Dynamics of Community-School Partnership in Implementing Reading Intervention Program During COVID-19 Pandemic:
A Phenomenological Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

Engagement of stakeholders in school is a vital element that plays a pivotal role towards the school's success while engaging them effectively within the spectrum of their responsibility. This study explored the experiences of school heads on their approaches in engaging stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic in the implementation of community-based reading intervention programs that would enhance students' literacy skills in Tagum City Division. Further, this investigated their coping strategies amidst the pitfalls of stakeholders' participation in the program. In exploring the approaches of school heads, the researcher employed the qualitative – phenomenological study of which the primary instrument of data gathering was through in-depth interview of the seven participants who were school heads, selected through purposive sampling. In terms of school heads' approaches in engaging stakeholders, the following themes emerged namely: planning and organizing, implementing innovative practices, capacitating, and orienting the stakeholders, and establishing a strong home-school partnership. Further, the themes that surfaced for school heads' coping approaches were intensifying resource generation efforts, effective information dissemination and communication with stakeholders, and strengthening community linkages. It has implications on the need for school heads to sustain various approaches towards effective engagement of stakeholders amidst the pandemic. To achieve holistic education, stakeholders need to play a supportive role in education and the Department of Education must consider the enactment of a policy for stakeholders' engagement. Thus, it has a continued synergy to every school's effort exemplified in strong partnerships among multi-stakeholders especially during crises.

Keywords: community-school partnerships, reading intervention program, COVID-19 pandemic, qualitative-phenomenological method, Tagum City, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Development Programme (2020) states that the world is facing a defining health crisis of our time, the COVID-19 pandemic, which was spread where many people were infected, numerous deaths were recorded while others are still recovering from this virus. This pandemic is not only a health crisis, but it is also an unprecedented crisis. It has the capacity to create destructive effects in our social, economic, political, and educational conditions. In India, research of Cashman (2020) showed that schools were challenged on looking at some of the motivators of parent engagement towards their children's education in rural areas, as well as how community-based accountability relationships improve learning outcomes for the most deprived primary-school learners particularly in the present situation where millions of children are affected of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Similarly, in the Philippines, Baloran & Hernan (2020) presented that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the public educational sectors in terms of adjustment in educational modalities of instructional delivery, school operations (including the participation of stakeholders), and policies. Consequently,

in Tagum City Division, it has been observed that although the schools are doing their best to link with the different school stakeholders, still declining results had been reported by schools on some of the school-initiated activities, specifically in the enhancement of students' literacy through the conduct of intervention programs. In reviewing previous studies, a few investigations about the effects of COVID-19 on stakeholders' engagement have been found. Results of the study conducted by Tria (2020) highlighted the present COVID-19 pandemic which brought extraordinary challenges and has affected the educational sectors. However, this present investigation focuses on the need for stakeholders' support particularly in implementing various school programs like the reading program being conducted in the community amidst the pandemic.

The findings of this study provide relevance to the administrative committee of the Tagum City Division and the regional office to strengthen and intensify effective strategies and discover several ways to minimize the existing challenges in the program implementation. Moreover, the findings of this study will be used to improve program implementation which greatly influences the enhancement of students' literacy skills, how they are given attention for them to be academically motivated, and for the school heads and teachers to establish school mechanisms towards efficient and effective engagement of stakeholders especially in times of crisis. The main purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of school heads on how they engage stakeholders during this pandemic in the implementation of community-based reading intervention programs that enhance the literacy of students in Tagum City Division. Further, this investigates how they cope with the challenges they encountered during the implementation of the program.

METHODS

Research Design

The research design employed in this study was qualitative, utilizing a phenomenological approach. Using the mentioned design and approach, the research aimed at gaining a deep understanding and description of the stakeholders' engagement approached school heads in implementing community-based reading intervention programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, this also probed their coping mechanisms from the challenges they encountered in conducting the program.

Research Participants

The participants of this study were the seven school heads in Tagum City Division. I followed some criteria in selecting the participants. The selection criteria are the following: (1) must be holding a Plantilla position as Principal I, II, III, and IV for the elementary; (2) must be leading or handling a school for one to three years; and (3) must have shown exemplary performance in building strong partnerships with stakeholders particularly in the implementation of community-based reading intervention program during the pandemic. They were composed of both males and female school heads in the Tagum City Division. Additionally, the seven participants for in-depth interviews were already enough to provide information regarding the opportunity to identify and generate the themes.

Data Collection

There were different steps in collecting research data from the participants. The following steps were employed in gathering the data following the IATF protocols where face-to-face was limited or not allowed. In case when face-to-face was necessary, social distancing, wearing of face mask and face shield were observed. As a researcher, I sought permission to conduct the study, prepared the instrument, sought informed consent from the participants, administered the interview, transcribed, translated, and analyzed the data, endorsed to the data analyst, and ensured data privacy.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through data coding and thematic analysis. Highlighters and colored pens were used on the text being analyzed to represent important and

reoccurring themes. Then, the texts were grouped with the same color of pens and highlighter and described with words and short phrases. Thematic analysis was done after the initial codes were identified. Then, categorizing and analyzing all the responses of the participants from general to specific followed. Responses with similar core ideas were extracted and grouped to formulate comprehensive themes. Each theme should consist of at least three core ideas to make it valid. Meanwhile, code names were assigned for each of the participants.

To familiarize the data, listening and transcribing the recorded interview of the participants were conducted. In addition, I kept on reading it to identify similar answers given by the participants. After familiarizing the data, coding began. Coding was employed in which the data confirmed to arrive for themes, ideas, and categories.

Ethical Consideration

This study adhered to ethical consideration as cited in the Belmont Report (1979) where respect for persons, beneficence, and justice were identified. It also compiled the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173).

RESULTS

Engagement Approaches of School Heads in the Conduct of Community-based Reading Intervention Program during COVID-19 Pandemic

The school heads shared their views, strategies or approaches in terms of the conduct of community-based reading intervention program during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1 shows the approaches or strategies employed by the school heads in the conduct of the community-based reading intervention program during the COVID-19 pandemic. Four emerging themes from the data collected were generated based on their shared views. The themes are as follows: planning and organizing; implementing innovative practices; capacitating and orienting the stakeholders; and establishing a strong

home-school partnership. These themes are supported and justified by the testimonies of informants during interviews. This serves as their evaluation in their journey as head of schools in engaging the stakeholders in the community-based reading intervention program during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1

Engagement Approaches of School Heads in the Conduct of Community-based Reading Intervention Program during COVID-19 Pandemic

Major Themes	Number of Responses
Planning and organizing	5
Implementing Innovative Practices	5
Capacitating and Orienting the Stakeholders	5
Establishing a Strong Home-School Partnership	5

Coping Mechanisms on the Challenges Encountered in the Implementation of Community-based Reading Intervention Program during this COVID-19 Pandemic in terms of Engaging the Stakeholders

Table 2 shows the coping mechanisms on the challenges encountered in engaging the stakeholders during the conduct of their respective community-based reading intervention programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Three emerging themes were generated based on their shared views. The themes are as follows: intensifying resource generation efforts, having effective information dissemination and communication with stakeholders, and strengthening community linkages. These provide mechanisms that address the difficulties encountered by the school heads in implementing the program, especially in engaging the stakeholders, this pandemic.

Table 2

Coping Mechanisms on the Challenges Encountered in the Implementation of Community-based Reading Intervention Program during this COVID-19 Pandemic in terms of Engaging the Stakeholders

Major Themes	Number of Responses
Intensifying Resource Generation Efforts	4
Having Effective Information Dissemination and Communication with Stakeholders	7
Strengthening Community Linkages	3

DISCUSSION

Engagement Approaches of School Heads in the Conduct of Community-based Reading Intervention Program during COVID-19 Pandemic

The themes drawn from the responses from the research questions of the participants during the interview are discussed, with the aim to explore their different experiences on how they engaged the stakeholders in the conduct of community-based reading intervention program during this COVID-19 pandemic and the overcoming mechanisms instituted to address the challenges encountered during the implementation. In gathering the data, important things were considered before, during, and after the conduct of the study; and one of the most important things I considered was to ensure the confidentiality of their identity and of their statements. With this, the participants felt safe and secure in their involvement.

Planning and Organizing

With their knowledge, experiences, and competencies, the school heads are central to leading and managing the effort in engaging the stakeholders, despite the pandemic, particularly in conducting community-based reading intervention programs. They are responsible for planning and organizing certain processes that would address the needs of the present times. It was evident in the participants' responses that when stakeholders were engaged during the planning and organizing phases, the program was implemented successfully. Further, the participants revealed that by employing specific strategies like planning the activities and organizing the people, it is easier to implement the program despite the pandemic.

One of the elements in the success of organizing events, official meetings, projects, and programs is through planning. It is a devised method or procedure on how the program should go about. Planning helps to implement the activities efficiently and effectively because of the prepared sequence of steps to reach the goals of an activity. It also helps save time and effort (The New Indian Express, 2016). Teachers' professional culture plays a critical role in sharing organizational learning capacity. In developing school activities, it is very important to have strategic planning given by the school leaders (Louis & Lee, 2016)

Implementing Innovative Practices

Innovations in the school are part of the practices that school heads utilize effectively. Through these, school leaders can develop various projects and programs which enjoin stakeholders' support or assistance. Based on the results of the interview, school heads further believe that innovations in schools are significant undertakings that invite possible stakeholders who will extend their time and resources for school projects and programs, especially this time of the pandemic.

As Hale (2017) sought to find characteristics of innovation and global leaders' innovation in the schools of Asia region, he found out that schools should establish school culture and practices in

developing innovation and support leaders in making an innovative school atmosphere. It is shown that innovative school leaders should be open in taking risks and creating experiences where employees have the freedom to fail. The findings of the study also showed that support from the school leaders is very important in building an innovative school environment. Furthermore, it was also found out that for the organization to be empowered to generate new ideas and implement innovations, school leaders must share the vision of the school, build strong relationships, and utilize the existing organization's resources.

Also, the result of the study conducted by Dungan (2017) focused on the extent of influence of innovation diffusion on the decision in using distance learning as a mode of delivering instruction. He discovered that teachers' small innovations at schools are diffusing horizontally before diffusing vertically to other grade levels. These small innovations have different diffusion from the larger innovations. It is because larger innovations are introduced by educational leaders downward throughout the school.

Capacitating and Orienting the Stakeholders

Communicating to our stakeholders plays an important role during this COVID-19 pandemic. School heads have undergone a series of capacity-building activities and orientation of parents and other stakeholders to communicate the purpose of implementing the community-based reading intervention program despite the pandemic to enhance the literacy skills of the learners. In the context of this study, I believe as a researcher that this activity conducted by the school heads is very critical in achieving the goals and objectives of the program to actively engage stakeholders despite the pandemic.

This is like the study conducted by Haris (2016), which focused on the capacity-building activities for educational

stakeholders such as school principals, school supervisors, District Education officials, and school committee members. The result showed that the program helps to improve stakeholders' participation in the schools' educational management. It also showed that district governments give their greater commitment to improving education. There is also a change in behavior in the classroom and the community.

Establishing a Strong Home-School Partnership

As we face the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the manner school leaders and teachers engage the stakeholders, there is a dire need to establish strong support and partnership that would undoubtedly assist the school towards the realization of the program, particularly the community-based reading intervention program. The school heads consider parents as teachers of their children at home. So, the partnership between home and school is pivotal towards the achievement of the goals of the program.

Similarly, Zacarian and Silverstone (2015) also mentioned the challenges brought by the community setting for educational leaders in running the school effectively. This is especially true in urban areas. Further, the school improvement and changes, strengthening families' support, improving, and developing a community where students live, and building a conducive learning environment for students help build partnership (Casto, 2016). Further, Blankstein and Noguera (2015) posited that establishing effective partnerships has a crucial role in school reform, even though it is challenging. They believed that school leaders are encouraged to broaden and strengthen motivations in establishing the partnership between the schools and service organizations to address students' needs, especially in social and healthcare services.

Likewise, the sustainability of this collaboration needs also depends on fostering a relationship that has reciprocal benefits. Educational leaders said that partnership efforts were not something added but is already embedded in the structure of how the school operates and manages. Hence, partnership is already a part of the school (Gross et al., 2015).

Coping Mechanisms of School Heads on the Challenges Encountered in the Implementation of Community-based Reading Intervention Program during COVID-19 Pandemic in terms of Engaging the Stakeholders

To weather difficulties or challenges the school may encounter, school leaders can institute various mechanisms and timely interventions. True to both external and internal stakeholders, putting in place such measures would ensure continuous improvement. Participants revealed that, along the way, they encountered numerous challenges in implementing their school's reading programs. The three emerging themes provide mechanisms that address the difficulties encountered by school heads in the implementation of the program in this pandemic, especially in engaging the stakeholders.

Intensifying Resource Generation Efforts

One of the vital mechanisms that would address the challenges encountered by school heads in engaging stakeholders during this pandemic, particularly in implementing the community-based reading intervention program, is the skill of resource generation. Efforts have been made by the school heads to address the pressing problems in this pandemic, specifically on how to source out funds, supplies, materials, and infrastructures that could be used in the implementation of the program.

On the same lens, Petko et al. (2015) posited that resource management plays a vital role in having an efficient and effective development and utilization of an organization's resources to its optimum use. However, resources are not only limited financially, but it also includes inventory, human skills, production resources, or information technology. Since school principals or educational leaders manage the school's limited resources, they are also accountable for maintaining and increasing the schools' effectiveness in transition, innovation, reform, or crisis happening in the school. Educational leaders are also encouraged to do innovations in strengthening curriculum implementation of the institution even in the chaotic fiscal and policy environment (Calub, 2015).

Having Effective Information Dissemination and Communication with Stakeholders

Reaching out to our parents and other education stakeholders is a vital element to deliver the education services that promote the learning of our learners. Our school leaders manifest this through their exerted efforts during this COVID-19 pandemic just to effectively inform the stakeholders of the projects and programs and communicate with them the purpose and goals of such. As a researcher, I see this action to have an impact on the success of program implementation since the roles of stakeholders during this pandemic is a serious undertaking and the need for constant communication creates an avenue for better understanding between the school and community.

Bisk (2018) also emphasized that leaders are role models in an organization. Subordinates need a good management team to organize and make sure that everybody is doing his or her job required of him or her. One of the most important skills for leaders is the ability to communicate effectively. While the ability to strategize is also crucial, strategies are nothing without a team that understands how to carry them out. It is a leader's responsibility to ensure that the team understands the tasks at hand and is motivated enough to give it their full attention.

On the same view, Green, Walker, and Hoover-Dempsey (2017) explained that the involvement of parents has a positive effect on the learning of children and develops self-efficacy of parents in the idea that they have something to do relative to their child's education. Moreover, a harmonious relationship between the school and home results in sharing and maximizing resources that can also support children in developing their positive behaviors and performing well in schools.

Strengthening Community Linkages

Stakeholders play a significant role in the delivery of education services to the community. Undeniably, connections with community stakeholders are crucial in realizing the school's projects and programs. I recognize the important functions they portray in the implementation of community-based reading intervention programs in this pandemic. The time and resources they rendered to the schools in the department only manifest the kind of community stakeholders we have.

It is the role of the community to provide quality education to the learners. A community that looks after the education of the children encourages them to develop critical thinking to face the challenges predominant in the community, motivates, assists and promotes the ability to solve pressing problems (The New Vision, 2018). Consequently, it comes with different paths the community school movement that ensures much-needed attention in the development of a child, family, and community well-being underscoring the shared core values and goals of school social work that promises the idea of better school reforms (Gherardi, 2019).

Implications for Teaching Practice

Results of this study are significant elements towards the improvement or development of policy, practice, theory, and ensuing research studies. It explains the importance of the experiences of school heads in engaging stakeholders during this pandemic in the implementation

of community-based reading intervention programs.

With the hopes in mind, the Department of Education may incorporate initiatives, propose programs for better engagement of stakeholders for school as well as division-initiated activities; for school heads to have effective financial management on essential priority settings of specific school expenses to incur in implementing the program; and to coordinate with Local Government Units (LGUs) since there are some disadvantaged communities gained support through the provision of supplies and infrastructures that are utilized in the implementation of the community-based reading intervention program.

Implications for Further Research

This study explored the experiences of school heads on how they engaged stakeholders during this pandemic in the implementation of community-based reading intervention programs. Participants were delimited to seven school heads. The implementation of a community-based reading intervention program during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting stakeholders' engagement, has offered various learning opportunities to the school leaders and teachers. Specific actions are suggested that this study tries to resolve or needs to be taken about policy, theory, practice, or subsequent research in the future.

It is proposed to conduct regular monitoring on effective fiscal management of the program. Further, school heads can operate with transparency and accountability, tailoring communications to education stakeholders to collaborate better by reducing communication barriers. In addition, sustaining necessary innovativeness aid in gaining support and resources needed in implementing various programs and projects. Meanwhile, the use of other data gathering tools, like Focus Group Discussion, to triangulate the data involving school reading coordinators and school partnership focal persons captured interesting and varying results. Results

may serve as valuable inputs for DepEd personnel for further venturing into professional development training and capacity building. To further generate a more valid and reliable result, it is recommended that another study may be conducted using the mixed method approach to strike a balance in generating data and information.

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