, staff, and situation. The use of blended leadership styles is essential for meeting diverse school requirements and challenges.

“...if you need the persuasion to be quite democratic every time we talk, I'm democratic to you. But if it's necessary for me to transform, I also need to transform for you to have an improvement. Mixed combination.”
Maria

Theme 3.5. Communication and Innovation as Key to a Competent and Happy Working Environment

Outstanding school heads in this study expressed that communication and innovation are the lifeblood of the school. With effective leadership employing democratic, transformational, or even blended approaches, teachers are able to strengthen their competencies and functions in the professional community. This is mainly due to establishing a culture of mutual trust, transparency, and collaborative efforts among school members. This results in greater accomplishments for teachers, students, and the school as a whole.

“...They can transform weaknesses and threats into strengths and opportunities, resulting in a competent and functional professional community. They are really doing well in the workplace. Where the school head goes, so does the school.” Jean

4. Educational Perspectives and Philosophies of the Leading School heads

The outstanding school heads cited educational philosophies of progressivism and pragmatism as central to their success in gaining significant recognition to their schools. Pragmatism and progressivism are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary educational philosophies that can work in tandem. The outstanding school heads recorded an increase in their stakeholders’ participation and school recognition due to their ability to balance these principles and maintain a clear, consistent vision for their institutions.

Theme 4.1. Progressivism and Pragmatism as Educational Philosophies of Learning Leaders

A leader’s educational philosophy is an integral component that guides their approach in handling complex organizational challenges. Outstanding school heads in this study expressed sound educational philosophies of progressivism and pragmatism. These philosophies were reflected to a large extent in their decision-making, delegation of responsibilities, and empowering of others (Robinson & Gray, 2019). They described their goals of providing the overall school community - teachers, students, and parents - with a sense of hope, purpose, and belonging while turning school goals into reality.

“...we need to progress. These philosophies will use all your characteristics and leadership style to make the school progress and improve. If there is progress, there is also change.” John

Theme 4.2. Progressivism and Pragmatism Towards Holistic Development and Academic Excellence

Developing a holistic approach to education has been a central focus of pedagogical discourse. In terms of their educational philosophy, the condensed meaning of their answers suggests that learning by or from experience and the notion of “working towards progress” are integral to the aims of providing holistic development and academic excellence. They describe how to deal with problems and come up with solutions pluralistically and pragmatically.

“...I do always apply that holistic development – not only of my learners but also of my staff – for the holistic development of everyone.” Margaret

Theme 4.3. Career Advancement, Promoting Efficiency and Applying Practical Solutions

Giving professionals the tools and support to thrive in their academic and professional pursuits has long been a critical priority for individuals and organizations. The outstanding school heads have highlighted the necessity of forging strong connections between them and their teachers.

“...My decision is always for our clientele's and my teachers' benefit. That's why all my decisions, in all of the decisions that I've been doing, I've been applying in my leadership journey, I always see to it that our learners are benefitted more.” Margaret

Theme 4.4. Establishing a Culture of Striving for Success

A leader is someone who leads others. The outstanding school heads understand this well and take on the responsibility of guiding their school community toward a culture of striving for success. These leaders are committed to creating a school culture that values equity and high expectations. Their leadership manifests in outstanding awards and recognitions, attainment of a research culture, and teachers' and learners' outstanding performance.

“...My being a progressivist provided many opportunities for teachers to enhance their knowledge, skills, and potential; to boost our morale to the point that teachers were promoted and given recognition as Outstanding Teachers, Master Teacher as well as the students consistently won in academic contests”. John

Theme 4.5. Raising Awareness through Increased School Community Participation

Stakeholders' participation in school communities plays a pivotal role in fostering positive educational outcomes for the learners. In recalling how their involvement can yield meaningful dividends, examining the various facets of community engagement and the barriers that impede it is crucial. They described how teachers worked in a collaborative manner where they considered community members as partners in the educational process (Reina et al., 2014). The teachers were able to leverage the insights and resources of the community to enhance the learning environment.

"...So in the eventuality teachers were helped to have authorship. They were helped to have established materials to be used. Nowadays, changing the landscape, I teach that when you create materials, they must be evaluated. It's been practical, if you're already doing it, have it evaluated." Jean

CONCLUSION

The accounts of school heads' management practices, personal characteristics and qualities, leadership style, and educational philosophies have led the organizational landscape to become triumphant in terms of the academic and professional development of schools. They had set high standards of success for their schools by cultivating a proactive and collaborative learning environment. Their statements showed that to become an outstanding school head, one must be able to work through struggles and challenges while upholding the values and beliefs they have about how a school should be.

Their optimism, resiliency, and being a relational type of leader have seen them through the myriad of difficulties they have encountered in their leadership journey. On being optimistic and resilient, they stressed that they should be the agents of change in their schools, inspiring others to work hard to achieve their goals and continuously improve. With the leadership styles of democratic and transformational, they have empowered teachers, staff, and the whole school community to take ownership of the school's mission and vision and work together to realize them.

Still, their statements prove that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to effective leadership in schools. They employ which leadership — may it be blended — that best suits the needs of their schools. Being progressivists and pragmatists, they continue to work towards creating an inclusive and empowering environment for students, teachers, and staff, leading to the overall success and growth of the whole organization. With this, it is clear that effective school leadership requires a combination of various traits, skills, and approaches.

This is how the leading school heads describe their sagas of triumphs.



The Outstanding School Heads are Likened to “Fire.”

Symbolic Representation

Roughly 1 million years ago, humans were able to create fire. This discovery revolutionized human civilization and allowed for advancements in cooking, warmth, and protection. This gave hope to early humans and played a crucial role in their survival and development, adding insights to the lived experiences of the leading school heads in the division of Laguna.

The leading school heads are like fire. They brighten the path toward educational excellence and bring warmth and inspiration to the students, teachers, and the entire school community—personally, academically, and professionally—by providing guidance, motivation, and support. Just as the fire was a game-changer for early humans, these outstanding school heads are game-changers in the field of education. Their symbolic representation showcases their transformative power in schools, fostering an optimistic environment that promotes growth and success.

Like fire, they ignite the passion for learning and create a nurturing environment. With their guidance, motivation, and support, these outstanding school heads are able to spark a love for education in both students and teachers alike. They lead by example, embodying the qualities of dedication, innovation, and resilience. Just like fire, their impact is far-reaching, influencing not only the immediate school community but also the broader educational landscape by setting standards of excellence and inspiring others to follow their lead.

The burning desire to excel and lead with passion and dedication sets these outstanding school heads apart from their peers. They appear as beacons of light through their luminous actions and unwavering commitment to educational excellence. Fire symbolizes the transformative power and impact of these exceptional school heads in the Division of Laguna, illuminating a path of growth, success, and hope for all those under their leadership.

One cannot create fire without the right knowledge and tools. In the same way, these leading school heads have acquired the necessary knowledge, skills, and expertise through their years of experience and continuous professional development. These are factors that have contributed to their ability to effectively lead and bring about positive change in their respective schools. Without their knowledge and tools, they would not have been able to ignite the flame of transformation and inspire others to achieve greatness. The leading school heads are like fire. They brighten the path toward educational excellence and bring warmth and inspiration to the students, teachers, and the entire school community — personally, academically, and professionally — by providing guidance, motivation, and support. Just as the fire was a game-changer for early humans, these outstanding school heads are game-changers in the field of education. Their symbolic representation showcases their transformative power in schools, fostering an optimistic environment that promotes growth and success.

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Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to school heads who have five (5 years) experience as school leaders. The populations selected for this study are five (5) principals awarded as outstanding school heads of SDO Laguna during the Gawad Marangal for the Year 2020-2023. Moreover, the school heads have at least 5 years of experience as a principal or school head and were promoted to the next rank after they garnered the award in Gawad Marangal. This study explored the sagas and triumphs of five leading school heads. The interviews were conducted face-to-face depending on the availability of the interviewee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of the study and the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are given:

1. The Schools Division Office of Laguna should establish a technical assistance program to assist school heads in upholding their exceptional performance and position to ensure that they are better equipped to manage their schools and improve the overall school performance.
2. The school heads of the Division of Laguna should be catalysts of change for their schools. They can become better or outstanding school administrators themselves by acquiring the management techniques, instructional philosophies, and leadership ideologies that the leading school heads implemented to raise their students and school achievement. They, too, can motivate new and existing school heads to become exceptional and prosperous learning leaders.
3. As the teachers are one of the main factors that help school heads achieve their aspirations and goals for the school, they must become more aware of the traits and attributes of an excellent school leader which they would imitate. They should understand the qualities and abilities of an outstanding school leader to become outstanding teachers themselves.
4. Non-teaching staff must learn to form a fruitful association and comprehend the changes to the educational system that serve as the foundation for projects, events, and other activities. With proper communication, a productive workplace that encourages cooperation, creative teaching strategies, and ongoing professional development for teachers could be established.
5. The learners should be open to new learnings, resilient, and optimistic. Enthusiasm, collaboration, and open communication will take place to foster an environment with a common purpose of achieving the best outcomes for the school and the students. Learners must learn the significance of developing their knowledge, skills, and attitudes for the betterment of their well-being and the community as a whole.
6. Internal and external stakeholders' strong relationship with the school must be maintained to promote sound interpersonal engagement with them. With this, they can provide and aid the school to achieve positive outcomes for the learners and the school. They should be actively engaged in school activities and decision-making processes to foster a sense of ownership and collaboration.
7. This knowledge will serve as a valuable reference for future research on leadership development and as a guide for implementing effective leadership development initiatives.

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