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RESEARCH ARTICLE

School Leadership Practices and Administrative Experiences in the Implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program: A Qualitative Study in the Reina Mercedes District, Schools Division of Isabela

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored school leadership practices and administrative experiences in the implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP) in the Reina Mercedes District, Schools Division of Isabela. The study aimed to examine how school leaders manage, supervise, and sustain the implementation of the feeding program, including the challenges and support mechanisms encountered during program implementation. Using a descriptive qualitative research design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis, and field observations involving school heads, feeding coordinators, and selected teachers. Thematic analysis revealed four major themes: (1) collaborative and participatory leadership practices in feeding program implementation, (2) adaptive administrative management and resource mobilization, (3) learner welfare and community-centered program support, and (4) operational and administrative challenges in sustaining the School-Based Feeding Program. Findings showed that school leaders demonstrated strong commitment, collaboration, and instructional leadership in ensuring effective feeding program implementation through stakeholder coordination, resource management, monitoring systems, and community partnerships. The program positively contributed to learner participation, attendance, and nutritional support. However, logistical limitations, resource constraints, procurement concerns, and administrative workload affected implementation efficiency. The study concludes that collaborative leadership and adaptive administrative practices significantly contribute to the sustainability and effectiveness of school-based feeding programs. Strengthening institutional support, stakeholder collaboration, and administrative capacity-building programs is recommended to improve feeding program implementation in public elementary schools.

Keywords: school leadership, School-Based Feeding Program, administrative practices, educational leadership, learner welfare, qualitative study, Philippines

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INTRODUCTION

School feeding programs play a significant role in promoting learner health, nutritional well-being, classroom participation, and academic engagement among elementary learners. In the Philippines, the School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP) implemented by the Department of Education aims to address malnutrition among nutritionally at-risk learners through the provision of nutritious meals and health-related interventions. The program contributes not only to learners' physical development but also to improved attendance, participation, and classroom performance.

The successful implementation of school feeding programs largely depends on effective school leadership and administrative management. School heads and feeding program coordinators play essential roles in organizing resources, mobilizing stakeholders, managing operations, monitoring implementation, and sustaining collaborative partnerships necessary for effective program delivery. Leadership practices such as collaboration, participatory management, decision-making, and stakeholder engagement significantly influence program sustainability and operational efficiency.

In public elementary schools, school leaders frequently encounter administrative and operational challenges related to procurement processes, food preparation, resource allocation, time management, monitoring systems, and stakeholder coordination. Despite these difficulties, school administrators continuously adapt leadership practices and mobilize community support to sustain feeding program implementation and ensure learner welfare.

Collaborative leadership approaches are particularly important in school feeding programs because implementation requires coordination among teachers, parents, local government units, community stakeholders, and school personnel. Effective leadership strengthens accountability, participation, communication, and collective responsibility among program implementers. Previous studies revealed that school feeding programs positively influence learner nutrition, attendance, and classroom engagement. However, limited qualitative studies have explored the lived experiences of school leaders and administrators managing the implementation of feeding programs within Philippine public school contexts.

This study therefore aimed to explore school leadership practices and administrative experiences in the implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program in the Reina Mercedes District, Schools Division of Isabela.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What leadership practices are utilized by school administrators in implementing the School-Based Feeding Program?
2. What administrative experiences do school leaders encounter during feeding program implementation?
3. What challenges affect the implementation and sustainability of the School-Based Feeding Program?
4. What implications may be derived for improving leadership and administrative practices in school feeding programs?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

School Leadership in Educational Program Implementation

School leadership plays a critical role in the successful implementation of educational programs and learner support initiatives. According to Kenneth Leithwood, effective school leadership influences organizational performance, teacher collaboration, and learner outcomes through shared vision, participatory management, and instructional support (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Research indicates that collaborative and transformational leadership practices strengthen program implementation, stakeholder participation, and school improvement initiatives (Hallinger, 2018). School leaders who encourage teamwork, communication, and shared decision-making create more effective and sustainable educational environments.

Administrative Management and School-Based Feeding Programs

Administrative management in school feeding programs involves planning, resource allocation, procurement, supervision, monitoring, and coordination among stakeholders. Effective administrative practices ensure accountability, operational efficiency, and program sustainability. Studies revealed that school-based feeding programs positively contribute to learner attendance, nutritional improvement, and academic participation when supported by effective leadership and administrative systems (Bundy et al., 2018). School administrators play significant roles in organizing feeding operations, ensuring food safety, and mobilizing stakeholder support.

Stakeholder Collaboration and Community Participation

Collaborative leadership and stakeholder participation are essential in sustaining school feeding programs. Teachers, parents, local government units, and community organizations contribute significantly to feeding operations, food preparation, monitoring, and resource mobilization. Research suggests that community participation strengthens program sustainability, accountability, and collective responsibility in school-based interventions (Epstein, 2018). Strong school-community partnerships contribute positively to learner welfare and educational support programs.

Challenges in Feeding Program Implementation

Public schools frequently encounter operational challenges related to procurement delays, limited funding, food preparation concerns, logistical limitations, monitoring difficulties, and administrative workload (OECD, 2019). School leaders often adapt management strategies and mobilize community resources to sustain feeding program operations despite institutional limitations.

Despite these challenges, school administrators continue to demonstrate resilience and commitment in implementing learner welfare programs and educational support services.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive qualitative research design to explore school leadership practices and administrative experiences in the implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program. The qualitative approach enabled the researcher to examine participants' lived experiences, leadership realities, and program implementation practices within natural school settings.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in selected public elementary schools within the Reina Mercedes District, Schools Division of Isabela, Philippines. The schools included in the study actively implemented the School-Based Feeding Program and served learners from diverse socioeconomic and rural

community backgrounds.

Participants of the Study

The participants included six school heads, feeding program coordinators, and selected teachers directly involved in the implementation and supervision of the School-Based Feeding Program. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their administrative responsibilities and experiences related to feeding program implementation.

Data Gathering Procedures

Interviews explored participants' leadership practices, administrative experiences, stakeholder coordination, and implementation challenges. Observations focused on feeding operations, program coordination, and school-community interaction during feeding activities.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework developed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006). Coding, categorization, and theme development were conducted systematically to identify meaningful patterns and interpretations from the collected qualitative data.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Credibility was established through triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement during data gathering. Dependability was ensured through audit trails and systematic documentation of research procedures. Confirmability and transferability were strengthened through detailed descriptions of the research context and findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and respect for participants were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study. Permission from school authorities and district administrators was secured prior to data gathering activities.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Theme 1: Collaborative and Participatory Leadership Practices in Feeding Program Implementation

The findings revealed that school leaders in the Reina Mercedes District demonstrated collaborative and participatory leadership practices in implementing the School-Based Feeding Program (SBFP). School heads emphasized the importance of teamwork, shared responsibility, and stakeholder involvement in ensuring the smooth and effective delivery of feeding services to nutritionally at-risk learners.

Participants explained that the implementation of the feeding program required continuous coordination among teachers, feeding coordinators, parents, barangay officials, and community stakeholders. School leaders frequently organized meetings, planning sessions, and collaborative monitoring activities to ensure that feeding operations were properly managed and aligned with program objectives.

One school head shared:

"Hindi kayang gawin ng school head lang ang feeding program. Kailangan talaga ng tulong ng teachers, parents, at stakeholders."

Another participant explained:

"Ang teamwork at communication ang pinakamahalaga para maging successful ang implementation."

Teachers and feeding coordinators also highlighted the active involvement of school administrators in supervising food preparation, monitoring learner attendance, organizing feeding schedules, and ensuring compliance with DepEd feeding guidelines.

One feeding coordinator stated:

“Hands-on talaga ang school head namin sa monitoring ng feeding activities at procurement.”

Another participant noted:

“Kapag supportive ang administration, mas nagiging maayos ang implementation.”

Field observations confirmed that school leaders actively participated in feeding operations through supervision, coordination, and stakeholder engagement. School heads regularly communicated with parents and local stakeholders regarding feeding schedules, nutritional concerns, and learner participation.

Participants also emphasized the importance of participatory decision-making in addressing implementation concerns and operational adjustments. Teachers and coordinators reported that school leaders encouraged collaboration and collective problem-solving during feeding program implementation.

One teacher shared:

“Pinapakinggan ng school head ang suggestions namin kaya mas nagiging effective ang implementation.”

Another participant explained:

“Nagkakaroon ng shared responsibility kaya mas nagiging organized ang trabaho.”

The findings suggest that collaborative and participatory leadership practices significantly contribute to the effective implementation and sustainability of school feeding programs. Shared leadership and stakeholder engagement strengthened accountability, operational coordination, and collective commitment among program implementers.

These findings support the leadership framework of Kenneth Leithwood, which emphasizes collaborative leadership, shared vision, and stakeholder participation in improving educational program implementation (Leithwood et al., 2020). Similarly, Hallinger (2018) emphasized that participatory leadership strengthens organizational effectiveness, teacher collaboration, and school improvement initiatives.

Theme 2: Adaptive Administrative Management and Resource Mobilization

The findings further revealed that school leaders demonstrated adaptive administrative management and resource mobilization practices to sustain the implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program despite operational limitations and resource constraints.

Participants emphasized that effective administrative management involved careful planning, procurement coordination, financial accountability, monitoring systems, and strategic allocation of available resources. School heads frequently coordinated with local government units, parents, community stakeholders, and private donors to secure additional support for feeding operations.

One participant shared:

“Kailangan talagang maging resourceful kasi hindi sapat minsan ang available resources.”

Another school head explained:

“Nakikipag-coordinate kami sa LGU at stakeholders para may dagdag na support sa feeding program.”

School administrators also demonstrated flexibility in addressing logistical concerns, procurement delays, and food supply shortages. Participants explained that school leaders frequently

improvised operational strategies and maximized community support to ensure continuity of feeding services.

One feeding coordinator stated:

"Kapag may delay sa supplies, gumagawa agad ng paraan ang administration para hindi maapektuhan ang feeding."

Another participant shared:

"Importante ang proper planning at monitoring para maging sustainable ang program."

Document analysis revealed that school leaders maintained organized feeding records, liquidation reports, nutritional monitoring forms, and implementation plans to ensure accountability and compliance with program guidelines. Participants emphasized that administrative documentation and systematic monitoring contributed to operational efficiency and transparency.

Field observations further showed that school administrators supervised food preparation areas, monitored sanitation practices, and coordinated feeding schedules to maintain learner safety and program quality.

One teacher explained:

"Mahigpit ang monitoring ng administration pagdating sa food safety at cleanliness."

Another participant stated:

"Kahit kulang ang resources, sinisikap talagang mapanatili ang quality ng implementation."

The findings suggest that adaptive administrative management and effective resource mobilization significantly contribute to the sustainability and operational efficiency of school feeding programs. School leaders' flexibility and resourcefulness enabled schools to sustain learner welfare initiatives despite institutional and logistical limitations.

These findings align with Bundy et al. (2018), which emphasized that effective administrative systems and resource coordination contribute significantly to successful school feeding program implementation. The findings likewise support organizational leadership theories emphasizing adaptive management and strategic resource allocation in educational program administration.

Theme 3: Learner Welfare and Community-Centered Program Support

Another major finding revealed that school leaders prioritized learner welfare and community-centered support in implementing the School-Based Feeding Program. Participants emphasized that the feeding program positively contributed to learners' nutritional improvement, classroom participation, attendance, and overall well-being.

School leaders explained that addressing learners' nutritional needs significantly improved learners' energy, attentiveness, and participation during classroom instruction. Teachers observed that beneficiaries of the feeding program demonstrated improved classroom behavior, attendance, and learning participation.

One participant stated:

"Kapag nakakakain nang maayos ang mga bata, mas active sila sa klase."

Another teacher explained:

"Napapansin naming mas nagiging attentive at participative ang learners pagkatapos ng feeding."

Teachers and coordinators also emphasized the importance of parental and community involvement in sustaining the feeding program. Parents actively participated in food preparation, feeding supervision, and logistical support during implementation.

One feeding coordinator shared:

"Malaking tulong ang participation ng parents sa preparation at monitoring ng feeding."

Another participant explained:

"Nagiging successful ang implementation dahil nagtutulungan ang school at community."

Field observations revealed strong school-community collaboration during feeding activities. Community stakeholders, barangay officials, and parent volunteers actively assisted in preparing meals, monitoring learners, and maintaining cleanliness in feeding areas.

Participants further emphasized that the feeding program fostered stronger relationships among schools, families, and communities. School leaders viewed stakeholder collaboration as essential in promoting shared responsibility for learner welfare and educational support.

One school head stated:

"Hindi lang ito feeding program kundi partnership din para sa kapakanan ng mga bata."

Another participant shared:

"Kapag united ang community, mas nagiging sustainable ang program."

The findings suggest that community-centered support and collaborative stakeholder engagement significantly strengthen feeding program implementation and learner welfare initiatives. School feeding programs not only address nutritional concerns but also promote stronger school-community relationships and collective responsibility for learners' well-being.

These findings support Epstein's (2018) framework on school-family-community partnerships, which emphasizes collaborative stakeholder involvement in promoting learner support and educational success. Similarly, Bundy et al. (2018) highlighted that school feeding programs positively influence learner attendance, participation, and overall well-being when supported by strong community partnerships.

Theme 4: Operational and Administrative Challenges in Sustaining the School-Based Feeding Program

Despite the positive leadership practices and collaborative implementation strategies, participants encountered several operational and administrative challenges affecting the sustainability of the School-Based Feeding Program.

One participant stated:

"Mahirap minsan ang procurement at kulang ang time para sa preparation at monitoring."

Another school head explained:

"Malaking challenge ang budget limitations at logistical concerns lalo na kapag delayed ang supplies."

Participants identified procurement delays, limited funding, inadequate kitchen facilities, food supply shortages, administrative workload, and monitoring demands as major challenges affecting feeding program implementation. School leaders explained that balancing feeding program responsibilities with other administrative duties increased workload pressures among teachers and administrators.

One feeding coordinator shared:

"Bukod sa teaching load, dagdag trabaho rin talaga ang feeding program implementation."

Another participant noted:

"Minsan kulang ang manpower kaya nahihirapan sa scheduling at monitoring."

Teachers also highlighted challenges related to food preparation, storage facilities, sanitation maintenance, and documentation requirements. Participants explained that limited infrastructure

and insufficient resources affected operational efficiency and sustainability.

One teacher explained:

“Kulang minsan ang kitchen equipment at preparation area kaya challenging ang operations.”

Another participant stated:

“Marami ring paperwork at reports na kailangang tapusin habang ongoing ang feeding.”

Field observations confirmed that schools frequently improvised preparation spaces and operational systems due to infrastructural limitations. Despite these difficulties, school leaders demonstrated resilience, flexibility, and commitment in sustaining feeding services for learners. Participants emphasized that learner welfare and nutritional improvement remained their primary motivation in continuing feeding program implementation despite operational constraints.

One school head shared:

“Kahit mahirap, ginagawa namin ang lahat para tuloy-tuloy ang support sa mga bata.”

Another participant explained:

“Kapag nakikita naming may improvement sa attendance at health ng learners, sulit lahat ng effort.”

The findings indicate that while collaborative leadership and adaptive management strengthen feeding program implementation, institutional support, resource augmentation, and administrative assistance remain essential in sustaining quality feeding services in public elementary schools.

These findings support OECD (2019), which emphasized that public schools frequently encounter operational and resource-related challenges affecting educational support programs. Similarly, studies on school program implementation highlight that administrative workload and logistical limitations significantly influence program sustainability and operational effectiveness.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that collaborative leadership, adaptive administrative management, and community-centered support significantly contribute to the effective implementation of the School-Based Feeding Program in the Reina Mercedes District, Schools Division of Isabela. School leaders demonstrated participatory and learner-centered leadership practices that strengthened stakeholder engagement, operational coordination, and collective accountability during program implementation.

Collaborative leadership practices enabled school administrators to mobilize teachers, parents, local government units, and community stakeholders in sustaining feeding operations and learner welfare initiatives. Shared decision-making and participatory management strengthened communication, teamwork, and operational efficiency within schools implementing the feeding program.

Adaptive administrative management practices likewise contributed significantly to program sustainability. School leaders demonstrated flexibility and resourcefulness in addressing procurement concerns, logistical limitations, and operational challenges through strategic planning, resource mobilization, and stakeholder coordination. Effective documentation, monitoring systems, and accountability measures further strengthened implementation efficiency and compliance with program guidelines.

The findings also highlighted the positive impact of the feeding program on learner welfare,

attendance, classroom participation, and nutritional support. School leaders and teachers observed improvements in learners' attentiveness, energy levels, and classroom engagement following feeding interventions. Strong school-community collaboration likewise promoted shared responsibility and strengthened partnerships among stakeholders supporting learner welfare initiatives.

However, operational and administrative challenges related to procurement delays, limited funding, inadequate facilities, manpower shortages, and administrative workload continue to affect the sustainability of feeding program implementation. Despite these limitations, school leaders demonstrated resilience, commitment, and adaptability in sustaining feeding services and ensuring learner welfare.

The findings emphasize the importance of strengthening leadership capacity, stakeholder collaboration, resource allocation, and administrative support systems to improve the implementation and sustainability of school-based feeding programs in public elementary schools.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that collaborative leadership practices and adaptive administrative management significantly contribute to the successful implementation and sustainability of the School-Based Feeding Program in the Reina Mercedes District, Schools Division of Isabela. School leaders demonstrated participatory leadership, resourcefulness, and strong commitment in managing feeding operations and promoting learner welfare.

Collaborative stakeholder engagement strengthened operational coordination, accountability, and community participation during program implementation. School administrators effectively mobilized teachers, parents, local government units, and community stakeholders in sustaining feeding services and learner support initiatives.

Adaptive administrative management practices enabled schools to address logistical concerns, procurement limitations, and resource-related challenges despite institutional constraints. Effective monitoring systems, resource mobilization, and operational flexibility contributed positively to program sustainability and implementation efficiency.

The feeding program also positively influenced learner welfare, attendance, participation, and classroom engagement. However, challenges related to limited funding, inadequate facilities, administrative workload, procurement delays, and manpower shortages continue to affect program implementation.

Despite these operational difficulties, school leaders demonstrated resilience, dedication, and commitment in sustaining school feeding services and supporting nutritionally at-risk learners. The study emphasizes the importance of collaborative leadership, community participation, and strengthened institutional support in improving school-based feeding programs.

Implications of the Study

The findings imply that school feeding programs should continuously strengthen collaborative leadership practices, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive administrative systems to sustain effective implementation and learner welfare support in public schools.

Educational leaders and policymakers may provide stronger institutional support through increased funding allocation, improved kitchen facilities, additional manpower support, and streamlined procurement systems necessary for efficient feeding program implementation. Capacity-building programs focusing on school leadership, financial management, program

monitoring, and stakeholder coordination may further enhance administrators' competencies in managing school feeding initiatives.

Schools may also strengthen school-community partnerships and parental involvement programs to sustain collaborative support for learner nutrition and welfare initiatives.

Future researchers may conduct similar qualitative or mixed-methods studies exploring leadership effectiveness, learner outcomes, nutritional impacts, and stakeholder participation in school-based feeding programs across diverse educational contexts.

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