

EMPOWERMENT OF SCHOOL HEADS: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

Schools all over the world have been responsibly taken care of by school heads or principals. The main purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore the experiences, challenges and insights on empowerment of 17 high school principals from selected public secondary and elementary schools in Sarangani Province. Three research tools and an in-depth interview were utilized to concretize the selection of informants and to obtain the results of the study. Results revealed that informants have varied experiences on empowerment such as: selective empowerment, empowerment on decision-making, collective empowerment, challenged leadership, and reinforced empowerment. It was also worth noting that although participants are empowered leaders in their respective schools, their empowerment is demarcated and not at all absolute; it requires persistence and fortitude. The insights they shared conveyed their self-realizations as school heads' empowerment is demarcated, empowerment requires persistence and fortitude, school heads need capability building, and shared empowerment is plausible. This study may guide the Department of Education to support and empower their school principals in performing their duties in management and governance. By attending conferences, workshops, and pursuing graduate degrees, school heads/ principals may enhance empowerment in their respective areas of responsibilities.

Keyword: leadership; empowerment; experiences; phenomenology; Philippines

INTRODUCTION

One of the key elements for the successful implementation of school programs is the role of school heads. A school, like any other organization, needs a strong leadership and management. Moreover, the application of different management and leadership principles and practices in school setting complement each other. School leadership and management is a challenging role for school heads especially in promoting the culture of lifelong learning and teaching. However, many school heads could not achieve the desired results simply for the reason that school heads were not empowered with adequate resources and decision making authority at their level to continue the activities ("Empowering principals", 2010).

Additionally, recent educational reforms in education have been adopted to ensure all students are achieving at high levels and the instruction is aligned to the academic standards of principals being held responsible for these improvements. It was revealed that school improvement is dependent upon the quality of school leadership provided by principals in line with empowerment. DepEd Order no. 17 series of 1997 on adopting a Policy of Empowering School Principals suggests that school principals from Public Elementary or Secondary Schools should practice empowerment, a higher level of leadership that is challenging enough for principals, for

they are expected to demonstrate effectiveness typically from day one of the job without formal support or mentoring (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2013).

Due to a rapidly changing society, it is essential for schools to have effective principals as leaders. As leaders, principals face the challenge of improving teaching and learning to ensure academic success for all students. In order to improve our schooling system, principals and heads should be empowered to make independent decisions without fear and favor on the basis of merit. In addition, schools are the key institutions responsible for nurturing and educating our new generation therefore the Department of Education and those in power have a key responsibility to ensure that the schools in their jurisdiction are adequately resourced and smoothly functioning without administrative or political interference. Formation of school committees represented by parents, local communities as a support system to schools can play an effective role in countering such influences (Bendikson, Robinson & Hattie, 2012).

More researches have been done that identifies the empowerment of teachers and principals as an important component in achieving effective learning and teaching. Unfortunately, there is limited research that explores on the head teachers' experiences, challenges and insights on their exercise of empowerment from their own perspectives (Branch et al., 2013).

Being the academic head and head teacher of James L. Cheongbian National Trade School in Sarangani Province, I personally felt the problems on empowerment as faced by some of the head teachers. This study has drawn my interest to explore how school heads in Public Secondary and Elementary Schools exercise empowerment in their respective vicinity. My study focused on the exploration of empowerment of school heads as viewed by the school heads themselves.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the experiences, challenges and insights on empowerment as exercised by the school heads from the Public Secondary and Elementary Schools in the Division of Sarangani Province. There were 17 key informants in this study, nine women and eight men who were identified using the snowball and purposive sampling technique. Data were obtained through the use of in-depth interviews and focus group discussion. Phenomenological approach helped the researcher to gain access to school principals' lived experiences and their perceptions on empowerment.

Theoretical Lens

The analysis of this study was anchored on the theory of Structural Empowerment by Kanter (1993) which states that a situation can either constrain or encourage optimal job performance, regardless of personal tendencies or predispositions. He emphasized that power is the ability to mobilize resources to get things done. This power is observed when employees have access to lines of information, support, resources, and opportunities to learn and grow. Effectiveness in work is curtailed once these lines or sources of power are unavailable.

This theory of structural empowerment suggests that employees are empowered when they are given access to empowerment structures to accomplish their work, such as: opportunity, information, support, resources, formal power, and informal power. These lines of power emanate from formal and informal systems within organizations.

Delimitation and Limitations of the Study

A particular delimitation of this research is in terms of transferability to the population. First, the sample of this study was composed of 17 school heads from selected Public Secondary and Elementary Schools in the Division of Sarangani Province. Therefore, these individuals are not necessarily representatives of school heads from the big division mentioned.

For this reason, the results are limited to this group of school heads and caution should be exercised when attempting to infer about any of the results with regard to other populations. Secondly, the researcher used interview and focus group discussion with data properly interpreted and analyzed by the researcher. Therefore, the theory-laden nature of the investigation can be a recognized limitation as well as its strength. Additionally, the detailed and generous use of quotations and associated discussions of the results expose the researcher's rationale. This information may help the reader assess the trustworthiness of the findings for themselves. Prior to interviewing, ethical approval was granted by giving participants informed consent. Pseudonyms have been used to maintain anonymity of both participants and institutions in this study.

Furthermore, since the study was dependent on the ability of the informants and participants to describe their experiences to answer the interview questions. Informants and participants have varying degrees of knowledge and experiences with corporal punishment and positive discipline and therefore, may be subjective and could not be generalizable.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This section provides information on findings of previous researches conducted on the practice of empowerment by school leaders. The related literatures included herein are of great help in the direction of this study.

2.1 School Principal Empowerment

Empowerment can be a means for principals to create conditions that enables teachers, parents and even students to take ownership of the task to handle problems. Schools have various problems which school principals particularly the lack of resources both human, mostly teachers, and financial for funding physical facilities. Similar views were raised that if a principal's leadership is empowering, it promotes and influences the generation of new ideas. Whereas, strong leadership does not just emerge; it must be developed and cultivated. Developing school principals' leadership skills are necessary to eliminate gaps in achievement, teaching, and participation, is also referred to as equity and access. Principals have to deal with the drastic and dramatic changes in the era of globalization (Leithwood, Louis, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010; Moolenaar & Slegers, 2010; Sagnak, 2012).

Principal empowerment means encouraging and allowing individuals to take personal responsibility for improving the way they do their jobs and contribute to the organization's goals. It is synonymously being related to collaborative decisions making the principal as multi-purpose tool for school improvement and effectiveness. Hence, Schools of the 21st and in preparation for students' impact on the 22nd century require principals to be well-versed in the art of instructional leadership, community leadership, and visionary leadership examined the concept

of power from the structuralist perspective which emphasizes control and order (Cheney, Davis, Garret & Holleran, 2010; Madziyire, 2012).

Additionally, empowerment is evident when there is shifting or changing the culture of an organization toward a mindset that truly believes that all students can and will learn takes a strong sense of moral purpose. Moreover, the moral purpose of this level begins with the belief system of the building leader, the principal, and can only be achieved when beliefs are demonstrated through behaviors. Developing a high level of efficacy in one's leadership abilities doesn't just happen. Strong leadership does not just emerge; it must be developed and cultivated. Hence, developing school principals' leadership skills is necessary to eliminate gaps in achievement, teaching, and participation. Any school principal has the primary role to ensure that high-quality teaching takes place within the school. However, many principal training and preparation programs focus on management rather than leadership roles (Garrett, 2008; Cheney et al., 2010).

School administrators need to become knowledgeable of the empowerment practices in the school environment in addition to the skills and behaviors of the school heads. The foundation for school leadership continues to evolve, and many schools are embracing a new mindset in which the leadership in schools is no longer solely performed by the school principal; instead leadership is viewed as an aggregated function, and other members of the leadership team with formally designated leadership roles take part in leading the school. Empowerment, then, is a dynamic, interactive process comprised with the concerted action of people working together to bring about a situation in which the amount of energy created is greater than the sum of the individual actions. Leadership functions are stretched over the work of a number of individuals, and tasks are accomplished through interaction between multiple leaders (Williams, 2007; Devos, Tuytens & Hulpia, 2014).

Nevertheless, releasing power to the teachers to help with curriculum decisions and student discipline can free up the assistant principal and principal to tend to other, equally pressing matters within the school culture. This release of power, however, stems from a change in mindset. School leaders who have developed this mindset for shared leadership are those who believe envisioning teachers as entrepreneurial owners of the academic instruction they provide unlocks tremendous potential for reform that is both teacher-friendly and aimed squarely at enhancing achievement opportunities for students (Garrett, 2008).

2.2 Challenges in the Practice of Empowerment

As the need for shared and collaborative leadership continues to grow, the influx of administrator and educator responsibilities, so does the research on the area of empowering teachers. The foundation for school leadership continues to evolve, and many schools are embracing a new mindset in which the leadership in schools is no longer solely performed by the school principal; instead leadership is [viewed as] an aggregated function, and other members of the leadership team with formally designated leadership roles take part in leading the school (Devos et al., 2014).

School administrators need to become knowledgeable of what empowerment practices look like in the school environment in addition to the skills and behaviors this practice includes. This

knowledge will then assist them in replicating such models of empowerment in their own districts in hopes of maximizing student achievement. Teacher empowerment is an educational reform initiative that often accompanies policies to increase decision-making authority and accountability at the school level. However, empowerment resides to where the leadership is distributed among all members of the leadership team and where teachers can participate in school decision-making methods. Empowerment, then, is a dynamic, interactive influence process comprised of the concerted action of people that bring about a situation in which the amount of energy created is greater than the sum of the individual actions (Marks & Louis, 1997; Pearson & Moomaw, 2006).

Moreover, school empowerment often stems from the establishment of a shared vision or goal. Researchers have studied how this element of empowerment is linked to school success. School administrators looking to enact models of empowerment should understand that empowerment should focus on decisions that affect mid-level policies regarding school functioning -those that are broader than a single classroom, but still clearly related to the improvement of learning environments. For empowerment to last, it needs an active involvement of teachers especially on school environments. Also, teachers should become more involved in professional decision making at the school site. They added that in an environment of fostered empowerment, the teacher's levels of actual involvement, desired involvement, interest and expertise increased over time (Devos et al., 2014)

Furthermore, collaboration and cooperation are the foundation for empowerment of teachers to take place. Empowerment allows teachers to attain greater responsibilities and consequently make valuable contributions to the school. School principals will need to rely more on collaboration and cooperation to keep up with the countless changes and initiatives on the horizon in today's climate of educational reform. Releasing power to the teachers to help with curriculum decisions and student discipline can free up the assistant principal and principal to tend to others equally pressing matters within the school culture. This release of power, however, stems from a change in mindset. School leaders who have developed this mindset for shared leadership are those who believe in envisioning teachers as entrepreneurial owners of the academic instruction they provide unlocks tremendous potential for reform that is both teacher-friendly and aimed squarely at enhancing achievement opportunities for students (Cheney et al., 2010; Sagnak, 2012).

In order to empower teachers and develop collaborative leadership within school buildings, principals must first focus their efforts on establishing trusting relationships. Fostering positive relationships is not a novel idea for most administrators, and it continues to present itself in the literature on empowerment. Themes of relationships are critical part of empowerment noting that trust contributes to a positive working environment characterized by honest, supportive relationships. In addition, linking teacher empowerment to principal relationships is built on trust where principals are viewed as having higher levels of persuasion. Principals with credibility can influence and persuade as a result of buy-in and maintaining trust in their leadership. To maximize the ability to persuade, inspire, lead, and empower their teachers, principals should remain focused on the relationships they have with their staff (Rinehart, Short & Eckley, 1998).

Even though empowerment of teachers, pupils, parents and the school community is seen as a key factor to successful leadership as demonstrated in the present study, empowerment creates conditions that enables teachers, parents and even students to take ownership of the task. This requires good interpersonal relationships together with a flexible and adaptable management style the fact that empowerment is a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members. This process can be achieved by leaders whose approach to communication enhances trust in its members, shows empathy and sensitivity to subordinates and colleagues. Similar views were raised that effective principals encourage others to participate in the decision-making processes in their schools. Nonetheless, leadership is about power but what determines its effectiveness is the way that power is used (Moolenaar et al., 2010; Samuels, 2012; & Sagnak, 2012).

Although researchers need to continue to collect and share data, previous findings provide some insightful implications for current school leaders. For example, teacher empowerment is related to principals' social attractiveness or likeness, credibility, and trustworthiness. Their findings are consistent with other findings from who found trust to be a major element of initiating teacher empowerment. The further an individual investigates in the literature, the more trust and empowerment can be observed as a key factor. Empowerment was a significant predictor of interpersonal-level trust suggesting that principals need to be aware of the relationship between the two. Therefore, based on their findings, they recommend that complex organizations, including schools, continually seek new ways to extend parameters of trust, and encourage cooperation and collaboration among employees (Rice & Schneider, 1994).

2.3 The Practice of Empowerment

Principals are responsible for shaping the climate of their building as a means to create a safe and engaging learning environment for all. This type of setting is necessary for increases in student achievement to continue amidst the new requirements being placed on school districts and school leaders. School heads need capability-building. Teachers consider their school a place that values their contribution and cares about their well-being. Hence, empowerment has great potential for developing success within the organization, especially when it is personalized for employees. The effective means of empowerment for the individual within the organizational settings results from the internalization of a framework that is grounded in personal meaning and is responsive to the larger aims of the organization (Bogler & Nir, 2012).

In order for school principals to enact empowerment in such a way that is individualized and personalized for teachers, communication skills need to be greatly considered and reflected upon. With greater empowerment comes a greater responsibility to allow others to take on tasks and tackle problems (Marks & Louis, 1997).

Furthermore, empowerment requires persistence and fortitude. Therefore, there is a critical need for extensive research to be completed in the area of teacher empowerment within the school setting to inform principals of best practice. One of the concerns of school leaders is that, there is little, if any, empirical evidence existence that describes the relationship between empowerment and principal characteristics that influence teachers to change their orientation and practices. In this regard researchers have not been conducting serious studies of what might be learned about

the kinds of decisions teachers make when given the chance and what those decisions mean in terms of student achievement in empowered environments. What currently exists in the literature is only a starting point to gather other measures of the interpersonal relationship between teachers and their principal (Rinehart et al., 1998; Moye, Henkin, & Egley, 2005).

Empowering teachers to take on leadership roles and embrace responsibility for new challenges they did not previously possess will allow for greater levels of empowerment, especially, because empowered teachers believe that they have the skills and knowledge to act on a situation and improve it. Principals who strive to raise teachers' commitment to the organization and to the profession through an empowerment model will reap benefits from teachers who feel a stronger sense of belonging, which could potentially lead into a trickledown effect that would pave the way for improvements in instruction and students' learning (Rinehart et al., 1998; Bogler & Somech, 2004).

School heads empowerment has the potential to positively impact the overall organization. Participation in administrative/governance teams and community-relations teams enhanced feelings of empowerment which yielded higher levels of organizational commitment. Likewise, if teachers are to be empowered and regarded as professionals, then, like other professionals, they must have the freedom to prescribe the best treatment for their students which can only come from the release of control from school administrators (Jackson & Marriott, 2012).

2.4 Principal Empowerment to Preparation and Promotion Program

Principal Empowerment can be strengthened by organisational culture. Organisational activities carried out with dependence on relationship structures reflect the characteristics of organizational culture. Organizational culture may be conducive to empowerment, if these characteristics are perceived positively by members of the organization. Outcome oriented culture facilitates decisions on the ways that members of organizations work to reach their goals relating to autonomy in decision-making. This type of culture can more easily implement empowering practices. Having supportive culture along with a high-involvement in workplaces brings out positive outcomes related to the members of organization (Psychoyos, 2012).

Empowerment is used as a managerial tool for adapting to the changing and complex structure of environment. Empowerment is seen as an effective strategy in modern management practices. Managers should pay attention to thinking 'outside of the box' regarding decision making processes, while deciding on which management style to use. In case empowerment and letting members participate in decision making processes are included in an organisational culture, involvement of members occurs in a more easy and effective way in organisations. Enabling members of organisations to take part in decision making is an important component of an empowerment culture (Robertson, 2008; Sheard, 2011).

In addition, workplace enabling teachers to work in a collaborative environment, while providing trust among teachers, can be created by school principals in the context of school culture. Delegating responsibilities in decision making processes or having authority may be true management styles depending on the characteristics of conditions. However, the changing of organizational culture towards empowerment is an issue that requires leadership rather than

management. Studies that examine teacher empowerment psychologically examine how social factors such as the empowering behavior of school leaders affect the work related output of teachers (Robertson, 2008).

School principals must shape school culture to empower teachers and distribute their leadership roles to teachers in line with this purpose. School culture acts as a kind of facilitator for principals to empower teachers via their principal leadership. The sense of empowerment of teachers is related to the facilitative leadership regarding issues that are related with the school as well as classrooms. Empowering leadership enables employees to make their own suggestions in addressing work-related issues. Leader trust can provide necessary facilities for hearing the voices of employees (Baird & Wang, 2010).

Empowering school heads improves their interpersonal relationship. The result of higher empowering leadership, the relationship between leader trust and employee voice is more positive. Principal leadership has effect on school heads empowerment dimensions such as formal authority, autonomy, collaboration, and trust. In a facilitative role for team work, research results emphasized the relationship between leadership styles and empowerment as well. It was found that the leadership style of the principal and the relationship between the school head and the principal can affect the empowerment perceptions of teachers. Instructional, transformational, and pedagogical leadership are necessary together for empowerment (Lortie, 2009; Baird & Wang, 2010).

According to various authors (Jacobson, 2008; Sagnak, 2012), leadership that involves others is empowering. Consequently leadership is no longer viewed as a function of just the principal. For instance, the practices of principals who successfully improved student performance in high poverty elementary schools found that their success was a result of collective efforts.

Principals who are supportive to their members of staff and community do empower them through effective communication. School leadership continues to evolve, and many schools are embracing a new mindset in which the leadership in schools is no longer solely performed by the school principal; instead leadership is an aggregated function, and other members of the leadership team with formally designated leadership roles take part in leading the school. The increased accountability demands associated with school leadership from new federal mandates and curricular initiatives have educators and district leaders focused almost solely on student achievement. A study revealed that one of the most important competencies of today's principals is their ability to empower the staff. In an educational setting there are far too many areas for one person to have an expertise and let alone manage (Aksel, Serinkan, Kiziloglu & Aksoy 2013; Devos et al., 2014).

Therefore, school leaders strengthen and develop their constituents by sharing power and information, and by giving others visibility and credit. As coaches and teachers, they give constituents challenging tasks and support them with the tools they need to be successful. If the leader expects all staff to develop a strong commitment to the end goal then they must provide them with the independence to strategize and act. In an educational setting, this independence may take the form of the staff becoming the instructional leaders or experts and the principal becoming the lead facilitator. In this sense, effective leaders are those that act as transformational

leaders who empower, motivate, teach and learn from the staff (Baird & Wang, 2010).

The above literatures discussed in this chapter served as the foundation for this study through the discussion on empowerment of school heads.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

In this research I employed a qualitative phenomenological method of inquiry. According to Creswell (2013), a qualitative is a method that investigates a problem or issue that needs to be explored, and it requires detailed understanding. This method seeks answers to questions that emphasize how experiences are created and given meaning, along with relying on participants' views or perceptions of the phenomenon. A qualitative phenomenological inquiry is particularly appropriate in this study because this research identifies and understands school principals' perceptions on empowerment in relation to their work, and the support needed as school leaders. In this study, the experiences, challenges and insights related to empowerment in the instructional and managerial responsibilities of the school principals from the Public Secondary and Elementary Schools in the Division of Sarangani Province are explored using phenomenological approach.

Once a qualitative research is determined for a study, there are multiple choices of approaches or methodologies the researcher needs to determine to utilize (Creswell, 2013). The decision about which approach to employ should connect the empirical data to the study's research questions and eventually to the conclusions (Yin, 2011). I chose phenomenological approach based on its appropriateness to meet the objectives of this study, as it emphasizes collecting descriptive data, using inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding of the Principals' shared perceptions of their ability to practice empowerment in their work and the contemporary real-life phenomenon that was in progress in a bounded system of time and place (Creswell, 2013). Thus, the most important concern of this phenomenological study is to understand the when, how or the why questions posed and the researcher has little control over the events (Yin, 2011). In this study, I answered the how question by exploring how principals from Public Secondary and Elementary Schools in Sarangani Province played the role of participants who practiced empowerment. I, being the researcher, simply became an observer and did not take control of the events.

The data was organized around certain topics, key themes or central questions, and was examined to see how far they fit or fail to fit the expected categories. Simons (2009) maintains that data analysis consists of examining and categorizing qualitative evidence to address the initial propositions of a study. In general, data analysis means a search for patterns in data.

The information gathered was drawn from 17 selected participants. The gathered information underwent a detailed description. Then, a cross-matching was done between the transcribed interview and the observation information to establish a thematic analysis across the 17 participants.

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), qualitative research allows the researcher to get the inner experience of a participant to determine and discover how the meaning is formed rather than test variables. This idea was supported by Bengtsson (2006) that a qualitative research is interested in knowing how humans arrange themselves and their settings and it allows a

researcher to share their understanding and perception. To substantially obtain shared perceptions, experiences and insights of school heads regarding empowerment, a qualitative method was utilized. Lastly, interpretation of the information was generated to answer the purpose of the study.

3.2 Research Participants

This study has a total of 17 participants. Specifically, nine were women and eight were men. All the participants were head teachers of the Public Secondary and Elementary Schools in Sarangani Province whose experiences ranged from two to eight years. They were chosen through purposive sampling with the aim to select those individuals who could yield the most relevant data as suggested by (Yin, 2011). Purposive sampling relies on the judgment of the researcher in selecting the participants of the study.

I also used snowball sampling apart from purposive sampling, in selecting the key informants of this study. According to the suggestions of Patton and Cochran (2002), snowball sampling is an approach for locating those participants who have rich information about the phenomenon to be researched by starting with one person and letting this person identify other participants. All the data were obtained with the use of in-depth interviews - a phenomenological approach which helped me gain access of the principals' lived experiences and their perceptions of leadership. The participants were informed about the ethical consideration around the study that they were free to withdraw anytime and that their privacy was of utmost importance, hence, pseudonyms were used.

3.3 Data Analysis

The method of analyzing data in this study was patterned after the method used in the work of Gempes (2008). This involves summarizing the mass of data collected and presenting the results in a way that communicates the most important features. Data was analyzed using a method which included data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and verification, adding that qualitative content analysis is any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings (Hancock, et al, 2009; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2007).

Initially in data analysis, data reduction is employed to get the abstraction of data from the transcriptions, deleting data, which are unimportant and transforming it into a comprehensible material, easily understood by many (Namey, Guest, Thairu & Johnson, 2007).

Thus, after the in-depth interview and focus group discussion, materials were transcribed. These transcribed materials were given back to the informants for verification. After all the information was confirmed of their veracity, the transcriptions were then subjected to scrutiny using a log sheet. This was purposely done to categorize the answers of the informants following the questions raised in the research questions. Moreover, this was done to easily identify the themes occurring from the gathered information. Then, transcriptions were given codes for easy identification and for audit trail. All information was then laid down for analysis and drawing conclusion. Lastly, the final materials were given to an expert for peer debriefing.

3.4 Trustworthiness of the Study

The trustworthiness of a study is determined by credibility, conformability, dependability, and transferability of the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

I addressed credibility by establishing my confidence as a researcher in search for truth of the research study's findings. In order to come up with answers to the questions, I used triangulation to show that the research study's findings are credible. I triangulated the data obtained from the different data collection methods such as interviews, field notes and focus group discussion results, to crystallize the findings and enhance credibility and trustworthiness. I also developed familiarity with the informants during the interviews and observations. According to Guba and Lincoln (1985), credibility is established through prolonged engagement and persistent observation.

As qualitative researcher, I addressed transferability by trying to use thick descriptions to show that the research study's findings can be applicable to other contexts, circumstances, and situations. On the other hand, Creswell (2011) defined transferability as to how the outcome of the research study be utilized by the users.

Conformability is the degree of neutrality in the research study's findings. In other words, I looked for means so that the findings were based on participants' responses and not any potential biases or personal motivations of my being the researcher. This is to make sure that the researcher does not skew the interpretation of what the research participants said to fit in a certain narrative. I also established peer debriefing. This peer debriefing serves as a reference index for the transcribed information through interviews from the informants. The reference codes were seen in every citation of the transcripts as articulated by the informants. Guba and Lincoln (1985) suggested that audit trail should be done by 'someone not related to the study'. Thus, the raw information was given to the auditor for his impressions, comments, and suggestions.

Moreover, I established the credibility of the study by making the description of the research steps acquired from the very start to the process of development and reporting and analyzing of findings available. I kept all materials used including the transcriptions of this study so that it could be accessed in case of future debriefing.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles such as the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, justice, consent and confidentiality and were justifiably followed in this study (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey, 2005).

In this study, privacy of the informants/participants was given utmost consideration. Before I formally conducted the study, the informants/participants were given letter of invitation and consent. Further, their confirmation does not indicate their real names but rather they were provided with pseudonyms. Part of the briefing of the participants was the information (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2007) that all database linked to them would be destroyed after the completion of the analysis. Thus, all information was kept with utmost privacy.

This was to ensure that the all relevant data gathered in the study were utilized for the purpose of this research alone. In doing so, participants would be assured that their inputs would not be utilized in contexts that may be detrimental to their welfare considering the profile and the extent of their participation in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Experiences of School Heads in their Practice of Empowerment

Table 1 presents the themes generated on the experiences of school heads in their practice of employment. These themes are *selective empowerment, decision-making empowerment, collective empowerment, challenged leadership, and reinforced empowerment.*

Selective empowerment. The 17 participants of this study were unanimous in sharing that the practice of empowerment in their respective schools is selective. It can be gleaned from the information gathered that Soft hearted, Superman and Serious, among others have responses that were descriptive of the practice of empowerment which was not 100% as far as principal functions are concerned. They stated that in recommending teachers for job posts and utilization of fiscal resources for the school is at times influenced by the Division office.

The results supported the idea of Reeves (2008) who argued that the leadership shortage may be dire, but the leadership development potential is great, if only schools and systems will tap into the potential of teacher leadership. Results suggest that school principals do work shadowing and networking to emphasize effective in leadership development using empowerment. Selective empowerment help school leader to identify skills to function in these roles.

Table 1: Experiences of School Heads in their Practice of Empowerment and Themes Generated

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Selective Empowerment	It's not 100% empowerment; there are things I don't have control of..
	In selection, hiring and promotion, we are only recommendatory.
	Sometimes there are things you cannot impose within the school level.
Decision-making Empowerment	I am pleased with this empowerment because I can decide for myself.
	We are given a hand to improve school with participation of stakeholders
	I gained courage and wisdom, to make decisions for our school.
Collective	I involved the teachers in planning school programs.

Empowerment	I let the teachers do their thing as long as it is good for the learners.
	I also empowered the coordinators to decide on their level.
Challenged Leadership	I feel that teachers were like testing my ability to deal with them.
	Some teachers were just observing /testing before cooperating with me.
	Sometimes conflict happens because of misunderstanding.
Reinforced Empowerment	Teachers adapted the changes I introduced regarding new techniques.
	Parents participate actively in all activities now
	The school community is positive about my empowerment as head.

Decision-making empowerment. On the other hand, Simple lady, Mickey and Giant as school heads felt that the practice of empowerment should be based on trust and respect from the superiors. They added that they are happy for the empowerment given them to decide for themselves what is best for the school. Happy face and Fighter also expressed that principals like them when empowered can influence behaviors of the teachers and the stakeholders to consolidate their efforts to move their school forward. They also expressed that they are happy for the empowerment given them to improve the school with the participation of stakeholders. This is congruent to the idea of Garrett (2008) who argued that decision-making empowerment as practiced in schools by principals is defined as meeting the needs of others before their own personal needs, avoiding the use of power for personal gain, demonstrating high moral standards, and setting challenging goals for their followers.

Similarly, this resounded the concept Hanushek (2011) on school empowerment stipulated in RA 9155 which is about the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001. This, accordingly, paved the way towards empowering them to plan to increase participation of stakeholders to gain efficient realization of the school’s vision and mission.

Collective empowerment. Classy, Wildflower and Desiree among others said that they involved teachers and sometimes the stakeholders in planning school programs and activities. They also empowered coordinators to decide on their levels.

This is somehow linked to what Collay (2006) stated that school principals’ empowerment is anchored on authority and responsibility to inspire those around them by displaying enthusiasm and optimism, involving the followers in envisioning attractive future states, communicating high expectations, and demonstrating commitment to the shared goals.

The result also conformed to the argument of Jacobson (2008) who stressed that empowerment should be an inspirational motivation in the school setting to encourage team spirit to reach

goals. Furthermore, empowerment calls for enhancement of the performance by providing opportunities for teachers to participate in decision making about issues that affect them.

Challenged leadership. During the FGD and in-depth interview the participants have common notion that some teachers were just testing their ability to deal with them. Lollipop, Icee and Rainee were one in saying that some of their teachers were adamant to cooperate with them. The participants believed that the situation like this is a challenge on their leadership.

Being empowered should be in a continuous pursuit by helping staff members develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture; fostering teacher development; and helping teachers solve their problems together more effectively (Harris, 2009).

Moreover, the result affirmed the idea of Pearson and Moomaw (2006) who said that empowerment skills are supposed to invite teachers to make teamwork possible at school even if, they sometimes lose their enthusiasm and concentration after some official barriers. The practice of empowerment needs individualized consideration which is represented by the leader's consistent effort to treat each individual as a special person and act as a coach and mentor who continually attempts to develop his or her followers' potential.

Reinforced empowerment. The participants are hopeful that the strategies they employ may get the trust of their stakeholders. Happy face and Mickey revealed that they adapted changes in dealing with their stakeholders. They introduced some changes wherein parents could actively participate. Lovely and Rainee also stated that the school community is positive and accept their empowerment being the school heads.

These support the concept of White and Cooper (2011) on reinforced empowerment as they suggested to have the opportunity to transfer these practices to other sites and to establish professional relationships with their peers based on trust and collegiality. Additionally, the capacity to move between contexts also helped the teacher leaders to develop a deeper sense of professionalism and further aspirations for more formal roles.

4.3 Coping with the Challenges in the Practice of School Empowerment

Table 2 presents the themes concerning the coping mechanism means of the participant in the context of the practice of empowerment.

Enabling co-workers and partners. Brainee shared that participating in decision-making is therefore a manner of empowering teachers and stakeholders in the schools. She shared that with the empowerment experience, she was shaped to approach it with a nurturing and caring mind. She felt that heading a school is more challenging than she had expected. She related with her subordinates and believed in both leading and learning.

The result is in consonance with the idea of Devos et al. (2014) who stated that for empowerment to last, it needs an active involvement of teachers especially on school environments. The teachers should become more involved in professional decision making at the school site. They added that in an environment of fostered empowerment, the teacher's levels of actual involvement, desired involvement, interest and expertise increased over time.

Familiarization and proper placement. Wildflower shared that as a school principal, she acts according to what teachers ought to have, sensed by teachers themselves, and endorsed by school stakeholders, such as administrators, teachers, students, or parents. Obviously, she considered the

teachers not only needed to recognize the necessity that they should possess the power to share the

Table 2: Coping with the Challenges in the Practice of Empowerment and Themes Generated

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Enabling co-workers and partners	I made sure their collaboration and cooperation is acknowledged
	I delegated responsibilities to some teachers to ensure their participation.
	I organized committees to help implement programs and projects.
Familiarization and proper placement	I checked file 201 and personal inventory to know the teachers and their qualifications/skills.
	I acquaint myself with the concerns and issues of the school before implementing change.
	I consider their competencies in giving them assignments.
Taking things in stride	I just considered challenges as part of my experience being a school head.
	I didn't mind negative feedback but I talk to them and defend my position.
	I tried to understand the position of those who are not participative.
Being optimistic	We should work hand in hand for the betterment of the school.
	Just keep working and enjoying the job till retirement.
	Just continue working honestly and responsibly.

right of decision making with but had to affirmed and assisted by those school interest groups who originally controlled the opportunity of policy making and resource allocation as well.

Taking things in stride. Rainee described empowerment as having knowledge about decentralized school governance and having the information about the operation and outcome of school policies. In this way teacher participation in decision- making could present crucial information closest to the sources of problems in the school and consequently improve the quality of decisions made. The result is in congruent to the idea of Gao, Janssen and Shi, (2011) who stated that principals have to understand and demonstrate diversity leadership with a core belief and ability to create a school environment respectful of individual differences.

Being optimistic. The way Softhearted principal interacted with his teachers and the community

strengthens his point of empowerment. He felt that communication is twofold: “We interact, I delegate...we work as a team”. He believed that working inclusively with others promotes progress.

This corroborates with the ideas of Cheney et al., (2010) that collaboration and cooperation are the foundation for empowerment of teachers to take place.

4.2 Insights Gained by the Principals in Their Practice of Empowerment

The thematic analysis of data derived four essential themes from the statements of participants namely; *School heads’ empowerment is demarcated*, *Empowerment requires persistence and fortitude*, *School heads need capability building*, and *Shared empowerment is plausible* as presented in Table 3.

School heads’ empowerment is demarcated. Softhearted’s principal expressed that as much as he wanted to use his position to promote the welfare of the school for the benefit of its present and future pupils, teachers and parents, he is not in full control of financial affairs of the school for which it has been established and the exercise of its functions to employ, hire and/or fire the staff in order to serve the needs of the school and its power is exercised with the approval of the Division Office of the Department of Education . Despite that, he exerts effort to promote and propel the development and maintenance of the school, as well as assist in the advancement of the moral, cultural and intellectual welfare of pupils at the school.

Empowerment requires persistence and fortitude. Summer considers perseverance and patience as part of the activities to which all the effort is invested by simply managing the day-to-day as a routine that must be maintained and handling problems with respect to individual differences. This supports to the ideas of Rinehart et al., (1998) and Moye et al., (2005) that empowerment requires persistence and fortitude.

School heads need capability-building. Happy face claimed that leader's behavior is directed to the manner in which organizational goals are set and attained. She suggested that trainings and technical assistance could make them assume the role of a leader is as mediator between organizational goals and individual needs, and therefore, his behavior (style) should correspond to the situational variables, so that the required organizational output will be attained.

Mickey believes that organizational leadership is usually expressed in the effect on people's motivation to perform tasks over time, while maximizing the means of motivation and with minimal use of coercive measures. Leadership style is the manner in which the leader undertakes the process of convincing and recruiting people for specific objectives and retaining them throughout all of the tasks until the objectives are attained.

Shared empowerment is plausible. Serious, while recalling her empowerment experiences, indicated the need for open communication with everyone within the school community. These interactions generated trust and in the process everyone involved felt respected and that empowered them to participate in the school’s activities. The result is aligned with what Samuels (2012) purported that empowerment be achieved by leaders whose approach to communication enhances trust in its members, shows empathy and sensitivity to subordinates and colleagues.

Implications for Future Research

This area of school principal's empowerment has proven to be a noteworthy investigative area of the study. While relevant findings have been discussed, this study uncovers the need for additional research.

The results of this study which are not generalizable beyond the 17 participants imply that there is a need for future research of the same kind to be conducted in another place with another group of school leaders to validate the findings of the study.

Further studies may also be undertaken on the role that the Department of Education portray along with the engagement of stakeholders to support school principals in becoming empowered while performing their duties in terms of school management and governance.

This study was specifically done for school heads of government schools. Further research may be done to investigate the same phenomenon among principals of the private schools.

Further research may be conducted to find out the stakeholders' views to authenticate the findings. Future research may be conducted to re-interview the participants of this study to find out if their experiences, challenges and insights have changed over time.

Moreover, future research may be conducted to investigate the content and model for professional development so school principals may become responsible in handling instructional and school management challenges. Lastly, future research in various geographic locations to validate the practice of empowering school leaders may be conducted.

Concluding Remarks

The exploration focused on the discussion on the different views of the study participants regarding their empowerment as school heads based on their experiences, challenges and insights as well as

Table 4: Insights Gained by the Principals in their Practice of Empowerment and Themes Generated

Major Themes	Core Ideas
School heads' empowerment is demarcated.	Heads should be given full empowerment particularly in hiring teachers.
	Empowerment should be 100% especially in selection and hiring.
	Heads should be fully trusted to solve the school problems on their own and not be dictated upon.
Empowerment requires persistence and fortitude.	People will test your leadership but you should persevere.
	Understand that people behave differently because of individual differences.
	School heads should be understanding and considerate of various personalities.

School heads need capability building	There should be continuous seminars and trainings on how to become effective school leaders.
	They should pursue graduate studies to upgrade themselves.
	Heads need technical assistance from higher officials especially PSDSS.
Shared empowerment is plausible.	If you are empowered you can empower others also.
	Stakeholders should be involved in decision making.
	Trusting people is also empowering them

the constructs which emerged from the information gleaned through in-depth interviews and focus-group discussion.

From the results of the study, I can say that while many school principals feel that they are empowered and have a voice in their current school setting, there are still areas of empowerment that could be enhanced and strengthened.

In reality no one person can possess all the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively address all aspects of the school environment. However at the very least, principals must be able to accurately assess their school's weaknesses and needs, and begin to develop the skills and allocate the time necessary to effectively address the areas of need. School Principals need for additional time in order to be more motivated to take on additional leadership roles based on their responses that their practice of empowerment is not at all 100 percent and empowerment is selective. They also want to be valued and recognized for the time spent on going above and beyond their expected duties.

There are powerful implications for empowering school leaders, one of which is the positive feelings of connectedness and having a shared sense of belonging to the organization. School principals also need to continue learning, and empowering them creates an environment where morale is high and self-confidence grows. Therefore, future research needs to be conducted investigating the possible relationships between teacher empowerment and student achievement.

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