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LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HEADS IN MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL DEMANDS TOWARD AN INTERVENTION PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of public elementary school heads in managing multiple organizational demands in the Orion District, Schools Division of Bataan, as the basis for an intervention program. It examined the

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overlapping instructional, administrative, personnel, financial, stakeholder, safety, and policy-related responsibilities that school heads manage within limited time and resources. A qualitative descriptive phenomenological design was used. Eight school heads, selected through purposive criterion sampling from a population of fourteen, participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interview transcripts, field notes, and reflective memos were analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological method. Six essential themes emerged: (1) Carrying Multiple Roles in an Overloaded Leadership Environment; (2) Administrative Compliance Displaces Instructional Leadership; (3) Prioritizing Through Urgency, Consequence, and Learner Welfare; (4) Sharing Leadership to Keep the School Functioning; (5) Leading Adaptively Through Communication, Relationships, and Emotional Regulation; and (6) Managing Multiple Demands Shapes Leadership but Exposes Structural Gaps. School heads prioritized learner welfare and safety and relied on delegation, teamwork, communication, adaptive leadership, and personal coping strategies to keep their schools functioning. The fundamental structure of the experience was a continuous process of ethical balancing under constrained organizational capacity. The study concluded that simultaneous organizational demands created a persistent emotional burden and exposed gaps in staffing, administrative workload, reporting requirements, and resources, so that individual adaptation alone was insufficient. Based on the findings, the BALANCE Program was proposed to strengthen leadership capacity, organizational support, well-being, and sustainable school management among public elementary school heads.

Keywords: *Multiple Organizational Demands, Educational Leadership, Intervention Program, Lived Experiences, Phenomenology, Public Elementary School Heads*

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Educational leadership has become more complex under the combined pressure of technological change, policy reform, globalization, and increasingly diverse learner needs. Beyond instructional supervision, school principals are now responsible for strategic planning, organizational management, financial accountability, human resource development, stakeholder engagement, and school improvement. UNESCO (2021) noted that school principals strongly influence a school's instruction, organization, and institutional responsiveness, and underscored the importance of effective school leadership in fostering educational quality. Principals face new challenges and expectations, and they must make evidence-informed decisions that weigh the factors that can both enhance and constrain school effectiveness and learner outcomes.

The study is grounded in international and national policies that recognize the critical role of school leadership in educational quality and institutional effectiveness. Sustainable Development Goal 4 prioritizes inclusive, equitable, and quality education and calls for strengthened education systems and strengthened capacities of educational leaders (United Nations, 2015). UNESCO (2021) likewise stresses the role of school principals in building inclusive, resilient, and learner-centered schools. In the Philippines, the Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP) 2030 identifies transformational leadership, organizational excellence, and evidence-informed decision-making as strategies for improving basic education (Department of Education [DepEd], 2022a), and the MATATAG Agenda lists strengthened school leadership and resilient school institutions among its focus areas for improving governance and accelerating learning recovery (DepEd, 2023b). The Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads describe the expectations of school heads in four domains: instructional leadership, organizational management, human resource development, and stakeholder engagement (DepEd, 2020). The Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001 (Republic Act No. 9155) likewise positions school principals as instructional leaders and administrative managers responsible for improving the quality of basic education through good governance.

Existing studies on school leadership have largely employed quantitative and correlational methods to examine instructional leadership, transformational leadership, organizational effectiveness, teacher performance, and school improvement. Although these studies have clarified the link between leadership actions and educational results, little research has examined how school principals personally experience the challenge of managing multiple organizational demands. Harris and Jones (2023) emphasized the need to understand leadership within real organizations, where leadership decisions are made day to day and where much of the work cannot be measured. This perspective remains under-researched in Philippine public elementary schools. Most available studies have concentrated on leadership effectiveness, school performance, and instructional supervision; to the authors' knowledge, none has focused on the experiences, coping mechanisms, and decision-making of school principals in the Orion District who must respond to simultaneous demands.

The expanding responsibilities assigned to school principals have made leadership in public elementary schools increasingly complex. Besides school governance, principals are responsible for financial planning and management, staff supervision, curriculum planning and implementation, school–community relations, disaster preparedness, child protection programs, and school improvement initiatives. These responsibilities often occur concurrently, and principals must respond to scarce resources, heavy administrative workloads, and varying stakeholder expectations. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023a) emphasized that school leadership is becoming more complex, leaving more principals feeling overwhelmed by administrative and organizational pressures. Possible consequences include work overload, role conflict, leadership stress, decision fatigue, and emotional exhaustion, with potential effects on instructional supervision, organizational climate, teacher motivation,

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and learner outcomes. Principals in the Orion District, Schools Division of Bataan, face these daily challenges while implementing educational reforms and responding to the needs of their school communities.

It is therefore important to consider school principals' lived experiences and not only organizational indicators and school performance. Examining how principals understand and reconcile competing demands, and how they respond to them, may offer insights into how they make decisions, solve problems, and sustain school effectiveness under constraints. UNESCO (2021) highlighted that competency development, support systems, co-constructed learning environments, and responsive leadership in practice are critical in supporting school leadership. Through phenomenological inquiry, this research sought to provide evidence that could inform leadership development programs, mentoring programs, organizational systems, and policy formulation in the Department of Education. The findings can help school principals, teachers, education planners, and researchers gain a clearer understanding of leadership practice in similar school contexts, and they served as inputs for designing an intervention program encompassing leadership development and mentoring.

The researchers were motivated by the recognition that effective school leaders carry out many activities that performance indicators do not capture. School success is usually measured through learner achievement, program implementation, and adherence to standards, yet little attention is given to the personal experiences, leadership challenges, and decision-making of the principals who make that success possible. The researchers regarded educational leadership as an experience to be explored not only through what is measurable but also through the lived experiences that shape it. This phenomenological inquiry therefore sought to reveal how school principals in the Orion District, Schools Division of Bataan, cope with competing organizational demands in public elementary schools, with implications for organizational support and for education policy on school leadership development. The findings also served as inputs for designing an intervention program responsive to the experiences of public elementary school principals in the Orion District.

Theoretical Framework

The present study was based on four recent theories that offer a basis for understanding the lived experiences of the public elementary school heads in managing simultaneous demands in the school. These include the Job Demands–Resources Theory, Bakker, Demerouti and Sanz-Vergel (2023); Multifaceted Sensemaking Theory, Turner, Allen, Hawamdeh and Mastanamma (2023); Paradoxical Leadership Theory (as summarized by Lee, Lyubovnikova, Zheng and Li, 2023); and Complexity Leadership Theory (as recently applied by Beresford-Dey, Howden and Martindale, 2024). These theories, taken together, account for how school leaders react to multiple and sometimes conflicting demands, make sense of the complexities of the school's situation, manage simultaneous demands, make use of personal and organizational resources, and adjust their leadership practices to meet shifting school demands. They also offer suitable theoretical frameworks to study the way school principals encounter leadership pressures, formulate decisions, have to cope and maintain their effectiveness, and deal with the demands of instruction, administration, finance, personnel, and stakeholders. The present study aimed to gain deeper insights into the complexities of school leaders' contemporary meaning-making and coping processes as revealed in the reflective and self-understanding of public elementary school heads in these theoretical frameworks.

The Job Demands-Job Resources (JD-R) Theory of Bakker, Demerouti, and Sanz-Vergel (2023) describes a state of employee functioning as a result of job demands and job resources. Job demands are components of work that require continued physical, cognitive, and/or emotional activity and will thus lead to strain if they are excessive or sustained over a period of time. Job resources are anything about a job that aids in achieving a goal, lowers the demands of a job, provokes learning, or maintains motivation. The revised theory also focuses on personal resources, proactive behavior, and the reciprocal processes over time between employees and the workplace.

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The theory is very supportive of the present study because the work of the public elementary school principal covers more than just instructional responsibilities but also administrative responsibilities, financial, personnel, stakeholder, safety, and policy responsibilities as well. Responsibilities become job demands when they consume time, attention, emotional energy, and resources that are not adequately available. Meanwhile, autonomy, experience, supportive supervisors, capable teachers, collaboration, technology, and community partnerships can serve as resources. JD–R Theory can thus be used to explain why, at times, responsibilities can feel manageable but at other times overwhelming, and how similar experiences can be understood as having different meanings for principals.

Turner, Allen, Hawamdeh, and Mastanamma (2023) further developed the Multifaceted Sensemaking Theory by synthesizing various aspects of sensemaking research. The theory is that sensemaking is an ongoing process that involves perceiving cues, making sense of ambiguous situations, developing plausible explanations, communicating with others, and enacting action in light of the interpretations. The process of meaning-making is not solely a cognitive one; it is influenced by social relations, organizational structures, previous experiences, identity, and shifts in the environment.

This theory directly relates to the study's question regarding the meaning-making and interpretation of the simultaneous demands of the organization by school heads. A school head seldom gets demands in a nicely organized order. On the other hand, the policy goals, the needs of the learners, concerns of the staff, requests from parents, resource constraints, and emergency situations can all be present. Sensemaking can be used to help clarify what decision to make, which expectation to uphold, what can be delegated, and what may be the consequences of said decision. The theory thus becomes the initial frame of reference to understand the subjective meanings expressed in the participants' stories.

Lee, Lyubovnikova, Zheng, and Li (2023) have compiled and summarized the current research in the field of paradoxical leadership, presenting it as a leadership characterized by apparently paradoxical but mutually reinforcing actions. The paradoxical leaders do not think that there is always a permanent either/or solution to any tension. Rather, they try to keep both sides of the continuing conflicts alive, including control/empowerment, standardization/individualization, continuity/change, and self/concern for the other. The theory can be applied where requests are genuine and are not all served by the attention that can be devoted at any one time.

These dilemmas are common to the heads of public schools. They are expected to meet both their administrative tasks and keep instructional time to a healthy level, hold staff accountable and maintain morale, adhere to uniform policies and deal with special learner needs, manage limited resources to strive for improvement, and address immediate issues without compromising the longer-range goals. Paradoxical Leadership Theory helps in the analysis of how the leader handles these paradoxes in a sequence, integration, delegation, boundary setting, or temporary prioritization. It is, therefore, very congruent with the phenomenon of simultaneous demands amongst organizations.

Beresford-Dey, Howden, and Martindale's (2024) use of Complexity Leadership Theory is a focus on leadership within an interdependent and uncertain system. Complexity perspectives differentiate formal administrative tasks from the adaptive processes that unfold as a result of interaction, learning, experimentation, and distributed expertise. Complexity leadership is about not trying to manage all of the variables but to facilitate the development of relationships, the sharing of information, teamwork, and local decision-making throughout the organization in a way that leads to effective solutions.

This theory fits in with the other lenses, as public elementary heads are open systems that are impacted by directives from the division, community conditions, the needs of the learners, staffing, budget, technology, emergencies, and policy change. Simultaneous demands can then be nonlinear: a staffing issue can impact instruction, a safety issue can influence the scheduling, and a stakeholder concern can lead to more reporting. It can also be helpful to understand

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why principals might choose to mobilize teams, delegate duties, form partnerships, and adjust their routines in addition to the collective effort of individuals through Complexity Leadership Theory.

The four theories complement each other in terms of their explanation of the phenomenon. JD–R Theory is the explanation of the strain and motivational effects of the balance between demands and resources; Multifaceted Sensemaking Theory is the explanation of leaders' interpretations of ambiguous and overlapping expectations; Paradoxical Leadership Theory is the explanation of the persistence and balancing of opposing expectations; and Complexity Leadership Theory is the explanation of adaptive, relational, distributed responses in dynamic school systems. Themes are not deduced from any of the theories. Rather, they serve as sensitizing lenses that facilitate interpretation following careful, descriptive lived meaning descriptions.

The integrated theoretical position is therefore consistent with phenomenology. The school head is viewed neither as a passive recipient of workload nor as a fully autonomous decision-maker. Leadership experience emerges from the interaction between organizational demands, available resources, personal interpretation, relational dynamics, and adaptive action. This theoretical synthesis provides a coherent basis for examining what school heads encounter, how they interpret those encounters, how they respond, and what forms of support may be warranted.

Review of Related Literature

On the Lived Experiences and Expanding Roles of Public Elementary School Principals

Bolman and Deal (2021) explained that organizations may be understood through structural, human-resource, political, and symbolic perspectives. In schools, these perspectives operate at the same time because principals deal with formal rules and structures, staff needs and relationships, different interests, and the values and meanings attached to school life. A single concern may therefore demand administrative, relational, political, and cultural responses from the school heads. This literature is relevant to the present study because it helps explain why leadership responsibilities may overlap and become difficult to separate in actual school practice.

Dulude and Milley (2021) described school leadership through the concept of institutional complexity and multiple accountability tensions. Their conceptual framework explains that school leaders are exposed to different expectations arising from government policy, professional standards, organizational priorities, and community demands. These expectations may be legitimate but not always fully compatible with one another. This perspective is closely related to the present study because multiple organizational demands are understood not simply as a large number of tasks but as responsibilities that may require different priorities, values, and responses at the same time.

Fullan (2021) emphasized that successful educational improvement depends on the use of the right drivers, particularly collaboration, capacity building, pedagogy, and systemness. He argued that fragmented initiatives and isolated solutions often weaken the coherence needed for sustainable school improvement. School heads therefore have to connect various programs and responsibilities rather than treat each mandate as an independent activity. This literature supports the present investigation because school heads who manage simultaneous demands must create coherence among instructional, organizational, and reform-related responsibilities.

Kotter, Akhtar, and Gupta (2021) explained that organizational change requires leaders to operate effectively in uncertain and rapidly changing conditions. Their discussion stresses the importance of mobilizing people, building shared direction, and responding to change without becoming trapped by rigid routines. In the school setting, policy shifts, emergencies, new programs, and changing stakeholder expectations may require school heads to modify existing practices while maintaining daily operations. This literature is relevant because the lived experience of leadership includes not only routine management but also the continuous adjustment of the organization to new demands.

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Northouse (2022) presented leadership as a process of influence that occurs through relationships between leaders and followers within particular situations. Leadership is therefore not limited to the authority attached to a formal position because its effectiveness also depends on communication, trust, motivation, and the capacity to work with people. Public elementary school heads must exercise these relational functions while carrying administrative and instructional responsibilities. This literature supports the present study by emphasizing that the burden of simultaneous demands includes the human and relational work required to secure cooperation and sustain school functioning.

UNESCO (2021) presented education as a social contract that must be rebuilt around cooperation, inclusion, participation, and shared responsibility. This direction expands the role of educational leaders because schools are expected to respond not only to academic outcomes but also to equity, participation, well-being, and community needs. School heads become important actors in translating these broad educational commitments into local school practices. The literature is relevant to the present study because the widening social responsibilities of schools contribute to the growing range of expectations placed on public-school heads.

The United Nations (2022) described the transformation of education as an urgent collective responsibility and calls for stronger educational systems that are inclusive, equitable, relevant, and resilient. Such transformation requires action at national, system, and school levels. For school heads, broad transformation goals eventually become concrete responsibilities involving teachers, learners, programs, resources, and community partnerships. This literature is related to the present study because it shows how global and national reform directions can create additional layers of responsibility within the day-to-day work of school leaders.

Fullan (2023), in The Principal 2.0, explained that the contemporary principal must move beyond a narrow administrative role and develop professional capital, contextual literacy, and systemness. He emphasized that school leaders need to build the capacity of others and connect school-level action with broader system improvement. This view recognizes that principals cannot personally perform every leadership task and must instead create conditions in which others can contribute. The literature is particularly relevant to the present investigation because delegation, collaboration, and capacity building may help school principals manage multiple organizational demands more sustainably.

Harris and Jones (2023) emphasized the continuing importance of school leadership while cautioning that leadership must be understood within the real conditions in which schools operate. Their discussion highlights the influence of context, collaboration, professional learning, and system conditions on leadership practice. This is important because formal descriptions of principal duties do not fully capture the decisions, pressures, and trade-offs experienced in everyday schoolwork. The literature strengthens the rationale for the present phenomenological study, which sought to understand leadership from the actual experiences and meanings described by school principals.

The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Team (2024) identified leadership as a major factor in improving education and stresses the importance of preparation, working conditions, collaboration, and distributed responsibility. The report presents school leaders as central to creating direction, supporting teaching, developing people, and connecting schools with the wider education system. It also recognizes that leaders need suitable conditions to perform these responsibilities effectively. This literature supports the present study because the experience of simultaneous demands cannot be understood separately from the support structures and working conditions surrounding school principals.

On Multiple Organizational Demands in Contemporary School Leadership

The OECD (2021a) explained that education systems need to become more responsive and resilient while continuing to pursue long-term improvement. Schools must be able to respond to disruption, uncertainty, and changing needs without losing focus on educational quality. At the school level, this expectation places principals in situations where

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urgent operational concerns may occur alongside strategic and instructional priorities. This literature is relevant to the present study because it shows how responsiveness and resilience can increase the number of simultaneous demands that school principals are expected to coordinate.

The World Bank (2021) emphasized learning recovery after COVID-19 while also calling for stronger, more equitable, and more resilient education systems. Recovery requires attention to learning loss, attendance, instructional support, teacher capacity, and the needs of vulnerable learners. These priorities do not replace routine school responsibilities; rather, they are added to existing organizational work. The literature is related to the present investigation because it illustrates how recovery initiatives can compete with or intensify administrative, instructional, and resource demands placed on school leaders.

The World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF (2021) described the global education crisis as requiring both immediate recovery and longer-term system strengthening. Their report highlights the need to reopen and sustain schooling, recover learning, support teachers and learners, and build more resilient education systems. For school principals, these goals involve coordination across instruction, health and safety, communication, resource use, and stakeholder engagement. This literature supports the present study because it demonstrates how crisis recovery can create interdependent demands that must be managed simultaneously at the school level.

The Department of Education (2022a), through the Basic Education Development Plan 2030, established long-term directions for improving access, equity, quality, resilience, and governance in Philippine basic education. School heads are expected to translate these priorities into school improvement plans, instructional programs, resource decisions, and stakeholder activities. The breadth of these priorities means that organizational leadership cannot focus on a single domain alone. This policy literature is relevant to the present study because it provides the national context within which public elementary school heads manage multiple and sometimes simultaneous responsibilities.

The Department of Education (2022b) also adopted the Basic Education Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to strengthen evidence-informed management and accountability across governance levels. The framework requires systematic monitoring, evaluation, reporting, and use of evidence for improvement. Although these processes are necessary for effective governance, they also require time, documentation, coordination, and follow-through from schools. This literature is relevant because monitoring and accountability requirements form part of the organizational demands that school principals must balance with instructional leadership and other school priorities.

The Department of Education (2023a) adopted the National Learning Recovery Program to address learning gaps and accelerate learner recovery. The program requires schools to identify learning needs, organize appropriate interventions, mobilize teachers and resources, and monitor implementation. School heads therefore have to coordinate recovery activities while continuing regular school operations and compliance requirements. This policy is closely related to the present study because learning recovery represents an important instructional demand that must be balanced with administrative and organizational responsibilities.

The MATATAG Agenda of the Department of Education (2023b) established a reform direction centered on making the curriculum relevant and accelerating the delivery of services, protecting learner well-being, and supporting teachers. These priorities require action from school leaders in curriculum implementation, facilities, learner support, teacher development, and community coordination. Each area is necessary, yet all draw on limited school time, personnel, and resources. This literature is relevant to the present study because it demonstrates how reform priorities create several legitimate demands that school principals must organize within the same school environment.

The Department of Education (2023c) issued policy guidelines for the National Learning Camp as part of learning recovery efforts. The program requires planning, learner identification, teacher participation, scheduling, resource preparation, monitoring, and coordination with stakeholders. These responsibilities can occur alongside end-of-year,

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beginning-of-year, and regular administrative work. This policy literature supports the present study by showing how a specific educational intervention can generate additional coordination requirements that school principals must integrate with their other leadership responsibilities.

The National Economic and Development Authority (2023) placed education and human-capital development among the major priorities of the Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028. The plan connects education with national goals involving productivity, inclusion, social development, and economic transformation. At the school level, these large development objectives are translated into expectations for improved learning, equitable services, and effective governance. This literature provides a broader national context for the present study because school principals operate within an education system expected to contribute to several national outcomes simultaneously.

DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024 directed the immediate removal of administrative tasks from public-school teachers to protect teaching time and improve the organization of schoolwork (Department of Education, 2024a). The policy has implications for school principals because duties must be redistributed, delegated, or assigned to appropriate administrative support mechanisms. This creates a need for clearer workflow and role management within schools. The literature is relevant to the present study because organizational demands are influenced not only by the quantity of work but also by how responsibilities are distributed among school personnel.

DepEd Order No. 005, s. 2024 rationalized teachers' workload and provides guidance regarding teaching overload (Department of Education, 2024c). The policy recognized the importance of balancing instructional duties with other assigned responsibilities. School heads play a key role in scheduling, assigning work, monitoring teaching loads, and ensuring that necessary school functions are still completed. This literature supports the present investigation because workload policies directly affect how principals distribute organizational responsibilities and manage multiple needs within limited human resources.

DepEd Order No. 010, s. 2024 provides policy guidelines for the implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum (Department of Education, 2024b). Curriculum implementation requires school leaders to attend to schedules, teacher preparation, learning resources, assessment, supervision, and communication with stakeholders. These activities are interconnected with staffing, budgeting, facilities, and school improvement work. This literature is related to the present study because curriculum reform adds a significant instructional and organizational demand that principals must coordinate with other continuing responsibilities.

On Sensemaking, Decision-Making, and Balancing Simultaneous Demands

Smith and Lewis (2022) introduced both/and thinking as a way of responding to persistent organizational tensions that cannot be solved through a simple either/or choice. They argued that leaders can recognize multiple needs, accept their interdependence, and search for approaches that allow both priorities to be addressed over time. School heads often face similar tensions, such as accountability and staff support, urgent concerns and long-term planning, or standardization and responsiveness to local needs. This literature is relevant because it provides a practical conceptual language for understanding how principals may balance multiple organizational demands.

The OECD (2022) emphasized the need for education systems to transform learning pathways while maintaining coherence, inclusion, and responsiveness. Such transformation requires coordinated decisions across curriculum, teaching, assessment, governance, and support systems. School heads therefore need to interpret changes in relation to the needs and conditions of their own schools. This literature supports the present study because decision-making under simultaneous demands is not only a matter of choosing tasks; it also requires principals to understand how different policies and priorities connect within the local context.

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The OECD (2023b) explained that equity and inclusion require education systems to respond to diverse learners and remove barriers to participation and success. For school principals, inclusive leadership involves decisions about resources, learner support, teacher practices, stakeholder participation, and school environments. These responsibilities may have to be addressed even when schools are already managing limited resources and other performance expectations. This literature is relevant to the present study because it illustrates how leaders must weigh different needs while maintaining fairness and educational inclusion.

The OECD Digital Education Outlook 2021 described the growing influence of artificial intelligence, automation, and emerging digital technologies on education (OECD, 2021b). The report emphasizes that technology affects not only classroom instruction but also system management and organizational processes. School heads must therefore make decisions about access, infrastructure, capability, and appropriate use. This literature is relevant to the present study because digital transformation creates new responsibilities that compete for attention and resources with established instructional and administrative demands.

The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Team (2023) cautions that technology in education should be adopted according to educational purposes rather than technological enthusiasm alone. The report emphasizes questions of relevance, equity, evidence, governance, and human capacity. School principals must therefore evaluate whether digital tools genuinely support learners and teachers and whether schools have the resources to use them effectively. This literature supports the present study because it demonstrates that leaders must interpret technological opportunities and risks before deciding how they fit within other school priorities.

Miao and Holmes (2023) provided guidance for the responsible use of generative artificial intelligence in education and research. They emphasize human agency, ethical safeguards, capacity building, privacy, and the need for clear educational purposes. These concerns require school heads to make judgments about emerging tools while protecting learners, teachers, and institutional integrity. This literature is relevant because new technologies add uncertainty to school leadership and require sensemaking, policy interpretation, and decision-making alongside existing organizational responsibilities.

The OECD Digital Education Outlook 2023 emphasized the development of coherent digital education ecosystems involving governance, infrastructure, digital resources, data, and human capacity (OECD, 2023c). Digital transformation is therefore not a single technology project but an organizational process involving many interconnected decisions. School heads may need to coordinate devices, connectivity, teacher development, data practices, and instructional use at the same time. This literature is related to the present study because such interconnected responsibilities require principals to prioritize and integrate multiple demands rather than address them independently.

The OECD Education Policy Outlook 2024 focused on reshaping teaching into a thriving profession in a period influenced by artificial intelligence and changing workforce conditions (OECD, 2024). The report highlighted the importance of professional conditions, skills, support, and system capacity. For school heads, teacher-related decisions must consider workload, professional development, motivation, and instructional quality while responding to organizational requirements. This literature is relevant because the principal's decisions about people and work conditions are central to balancing school priorities.

The OECD (2025b), in Trends Shaping Education 2025, identified major social, economic, technological, political, and environmental trends that may reshape education. The report encourages education leaders to anticipate change rather than respond only after problems emerge. This orientation requires leaders to consider both present demands and future implications when planning school actions. The literature supports the present study because school heads'

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decisions are made within a changing environment where immediate responsibilities may compete with the need for preparation, innovation, and long-term improvement.

On Coping Mechanisms, Well-Being, and Leadership Strategies

ISO 45003:2021 provides guidelines for managing psychological health and safety at work and treats psychosocial risks as organizational concerns rather than solely individual problems (International Organization for Standardization, 2021). The standard identifies the importance of workload, role clarity, support, communication, and organizational conditions in protecting psychological well-being. Applied to school leadership, this suggests that excessive or conflicting demands may be reduced through better work design and support systems. This literature is relevant to the present study because it broadens the analysis of coping from personal resilience to the organizational conditions that shape leadership strain.

The World Health Organization (2022) recommended organizational interventions to prevent and manage psychosocial risks at work. Its guidelines emphasize that worker well-being is influenced by job design, workload, interpersonal conditions, and available support. Individual stress-management practices may be helpful, but they should not replace changes to harmful work conditions. This literature supports the present study because school heads' coping mechanisms must be interpreted together with the organizational environment in which simultaneous demands occur.

The World Health Organization and International Labor Organization (2022) emphasized that mental health at work requires prevention, protection, support, and an enabling organizational environment. Their policy brief encourages workplaces to address risks before they result in serious harm and to strengthen support for workers experiencing difficulty. This perspective is relevant to school leadership because principals may continue functioning even while experiencing sustained strain. The literature therefore supports the development of an intervention program that includes both personal coping support and organizational measures.

Riley (2022) emphasized compassionate leadership as a means of strengthening belonging, trust, and humane relationships in schools. Compassionate leadership requires leaders to notice the needs of others, respond constructively, and create conditions in which people feel valued and connected. These relational practices can also become resources for leaders because trusted colleagues and supportive communities make shared problem-solving possible. This literature is relevant to the present study because communication, relationships, and collective support may help school heads cope with demanding organizational conditions.

UNESCO and the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (2024) highlighted teacher shortages, professional development, retention, and working conditions as central concerns for education systems. The report recognizes that strong educational outcomes depend on the conditions under which education professionals work. School heads are responsible for supporting teachers while also managing the consequences of staffing shortages and limited capacity. This literature is related to the present study because personnel conditions can function both as organizational demands and as important resources in the daily work of principals.

The United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession (2024) called for stronger professional dignity, decent working conditions, development opportunities, and supportive leadership for teachers. These recommendations place attention on the human conditions necessary for education reform to succeed. School heads must help create supportive workplaces while also meeting accountability and performance expectations. This literature supports the present study because leadership strategies that protect staff well-being, clarify roles, and build professional capacity may also reduce the pressure created by multiple organizational demands.

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The Second Congressional Commission on Education (2024), in Miseducation, identifies persistent structural problems within the Philippine education system. The report shows that school-level performance is affected by broader issues involving governance, resources, curriculum, teachers, and system coordination. School principals therefore work within constraints that they cannot fully control at the local level. This literature is relevant to the present study because school heads' coping strategies and decisions should be understood in relation to systemic conditions rather than interpreted only as personal leadership strengths or weaknesses.

The Second Congressional Commission on Education (2025), through Fixing the Foundations, emphasizes the need to strengthen the fundamental conditions of Philippine education. The report calls attention to coordinated reforms that address persistent learning and system problems. For school heads, system reforms may create both support and additional implementation responsibilities during the transition period. This literature is relevant because it highlights the need for leaders to adapt to reform while protecting the functioning and well-being of their school communities.

DepEd Order No. 024, s. 2025 established guidelines for the Expanded Career Progression System for Teachers and School Heads (Department of Education, 2025). The policy links professional roles with competency development, advancement, and clearer career pathways. Continuing leadership development can strengthen the ability of school principals to manage complex responsibilities through improved knowledge and skills. This literature supports the present study because an intervention program may need to include professional development that enhances school heads' capacity to cope with and manage multiple organizational demands.

On Organizational Support and Intervention Programs for School Heads

The Guide for Learning Recovery and Acceleration presents the RAPID framework as a structured approach to addressing learning losses through learner reach, assessment, prioritization of fundamentals, instructional efficiency, and psychosocial support (World Bank et al., 2022). The framework demonstrates the value of organizing complex educational challenges into coordinated areas of action. For school heads, structured frameworks can help clarify priorities when several needs compete for attention. This literature is relevant to the present study because the proposed intervention program may similarly need clear components that convert lived leadership challenges into manageable areas of support.

The World Bank (2023b), in Making Teacher Policy Work, emphasized that good policy depends on implementation capacity, incentives, management, and the conditions experienced by those responsible for delivery. Policy intentions may fail when local systems lack time, resources, skills, or support. School heads are important implementation actors because they connect policy directions with actual school practices. This literature supports the present study because an effective intervention program must respond to the realities of implementation rather than assume that formal policies alone are sufficient.

The World Bank (2023a) also reported that learning recovery efforts need to move toward acceleration and sustained system improvement. The report highlighted the importance of continuing recovery while reducing inequalities and strengthening instruction. This requires coordinated action across assessment, teaching, support, and school management. The literature is relevant because intervention support for school heads should help leaders connect learning priorities with the organizational conditions necessary for successful implementation.

Education Finance Watch 2024 emphasized the adequacy, equity, and efficiency of education financing and the importance of using limited resources effectively (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, & World Bank, 2024). At the school level, school heads regularly make decisions about how resources are distributed among instruction, facilities, programs, learner needs, and operational requirements. These decisions may involve difficult trade-offs when resources are insufficient for all needs. This literature supports the present study because resource prioritization is a major part of managing multiple organizational demands.

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The Second Congressional Commission on Education (2026), in Turning Point, presents a ten-year reform roadmap intended to coordinate major improvements in Philippine education. The report emphasizes the need for sustained, sequenced, and system-wide action rather than fragmented initiatives. School heads will remain important implementers of these reforms because system changes ultimately affect school-level practices. This literature is relevant to the present study because a locally grounded intervention program should help principals create coherence while broader reforms continue to introduce new responsibilities.

The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Team (2025), in Leadership and Education in East Asia: Lead for Technology, highlights the growing role of educational leaders in guiding digital transformation. School heads are expected to connect technology with educational goals, develop staff capacity, and ensure that digital change remains purposeful and equitable. These responsibilities require both technical understanding and organizational leadership. This literature supports the present study because digital leadership is one of the newer demands that school heads must integrate with existing instructional and administrative work.

The UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (2025) reported on the School Leadership Network as a platform connecting principals and experts across countries. The network supports the exchange of practices, peer learning, and the connection of policy with school-level realities. Such professional networks can reduce isolation and provide leaders with access to ideas and support from colleagues facing similar challenges. This literature is relevant to the present investigation because mentoring, peer support, and leadership networks may be appropriate components of an intervention program for school heads.

The OECD Education Policy Outlook 2025 emphasized that successful educational change depends on implementation conditions such as skills, motivation, time, resources, and professional networks (OECD, 2025a). This approach recognized that people cannot carry out reforms effectively when the organizational conditions for implementation are weak. School heads often become the point where multiple policies are translated into action. This literature supports the present study because an intervention program should strengthen not only individual leadership skills but also the resources and support conditions needed to manage simultaneous demands.

The OECD Digital Education Outlook 2026 examined the effective use of generative artificial intelligence in education and emphasizes pedagogical purpose, trustworthy governance, human agency, and professional capacity (OECD, 2026). The report also recognizes that generative AI may support institutional and administrative processes when used appropriately. For school heads, these tools may create opportunities to reduce some forms of workload while also introducing new governance and ethical responsibilities. This literature is relevant because intervention support may need to include responsible digital practices that improve efficiency without adding unnecessary complexity.

The World Bank (2026) described the Project for Learning Upgrade Support and Decentralization as a major Philippine initiative that supports foundational learning, teaching and leadership capacity, assessment, digitalization, and decentralized school support. The project recognizes that better learning outcomes require improvements not only in instruction but also in leadership and system management. This literature is directly relevant to the present study because it supports the need for stronger school-head capacity and organizational support as part of broader educational improvement efforts.

Taken together, the reviewed literature shows that these responsibilities are influenced by system conditions, workload design, resources, professional relationships, and the pace of educational change. Consequently, multiple organizational demands cannot be reduced to simple time-management difficulties because they involve legitimate expectations that may require simultaneous attention.

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The literature also identifies several possible ways of responding to complex leadership demands, including coherence building, shared leadership, role clarification, both/and thinking, evidence-informed decision-making, professional networks, psychosocial protection, capacity development, and organizational support. However, conceptual and policy sources do not fully explain how public elementary school heads personally experience, interpret, and cope with these demands in their daily work. This gap supports the need for the present phenomenological inquiry in the Orion District, Schools Division of Bataan, and for an intervention program grounded in the actual meanings and experiences expressed by the participants.

Review of Related Studies

The following studies provide empirical evidence relevant to the present investigation on the lived experiences of public elementary school heads in managing multiple organizational demands. They are organized thematically to establish what is already known about school heads' workload, stress, coping, time allocation, organizational support, instructional leadership, policy change, and the experiences of school heads in the Philippines and other educational contexts.

Principal Stress, Exhaustion, and Occupational Well-Being

González and Aravena (2021) conducted a study entitled "Always ready and always well": Exploring stress on school principals in Chile. The study explored how Chilean principals experienced occupational stress and identified the principalship as a role marked by persistent demands, responsibility, and expectations of constant readiness. The findings are relevant because they show that stress is embedded in the organization of leadership work, not merely in isolated difficult events. This parallels the present inquiry into how school principals experience simultaneous responsibilities and sustain performance under pressure.

Arnold, Rahimi, and Riley (2021) investigated Australian school principals' roles, responsibilities, well-being, and health during the pandemic: A snapshot of Australian school leaders' work roles and responsibilities and health and well-being during COVID-19. Australian school heads reported altered and intensified roles during the first year of the pandemic, demonstrating how crisis conditions can expand responsibility while reducing predictability. The study is relevant because it shows how leaders absorb new operational, communication, safety, and instructional demands at the same time. It also illustrates the importance of examining health and well-being alongside role performance.

A study conducted by Beauchamp et al. (2021) explored school leadership and management across the four nations of the United Kingdom in the early stage of the pandemic in "People miss people": A study of school leadership and management in the four nations of the United Kingdom in the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study demonstrates that leadership during uncertainty requires continuous interpretation and reprioritization. This is directly relevant to the present study's sensemaking question because principals must decide what information means for their local setting before acting.

Bedi, Kukemelk, and Bardone (2021) conducted a study that focuses on the personal, practice, and school factors influencing job stress and satisfaction among school principals. The study examined organizational, personal, and school factors associated with school principals' job stress and satisfaction. It showed that leadership well-being is linked to the conditions under which the job is performed. For the present study, the study supports attention to organizational sources of strain and to the possibility that the same environment may contain both demanding and supportive features.

Another related study carried out by Håkansson et al. (2021) examined organizational and social work environment factors, occupational balance, and negligible stress symptoms among Swedish principals: A cross-sectional study. Swedish principals with better organizational and social work environments and stronger occupational balance were

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more likely to report no or negligible stress symptoms. Supportive management and colleagues emerged as meaningful resources, while role demands and conflicts were important stress-related conditions. The study closely supports the job demands–resources lens adopted here and points to organizational support as a possible intervention target.

Another cross-sectional study conducted by Persson et al. (2021) focused on the prevalence of exhaustion symptoms and associations with school level, length of work experience, and gender: A nationwide cross-sectional study of Swedish principals. The nationwide study documented exhaustion symptoms among Swedish principals and examined variation by school level, work experience, and gender. The study is relevant because it shows that exhaustion is sufficiently prevalent to warrant attention as an occupational leadership issue. For the current phenomenological inquiry, it sensitizes the analysis to narratives of depletion, recovery difficulty, and sustained pressure without presuming that every participant experiences burnout.

Upadyaya, Toyama, and Salmela-Aro (2021) investigated school heads' stress profiles during COVID-19, demands, and resources. The study identified differing stress profiles among principals during COVID-19 and related them to job demands and available resources. Rather than treating school heads as a homogeneous group, the findings show that combinations of demands and resources matter. This supports the present study's effort to preserve individual lived experiences while seeking shared themes among school principals.

A study conducted by Ning (2021) focused on heads' time allocation in the context of Shanghai school administration. Ning examined how principals allocated their work time across administrative and instructional activities in Shanghai. The study is highly relevant because time is the practical medium through which simultaneous demands are reconciled: giving attention to one domain necessarily constrains attention elsewhere. It provides empirical support for asking how principals prioritize, sequence, and protect activities in crowded workdays.

Horwood et al. (2021) explored how passion relates to burnout and job satisfaction among school principals. The passionate school heads, burnout, and job satisfaction extended the dualistic model of passion. Using a large longitudinal sample of Australian school leaders, the study distinguished harmonious and obsessive passion and linked these orientations differently with burnout and job satisfaction. The findings suggest that strong commitment to leadership is not automatically protective; how the role is internalized matters. This is relevant to interpreting principals who continue to work intensely despite strain and who may describe both fulfillment and depletion.

Reid and Creed (2021) conducted a study regarding the nontraditional work-hour activities and job satisfaction among school heads. The study focused on school heads' work conducted beyond traditional work hours and its relationship with job satisfaction. It reinforces the idea that heads' workload extends beyond the visible school day and may involve evening or weekend tasks. For the present study, this contributes to understanding the "emotional demands" of leadership, particularly when unfinished demands follow leaders into personal time.

Crisis Leadership, Coping, and Work Conditions

Arastaman and Çetinkaya (2022) investigated the stressors faced by principals, ways of coping with stress, and leadership experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through semi-structured interviews with 12 principals, the study identified stressors encountered during the pandemic and the ways leaders coped while exercising crisis leadership. Its qualitative design is particularly relevant to the current phenomenological work because it demonstrates the value of leaders' own accounts for revealing how demands are appraised and managed. It also suggests that coping involves both personal and organizational strategies.

Çevik, Neyişci, and Erçetin (2022) conducted a qualitative analysis of school principals' stress sources and coping methods. This qualitative analysis investigated school principals' stress sources and coping methods, showing that administrative, interpersonal, and task-related pressures can overlap. School heads used a range of problem-focused

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and emotion-focused responses. The study is relevant because it supports examining coping as a repertoire that changes with the kind of demand rather than as a single stable behavior.

Dadaczynski et al. (2022) conducted a study that examined the health literacy and mental health of school heads. This German cross-sectional survey of 680 school heads found meaningful links between health literacy and mental health indicators. The findings suggest that school heads' capacity to access, understand, and use health information may be a resource when work is demanding. For the present study, this broadens the possible coping-resource domain beyond staffing and organizational support to include personal knowledge and self-management capacity.

Duong et al. (2022) investigated COVID-19-related fear, stress, and depression among school heads, including impacts of symptoms like COVID-19, information confusion, health-related activity limitations, working hours, sense of coherence, and health literacy. The study examined COVID-19-related fear, stress, and depression among school heads and considered the role of health literacy. It provides evidence that external crises can amplify both psychological and organizational demands on school leaders. The study is relevant to the present investigation because of the recognition that leaders must continue making consequential decisions even when they themselves are exposed to uncertainty and emotional strain.

A study conducted by Fotheringham et al. (2022) explored the pressures and influences on school heads navigating policy development during the COVID-19 pandemic. School heads described navigating rapidly developing policy while simultaneously responding to local school realities. The study highlights the interpretive work required when official guidance is changing or incomplete. This closely aligns with sensemaking theory and with the present question of how school heads interpret their experiences and convert policy expectations into action.

Kaufman, Diliberti, and Hamilton (2022) conducted a study that examined how principals perceived resource needs and job demands are related to their dissatisfaction and intention to leave their schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a nationally representative panel of principals, the study linked perceived resource needs and job demands with dissatisfaction and intention to leave during the pandemic. The findings reinforce the JD-R proposition that demanding work becomes more harmful when adequate resources are unavailable. For intervention design, this suggests that reducing unnecessary demands and strengthening resources may be more effective than relying only on individual coping.

A cross-sectional study conducted by Lau et al. (2022) focused on perceived stress, well-being, and their relations with work-related behaviors among Hong Kong school principals during the COVID-19 pandemic. It showed that work patterns and leader well-being are intertwined. For the present research, the study supports exploring behaviors such as extended work, recovery, help-seeking, and boundary management as part of the lived experience of organizational demands.

Ling et al. (2022) examined the administrative stressors and psychological and physiological symptoms among novice primary school heads. The study focused on novice primary school heads and connected administrative stressors with psychological and physiological symptoms. It is relevant because it locates stress within specific leadership tasks rather than treating it as a generalized state. The findings also suggest that experience level may influence how principals interpret and manage demands, an issue the present study can explore in participants' narratives.

Another study conducted by Burke, Kinnarney, and Salokangas (2022) explored how well-being and daily responsibilities shaped perceived stress among post-primary school leaders in "Split in all directions": An exploration of the impact of well-being and daily responsibilities on post-primary school leaders' perceived stress. The study's description of school leaders being "split in all directions" captures the fragmentation created by multiple daily responsibilities. Leaders' perceived stress was connected to the cumulative character of their work rather than one

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isolated duty. This is conceptually very close to the current study, which specifically investigates multiple organizational demands and their personal meaning for school principals.

Cahapay (2022) conducted a phenomenological study among school heads leading without a guidebook: Educational leadership practices of Philippine school heads in virulent COVID-19 times. A phenomenological approach was utilized to examine Philippine school principals leading in an unprecedented crisis without a ready-made guidebook. The study showed how leaders relied on adaptive practices while facing uncertainty. Its Philippine context and lived-experience orientation strongly support the methodology of the present study, while the current research moves beyond a pandemic-specific situation to examine everyday multiple organizational demands.

Resources, Time, Role Conflict, and Work Intensification

Beausaert et al. (2023) examined the role of social capital in school heads' well-being. This longitudinal study showed that social capital and supportive relationships are important for school heads' well-being. This is highly relevant to the present study because colleagues, supervisors, and professional networks may function as resources when demands are high. It also supports looking beyond individual resilience to relational and organizational forms of support in the proposed intervention.

A study conducted by Chen, Bellibaş, and Gümüş (2023) analyzed the impact of school climate and resources on school heads' workload stress and job satisfaction: Multinational evidence from TALIS 2018 data. Using TALIS 2018 data from 47 jurisdictions, the study modeled how school climate and resources relate to school heads' workload stress and job satisfaction. The multinational evidence indicates that organizational context matters substantially. This supports the present inquiry into Orion District by showing that broad patterns exist but also need local qualitative interpretation to reveal how demands are actually experienced.

Elomaa et al. (2023) investigated the work-related stress of elementary school principals in Finland: Coping strategies and support. Finnish elementary school heads described work-related stress, coping strategies, and forms of support in open-ended responses. The study is particularly comparable because it centers on elementary school leaders and gives attention to leaders' own descriptions. It supports the present study's focus on both the demands encountered and the strategies school heads use to remain functional.

Another study conducted by Leksy et al. (2023) examined work-related stress as a burnout risk factor among Polish school heads during the pandemic. The study showed that work-related stress was a risk factor for principal burnout during the pandemic. The findings add empirical support to the cumulative-strain pathway proposed by JD-R theory. For this study, it strengthens the rationale for listening for narratives of chronic overload, emotional exhaustion, and diminished recovery while remaining open to resilience and positive adaptation.

Marsh et al. (2023) conducted a study regarding school heads' mental health and well-being under threat: A longitudinal analysis of workplace demands, resources, burnout, and well-being. The longitudinal study examined how school heads workplace demands and resources relate over time to burnout and well-being. Its design strengthens the argument that leader well-being is dynamically connected to work conditions. The current phenomenological study complements this evidence by asking how school principals themselves explain the demands and resources that shape their daily leadership.

Ning et al. (2023) examined how workday time allocation related to somatic and psychological discomfort among Shanghai school heads. Among 347 Shanghai school heads, the way the workday was allocated was associated with somatic and psychological discomfort. The study shows that time allocation is not only a productivity issue but also a well-being issue. This is important for the present study because simultaneous demands are likely to be experienced through constant switching, deferred tasks, and difficult decisions about where limited time should go.

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Wang, Pollock, and Hauseman (2023) investigated time demands and emotionally draining situations amid work intensification of school heads. The study found that fast pace, long hours, and lack of time increased principals' exposure to emotionally draining situations. It is especially useful for this research because it connects workload with emotional labor rather than treating them as separate domains. It suggests that time pressure may intensify the emotional consequences of personnel, parent, and accountability issues.

A study conducted by Castro (2023) regarding managing simultaneous demands in a teacher shortage context: The impact of teacher shortages on principal leadership practices. Castro directly examined how teacher shortages altered school head practice and created simultaneous demands. School heads had to devote attention to staffing and coverage while still being expected to lead instruction and improvement. The study is one of the closest empirical precedents to the current topic, but its focus is a specific shortage context; the present research examines the broader constellation of organizational demands in public elementary schools.

Asuncion (2023) conducted a study that captured the physical, emotional, and mental stress described by Philippine elementary and secondary school heads in "I am physically, emotionally, and mentally stressed": From the voices of the elementary and secondary school heads. The study is valuable for establishing local relevance: principal strain is not only an international concern. The present study extends this line of inquiry by centering not stress alone but the underlying experience of reconciling multiple organizational demands and the meanings attached to those encounters.

Desabayla and Digo (2023) conducted a study regarding stressors and coping mechanisms of secondary school heads. This study identified stressors experienced by secondary school heads and the coping mechanisms they used. Its local evidence supports the inclusion of coping in the present research. At the same time, the survey format differs from the current phenomenological approach, which is designed to uncover how leaders interpret the tension among demands and why particular coping responses become meaningful.

Philippine Leadership Challenges and Lived Experiences

A phenomenological study conducted by Villanueva and Buenbrazo (2023) examined the challenges encountered by school administrators during the new normal education. Nine integrated school administrators described challenges encountered in the new-normal education setting. The phenomenological design demonstrated how local qualitative inquiry can surface shared meanings across leaders facing complex change. This study supports the methodological direction of the present research while leaving room to investigate a different locale, an elementary-school focus, and a broader set of organizational demands.

Another study by Arciaga and Astillero (2023) documented the challenges met and strategies employed by the school principals in the implementation of the modular distance learning modality. The study documented school principals' challenges and strategies in implementing modular distance learning. It shows how leaders mobilize resources, communicate with stakeholders, and adjust procedures when an instructional delivery system generates new administrative demands. The present study broadens the phenomenon beyond one modality and asks how such demands interact with the full set of school leadership responsibilities.

Paquera (2023) conducted a study that explored the lived experiences of school administrators and teachers in the new normal: Basis for management plan. Paquera explored the lived experiences of school administrators and teachers in the new normal and used the findings as a basis for a management plan. This is relevant because it demonstrates a pathway from qualitative experience to practical intervention. The current study follows a comparable logic but focuses more specifically on school heads' multiple organizational demands and the intervention implications arising from those experiences.

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Elnar and Tiongzon (2023) conducted a descriptive phenomenological study of the lives and work of school principals in integrated public schools. This descriptive phenomenological study identified themes related to workload, stress, curricular transitions, finance, and leadership challenges among heads of integrated public schools. The thematic overlap with the present study is substantial, especially in showing that leadership pressure is multidimensional. However, the current research is delimited to public elementary school principals in Orion District and specifically examines how simultaneous demands are interpreted and balanced.

Chen, Walker, and Riley (2023) conducted a study regarding reconceptualizing principal well-being: State, measurement, and consequences. Across sequential empirical samples, the researchers reconceptualized principal well-being and developed a multidimensional Principal Well-Being Inventory. The work demonstrates that school head well-being includes distinct but related dimensions rather than a single global feeling. Although the present study does not use a scale, this evidence sensitizes the qualitative analysis to emotional, cognitive, social, and occupational aspects of leadership experience.

A study conducted by Ertem (2024) focused on school leadership fostering mental health in times of crisis: Synthesis of school heads' views and PISA 2022. Ertem connected school leadership, crisis conditions, and mental health support using principals' views alongside PISA 2022 evidence. The study reinforces that leaders have responsibilities for both organizational continuity and the well-being of school communities. Such dual responsibility can generate overlapping priorities, making the study relevant to the present focus on how school heads weigh urgent human needs against institutional requirements.

Su-Keene and DeMatthews (2025) conducted a mixed-methods single-case study regarding stress overload among school heads, focusing on stress accumulation, sleep, and well-being over a school year. The study followed a school head across an academic year to examine how leadership stresses accumulated and how they interacted with sleep and well-being. The findings showed that school heads' stress developed through the accumulation of recurring work demands and insufficient opportunities for recovery rather than through isolated events alone. The researchers emphasized the importance of considering sleep and recovery when examining school head well-being. This study is relevant to the present investigation because it illustrates the often overlooked and cumulative effects of demanding leadership work and supports the inclusion of well-being and organizational support in understanding simultaneous demands.

A study conducted by Kutsyuruba, Arghash, and Al Makhamreh (2024) focused on school leaders' well-being: Perceptions of Canada's Outstanding School Heads. The study examined school heads recognized through Canada's Outstanding School Heads program and asked how even highly successful leaders understand well-being, barriers, coping, and system support. Its importance lies in showing that competence or recognition does not eliminate demanding work. The study also identifies coping and policy supports that can inform the intervention dimension of the present research.

Another study conducted by Hungo, Casinillo, and Madrigal (2024) is titled " Leadership and challenges: A phenomenological exploration of teacher-principals in the Philippines. The study explored the experiences of teacher-principals who carry leadership duties while remaining close to instructional work. Their accounts highlight role overlap and the practical difficulty of satisfying multiple expectations. The study is relevant because role combination is an intensified form of simultaneous demand, while the present inquiry considers school principals whose organizational responsibilities span several leadership domains.

Lopez (2024) conducted a study regarding a school-based resilience leadership framework for principals in times of disaster. Lopez developed a school-based resilience leadership framework grounded in principals' experiences during disasters. The work is relevant because emergencies compress decision time and require principals to coordinate

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safety, communication, continuity, and resources simultaneously. It demonstrates how lived leadership challenges can be translated into an organized framework for future support.

Recent Adaptation, Well-Being, and Organizational Response

A study conducted by Malto, Painaga, and Paz (2024) described how Philippine school leaders fostered students' learning engagement and well-being during the pandemic. Their experiences required attention to instruction, communication, psychosocial support, and operational continuity. The study illustrates the interconnected character of leadership demands and supports the present study's interest in how principals balance priorities that are all educationally legitimate.

A study conducted by Yeh, Ravalier, and Chang (2025) focused on unveiling English school heads' intentional well-being cultivation practices during a global pandemic. English school principals described intentional practices used to cultivate well-being during a global crisis. The study is relevant because it treats well-being as something leaders actively manage through boundaries, relationships, routines, and purposeful choices. These practices offer useful comparative categories for interpreting the coping mechanisms described by Orion District school principals.

Fang et al. (2025) conducted a study that investigated school heads' job burnout and job satisfaction in Finland: The impact of work–family conflict, role conflict, and sense of community. The Finnish study connects principal burnout and job satisfaction with work–family conflict, role conflict, and sense of community. Role conflict is particularly germane to the current topic because it represents incompatible or overlapping expectations within the leadership role. The protective relevance of community also supports attention to collegial support and shared leadership as resources.

A study conducted by Wang (2025) explored the emotional well-being of school principals: Exploring enhancement and risk factors. Wang found that resilience and organizational support can enhance school heads' emotional well-being, while demanding work conditions such as long hours and emotionally draining situations pose risks. The findings directly support a balanced intervention perspective: strengthen resources while also addressing work design. The study further validates emotional well-being as a meaningful leadership outcome.

A study conducted by Ponton and Benedetti (2025) examined how work hours relate to work-life balance among Texas school heads in Balancing the Clock. It adds contemporary evidence to the idea that leadership demands extend beyond formal schedules and compete with recovery and family time. For the present study, it supports probing how school heads establish boundaries, carry unfinished work home, and decide which responsibilities can be delayed.

Almagro, Bacang, and Calumpang (2025) conducted a study regarding reflections on school governance and the lived experiences of school heads. Philippine school heads reflected on governance under constrained conditions and described multifaceted barriers in carrying out their responsibilities. The study is highly relevant because governance demands intersect with people, resources, compliance, and instructional priorities. The current study narrows the lens to the experience of simultaneous demands in Orion District and uses those experiences as a basis for intervention design.

A study conducted by Duray (2025) regarding the lived experiences of school principals in the change and reforms in the educational landscape: A phenomenological study. This study examined public school heads navigating educational change and reform, with attention to decision-making, coping, and adaptation. This provides recent Philippine evidence that reform is experienced through day-to-day leadership work. The current study complements it by focusing specifically on how simultaneous organizational demands are interpreted, prioritized, and reconciled.

Another study conducted by Prestoza and Naldoza (2025) focused on the challenges and practices of instructional leadership: A qualitative inquiry of school heads and teachers. Through focus groups and interviews with five school heads and seven teachers, the study examined instructional leadership challenges and practices using the PIMRS as

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an analytic guide. It is relevant because it shows the continuing importance of protecting the instructional core even when school heads face organizational constraints. The present study investigates what happens when instructional leadership must compete with other legitimate responsibilities.

A study conducted by Murray et al. (2025) delved into the tensions that stultify education: School heads reflecting on their professional relationships. The study explored tensions in school heads' professional relationships and how those tensions can constrain educational work. It demonstrates that leadership demands are not only task-based; they are also relational and political. For the present study, this supports examining stakeholder expectations, staff relationships, and difficult conversations as part of the simultaneous organizational landscape.

Gumilao and Dagondon (2026) conducted a phenomenological study of school heads' lived experiences balancing teaching-learning and school administration. This recent Philippine phenomenological study directly explored school heads' lived experiences between teaching-learning and school administration. The reported tension between these domains is strongly aligned with the present topic. The Orion District study extends that concern by examining a wider set of organizational demands—financial, personnel, stakeholder, safety, policy, and improvement responsibilities—and how leaders make sense of their combined weight.

Research Gap

The empirical studies consistently show that principal work is characterized by high demands, long or fragmented work hours, emotionally draining encounters, role conflict, policy uncertainty, staffing pressures, and the need to protect instructional leadership amid administrative work. Quantitative and longitudinal studies demonstrate associations among demands, resources, stress, burnout, job satisfaction, and well-being, while qualitative studies reveal coping through prioritization, relationship building, adaptation, delegation, boundary management, and professional support. Philippine studies likewise document stress, crisis leadership, governance difficulties, modular learning challenges, instructional leadership concerns, and the lived experience of change.

Despite this growing evidence base, important gaps remain. Much of the international literature is survey-based, crisis-specific, or focused on a single demand such as workload, staffing, stress, instructional leadership, or policy change. Philippine qualitative studies provide valuable local accounts, but many center pandemic conditions, a specific delivery modality, governance in general, or broad educational reform. Few recent studies place the simultaneous competition among instructional, administrative, financial, human-resource, stakeholder, safety, and policy demands at the center of the phenomenon and then ask how public elementary school heads interpret, prioritize, and cope with those demands in a specific district context.

The present study addressed that gap through phenomenological inquiry among public elementary school heads in the Orion District, Schools Division of Bataan. It did not seek to measure leadership effectiveness or generalize statistically. Instead, it sought the essence and meaning of the leaders' experiences, the demands they identified as simultaneous, the sensemaking processes they used, the coping and leadership strategies they employed, and the themes that informed a context-responsive intervention program.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1. Paradigm of the Study

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The framework begins with the multiple organizational demands encountered by public elementary school heads, including instructional, administrative, human-resource, financial, stakeholder, safety and crisis, policy, digital, and accountability responsibilities. These demands may occur simultaneously and require school principals to determine which concerns are urgent, legitimate, and most important within a particular school situation.

The second component, sensemaking and interpretation, represents how school principals understand and assign meaning to these simultaneous demands. Through this process, they interpret organizational expectations, determine priorities, and consider the possible consequences of their decisions. Their interpretations then influence the leadership balancing and response strategies they employ, such as prioritization, delegation, adaptive problem solving, communication, and personal or collective coping.

These leadership responses contributed to the lived-experience outcomes of school principals. Such outcomes included experiences of role conflict, work overload, stress, emotional labor, and decision fatigue, as well as resilience, well-being, and perceptions of school functioning. The phenomenological inquiry sought to uncover how participants described and made sense of these experiences rather than to establish causal relationships among the components.

From the participants' narratives, essential themes were identified to describe the shared meaning and essence of managing multiple organizational demands. These themes served as the empirical basis for designing an intervention program that may strengthen leadership support, coping resources, organizational processes, and sustainable leadership practices among public elementary school heads.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of public elementary school heads in managing multiple organizational demands in the Orion District, Schools Division of Bataan, as input for designing an intervention program. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What lived experiences do public elementary school heads describe in managing multiple organizational demands within their school?

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2. What organizational demands do public elementary school heads commonly encounter in the performance of their leadership roles?
3. How do public elementary school heads make sense of and interpret their experiences in managing multiple organizational demands?
4. What coping mechanisms and leadership strategies do public elementary school heads employ in responding to multiple organizational demands?
5. What essential themes emerge from the lived experiences of public elementary school heads in managing multiple organizational demands?
6. Based on the findings of the study, what inputs can be proposed for the design of an intervention program?

Significance of the Study

This study was deemed significant to the following:

Public Elementary School Heads. It could enable school heads to take some time to consider their own leadership experiences and how many of the issues they face in their school are common to other schools. An awareness of the common threads in their experience can foster a sense of joint problem-solving, resilience within the profession, and more sustainable leadership.

Schools Division Office of Bataan. The Schools Division Office may draw on the results to enhance supervisory practices and mentoring of school principals and district-level interventions. Findings from the study could help division officials design programs that better support the effectiveness of leadership with context-specific challenges faced by school administrators in the division. The findings served as the direct foundational input for the intervention program proposed in this study.

Department of Education (DepEd). The findings can provide empirical evidence that can help the Department of Education to develop leadership development programs, wellness programs, and organizational support, which are responsive to the school principals. The study could also be used to reflect on leadership policies and administrative expectations and ensure that the expectations of the administration are sustainable, balanced, and attuned to the experiences of the leaders in the school.

Aspiring School Heads. Teachers who aspire to be in the pathway of leadership realistically base their presumptions of the position on the description stated in the documents, without comprehending the day-to-day activities and tensions that are really observable in terms of balancing instructional, administrative, financial, and also stakeholder-related responsibilities. Since this study focused on the lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and strategies used by the school heads in dealing with these simultaneous demands, it provided a profound, tangible, and experience-based view of what leadership really entails, beyond its surface level of formal duties and responsibilities. This could benefit the aspiring school principals by preparing them to have a surmountable psychological preparedness, tangible expectations, and coping strategies that on-the-ground school principals have found effective. This would also contribute to a manageable and stronger leadership pipeline through helping the aspiring leaders transition into the position with more readiness, clarity, and resilience.

Future Researchers. This study could be used as a reference for other qualitative and phenomenological studies in educational leadership, organizational behavior, school administration, and educational leadership well-being. It might also give a reference point for research on varying educational contexts, leadership situations, and organizational settings.

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Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focused on exploring the lived experiences of public elementary school heads in managing multiple organizational demands using a phenomenological research design. Specifically, it sought to understand how school heads perceive, interpret, and assign meaning to their experiences while fulfilling multiple leadership responsibilities within their respective schools.

The population of the study consisted of fourteen (14) public elementary school heads assigned in the Orion District, Schools Division of Bataan. From this population, eight (8) school heads participated in the in-depth interviews through purposive sampling, ensuring that only school heads who possessed substantial leadership experience and had directly encountered multiple organizational demands were included in the study. The eight participants represented two (2) large schools and six (6) small schools. Availability during the approved data-gathering period was also considered because some eligible school heads had prior official commitments, meetings, trainings, school activities, and other professional responsibilities that coincided with the interview schedule.

Data were gathered primarily through in-depth semi-structured interviews, supplemented by field notes and reflective memos whenever necessary. The collected data were analyzed using an appropriate phenomenological data analysis method to identify significant statements, formulate meanings, cluster themes, and describe the essence of the participants' lived experiences.

The study was delimited to the experiences of public elementary school heads within the Orion District and did not include school principals from private schools, secondary schools, or other districts within the Schools Division of Bataan. Likewise, the study did not seek to measure leadership effectiveness, organizational performance, employee satisfaction, or academic achievement through quantitative indicators. Instead, it was concerned solely with understanding the subjective meanings and lived experiences of participants regarding the multiple organizational demands they encountered in their leadership roles.

Furthermore, the findings of this study were limited to the narratives shared by the participants during the data collection period. Although the results may provide meaningful insights into educational leadership within similar contexts, they were not intended to be statistically generalized to all public-school principals in the Philippines. Rather, the study aimed to provide a rich, in-depth understanding of the phenomenon as experienced by public elementary school principals in the Orion District, thereby contributing to the existing body of knowledge on educational leadership and phenomenological research. These in-depth understandings served as the primary input for designing the proposed intervention program.

Assumptions of the Study

1. Public elementary school heads experience multiple organizational demands that can become simultaneous, interdependent, and context-dependent rather than occurring as isolated tasks.
2. School heads actively construct meaning from simultaneous demands through reflection, prior experience, policy interpretation, communication, and interaction with teachers, supervisors, learners, parents, and community stakeholders.
3. The experience of a demand is influenced by available organizational and personal resources; therefore, the same responsibility may be experienced differently across school heads and school contexts.
4. Leadership responses may include both strain and adaptation. School heads can experience workload, role conflict, emotional labor, or decision fatigue while also demonstrating resilience, learning, problem-solving, and commitment.
5. In-depth semi-structured interviews can elicit rich descriptions sufficient to identify significant statements, meanings, and essential themes concerning the phenomenon.

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6. Shared themes derived from the participants' narratives can inform a context-responsive intervention program, even though the findings are not intended for statistical generalization to all school heads in the Philippines.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were defined conceptually and operationally.

Multiple organizational demands. Refers to simultaneous or overlapping responsibilities and expectations that require school principals to allocate limited time, attention, emotional energy, and resources. Operationally, these include instructional, administrative, financial, personnel, stakeholder, safety, policy, digital, and accountability demands identified in participants' narratives (Bakker et al., 2023; Dulude & Milley, 2021).

Coping Mechanisms. Refers to cognitive, behavioral, relational, and self-regulatory responses used to manage or reduce the effects of demanding situations. In this study, the term includes strategies school heads describe for setting priorities, seeking support, establishing boundaries, restoring functioning, and sustaining leadership. The concept is treated together with organizational protection from psychosocial risks rather than as an individual responsibility alone (World Health Organization, 2022; World Health Organization & International Labour Organization, 2022).

Decision-Making. Refers to the process through which a school principal interprets available information, weighs alternatives and consequences, and selects a course of action. Operationally, it concerns decisions made when multiple legitimate demands compete for attention (Turner et al., 2023).

Emotional Labor. Refers to the management and expression of emotion as part of professional leadership interactions. In this study, it includes situations in which school heads regulate feelings while responding to conflict, staff concerns, parent issues, accountability, crises, or other demanding encounters. It is understood as part of the relational and psychosocial conditions of leadership work (Riley, 2022; International Organization for Standardization, 2021).

Intervention Program. Refers to the proposed set of support activities, structures, or mechanisms to be designed from the themes of the study. It may address workload, role clarification, peer support, mentoring, leadership development, coping resources, or organizational processes identified by participants as needing support.

Lived Experiences. Refer to the first-person meanings, perceptions, feelings, interpretations, and everyday realities through which school heads encounter and understand multiple organizational demands. The term is used phenomenologically and emphasizes experience as described by participants rather than externally measured performance.

Organizational Demands. Refer to work requirements arising from the school and the education system that require sustained effort from the school heads. They may include workload, role conflict, deadlines, compliance, interpersonal issues, resource constraints, and accountability expectations (Bakker et al., 2023).

Public Elementary School Heads. Refers operationally to the school heads managing public elementary schools in the Orion District, Schools Division of Bataan, who meet the inclusion criteria of the study.

Resilience. Refers to the capacity to maintain, recover, or adapt leadership functioning when confronted with adversity, uncertainty, or sustained work demands. In this study, resilience is understood as both an individual and relational-organizational process rather than simple endurance (OECD, 2021a; Kutsyuruba et al., 2024).

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Role Conflict. Refers to tension arising when different role expectations are incompatible, difficult to satisfy simultaneously, or require different actions. Operationally, it includes conflicts such as administrative compliance versus instructional leadership or staff support versus accountability (Fang et al., 2025).

School Leadership. Refers to the influence, coordination, decision-making, and organizational work through which a school head guides teaching, people, resources, relationships, and school improvement. In this study, it includes both formal administrative responsibilities and relational/adaptive leadership processes (Northouse, 2022; Harris & Jones, 2023).

Sensemaking. Refers to the process of noticing cues, interpreting ambiguity, constructing plausible meaning, and using that interpretation to guide action. Operationally, it concerns how school heads explain and prioritize simultaneous demands in their own context (Turner et al., 2023).

Workload and Work Intensification. Refers to the volume, pace, complexity, interruptions, after-hours activity, and time pressure embedded in school-principal work. In this study, the concept also includes the coordination burden created when multiple responsibilities must be completed within limited time and organizational capacity. It is interpreted in relation to workload design, role distribution, and organizational support (Department of Education, 2024c; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2024).

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METHODS

This section describes the research design, participants and sampling procedures, research instrument and its validation, data-gathering procedures, data processing and analytical lens, procedures for establishing trustworthiness, and ethical safeguards that guided the study. The methodological decisions were aligned with the purpose of exploring the lived experiences of public elementary school heads in the Orion District, Schools Division of Bataan, as they managed multiple organizational demands, and of generating inputs for designing an intervention program. Because the study sought to understand how school heads experienced, interpreted, and gave meaning to these demands, the procedures emphasized in-depth description, participant voice, reflexivity, and systematic phenomenological analysis.

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative descriptive phenomenological research design. Phenomenology is appropriate when a study seeks to examine a phenomenon as it is experienced by individuals and to describe the shared essence of those experiences rather than to measure relationships among variables (McLeod, 2024). Creswell and Poth (2023) identify phenomenology as one of the major qualitative approaches for investigating the meaning of lived experience among persons who have experienced the same phenomenon. In the present study, the phenomenon was the experience of concurrently managing instructional, administrative, human-resource, financial, stakeholder, policy, safety, digital, and accountability demands.

More specifically, the study followed a descriptive phenomenological orientation. This approach is suitable because the investigation was intended to remain close to the participants' descriptions of what they experienced, how they interpreted organizational pressures, and how they responded to them in everyday school leadership. Recent methodological reviews emphasize that descriptive phenomenology requires clear alignment among the philosophical position, data collection, bracketing, and the analytic procedure used to derive the essence of experience (Shorey & Ng, 2022; Abraham & Padmakumari, 2025). The design therefore prioritized rich first-person accounts and a transparent analytic process.

The principal method of data collection was individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured format provided a common set of questions aligned with the research problems while allowing the researchers to ask probes, request examples, clarify meanings, and follow significant experiences raised by participants. Field notes supplemented the interviews by documenting contextual information, nonverbal expressions, pauses, emphases, and immediate analytic reflections that helped the researchers understand the participants' narratives more fully.

The study did not use the four theoretical perspectives in Chapter II as predetermined coding categories. In keeping with the phenomenological orientation, the first cycle of analysis allowed meanings and themes to emerge from the participants' accounts. The Job Demands-Resources, Multifaceted Sensemaking, Paradoxical Leadership, and Complexity Leadership perspectives were used later in interpreting and discussing the themes, rather than as a template that restricted what participants were allowed to reveal. This separation was intended to preserve openness to the phenomenon while still allowing the findings to be situated within the study's theoretical foundation.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in the Orion District under the Schools Division of Bataan. The participants were public elementary school heads assigned to schools within the district. They were considered information-rich participants because their positions require them to coordinate instructional leadership, school operations, personnel concerns, resource management, stakeholder relations, policy implementation, learner protection, and school improvement activities, often within the same work period.

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Purposive criterion sampling was employed. This non-probability sampling strategy is appropriate because the participants were required to have direct and substantial experience of the phenomenon being investigated. Within the eligible group, the researchers also sought reasonable variation in years of leadership experience, school context, and school size when feasible so that the study could capture different expressions of the same phenomenon without changing its central focus. Availability during the approved data-gathering period served as a practical consideration after the inclusion criteria had been satisfied.

The study population consisted of fourteen (14) public elementary school heads in the Orion District. From this population, eight (8) school heads constituted the actual participants of the in-depth interviews. Two (2) participants represented large elementary schools and six (6) represented small elementary schools. The unequal distribution was not intended for statistical comparison but to describe the school contexts represented in the inquiry. Some other eligible school heads were not available during the approved data-gathering period because of prior official commitments and scheduled school, district, or division-related activities. Hennink and Kaiser (2022) emphasize that sample adequacy in qualitative research depends on the study purpose, participant specificity, and saturation rather than on a universal numerical rule. The researchers therefore examined the richness and recurrence of relevant meanings across the eight interviews in determining the adequacy of the data.

Inclusion Criteria

Participants were included if they were serving as public elementary school heads in the Orion District, Schools Division of Bataan; had substantial experience performing school-head functions and sufficient exposure to recurring organizational demands; and had personally encountered situations requiring the simultaneous management of multiple school responsibilities or stakeholder expectations. They also had to be willing to participate voluntarily in an in-depth interview and, when necessary, in a brief follow-up or member-checking activity. All participants were required to provide informed consent. Audio recording was requested; when recording was declined, participation could proceed only if accurate contemporaneous note-taking was feasible and permitted under the approved research protocol.

Exclusion Criteria

Excluded were school heads assigned exclusively to private schools, secondary schools, or schools outside the Orion District, as well as individuals who had served only in short-term or purely acting capacities without sufficient exposure to the school-head role. Eligible school heads who were on extended leave or otherwise unavailable during the approved data-gathering period were not included; this covered those whose official commitments, meetings, trainings, school activities, or other professional responsibilities prevented their participation in the scheduled interviews. Those who declined informed consent or withdrew before their data had been fully anonymized and incorporated into the analysis were also excluded, subject to the approved consent procedure.

Research Instrument

In qualitative phenomenological research, the researchers themselves served as the primary instruments for engaging participants, listening to their accounts, asking follow-up questions, recording observations, and interpreting meaning. To support consistency across interviews, the study used a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide. The guide was based directly on the Statement of the Problem and the conceptual focus of the study. It used open-ended, non-leading questions that encouraged participants to narrate concrete experiences rather than provide brief opinions or generalized statements.

The researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide consisted of six core questions that were directly aligned with the six specific questions in the Statement of the Problem. The first core question elicited concrete lived

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experiences of managing multiple organizational demands; the second identified the organizational demands commonly encountered; the third explored how principals make sense of and interpret those experiences; the fourth examined coping mechanisms and leadership strategies; the fifth invited participants to describe recurring situations, challenges, and patterns that characterize the experience; and the sixth solicited perceived forms of support or intervention that could help school heads manage simultaneous demands more effectively. An optional closing question allowed participants to share other experiences that they considered important to the study.

To ensure that the different forms of multiple organizational demands were clearly distinguished during the interview, the optional probes invited participants to identify the specific responsibilities involved in each narrated situation. For the lived-experience and organizational-demand questions, the interviewer asked participants to describe situations in which two or more responsibilities required attention at the same time and to clarify whether the simultaneous demands involved instructional supervision or curriculum work, administrative reporting and accountability, financial or resource-management responsibilities, personnel concerns, stakeholder expectations, policy compliance, safety or crisis management, or digital and program-related requirements. Where relevant, participants were also asked to describe conflicts between instructional and administrative responsibilities; financial or resource-management responsibilities and instructional, personnel, or learner needs; personnel or stakeholder concerns and policy or accountability requirements; and safety, disaster, child-protection, or crisis-management concerns occurring alongside routine instructional and administrative work.

For the sensemaking question, optional probes explored how principals determined which responsibility required immediate attention, what factors influenced their decisions, and what meaning they attached to the experience. For the coping and leadership-strategy question, probes asked how participants prioritized, delegated, communicated, adjusted plans, sought support, or decided whether a responsibility could be postponed, combined with another task, or temporarily deprioritized. These examples were used only as flexible clarification probes and not as a checklist of expected experiences; participants were first allowed to narrate their experiences freely so that the interview remained open-ended, non-leading, and consistent with descriptive phenomenology.

Table 1. Alignment of Research Questions, Interview Focus, and Data Source

Research Question	Interview Focus	Primary Data Source
1. Lived experiences in managing multiple organizational demands	Concrete episodes, simultaneous responsibilities, pressures, consequences, and day-to-day leadership experience	In-depth interview; field notes
2. Organizational demands commonly encountered	Instructional, administrative, personnel, financial, stakeholder, policy, safety/crisis, digital, and accountability demands	In-depth interview; field notes
3. Sensemaking and interpretation of experiences	Perceived urgency, legitimacy, priorities, meanings, values, and decision considerations	In-depth interview; reflective probes
4. Coping mechanisms and leadership strategies	Prioritization, delegation, communication, adaptive problem solving, personal and collective coping, support-seeking	In-depth interview; follow-up probes
5. Essential themes that emerge	Cross-participant patterns and the essence of the shared experience	Integrated interview transcripts; Colaizzi analysis

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6. Inputs for the design of an intervention program	Recurring leadership demands, support needs and gaps, helpful or insufficient coping practices, and proposed forms of organizational support or intervention	Integrated interview transcripts; field notes; finalized themes

Construction and Validation of the Instrument

The semi-structured interview guide was constructed after a careful review of the research questions, relevant theories, related literature, and recent studies on school leadership demands, school head stress and well-being, sensemaking, coping, and organizational response. The six core questions were checked for direct one-to-one alignment with the six specific questions in the Statement of the Problem, while the optional probes were examined for their ability to elicit concrete lived-experience descriptions without leading participants toward predetermined answers. Particular attention was given to whether the probes clearly distinguish among instructional, administrative and accountability, financial and resource-management, personnel, stakeholder, policy, safety or crisis, and digital or program-related demands, including situations in which two or more of these responsibilities occurred simultaneously. Questions or probes that are double-barreled, leading, overly theoretical, repetitive, or likely to produce only yes-or-no responses were revised into open-ended prompts that encourage detailed narration.

The initial interview guide was submitted to at least three qualified validators. The panel included an expert in qualitative or phenomenological research, an expert in educational management or school leadership, and a language or research-writing expert. They evaluated the guide in terms of relevance to the research questions, clarity, neutrality, sequencing, appropriateness of probes, sensitivity of wording, ability to elicit lived-experience descriptions, and clarity in distinguishing the different organizational demands without restricting participants to predetermined categories. Their comments and recommendations were documented and incorporated before data collection.

A pilot interview was then conducted with one or two public elementary school heads from a neighboring district who met the substantive inclusion criteria but were not part of the actual participant group. The pilot assessed whether the questions were understandable, whether the order supported a natural conversation, whether the probes elicited sufficiently rich descriptions, and whether the estimated interview duration was realistic. Because the instrument is qualitative and exploratory, internal-consistency statistics such as Cronbach's alpha were not computed. The purpose of validation was to strengthen content alignment and interview quality rather than to establish psychometric reliability.

Data-Gathering Procedure

Data gathering began only after the necessary institutional and administrative approvals had been obtained. The researchers secured approval from the appropriate Graduate School and research-ethics authorities, followed by formal permission from the Schools Division Office of Bataan and the concerned district or school authorities. Recruitment did not begin until these requirements had been completed.

Participant identification and invitation. Eligible school principals were identified using the approved inclusion criteria. Each prospective participant received an invitation explaining the purpose of the study, the expected time commitment, the voluntary nature of participation, the use of audio recording, and the confidentiality safeguards.

Informed consent and scheduling. Participants who expressed interest were provided with an informed-consent form and sufficient opportunity to ask questions. Interviews were scheduled at a time and place that minimized disruption

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to school operations and provided reasonable privacy. A secure online interview could be used only when face-to-face interviewing was impractical and when confidentiality could be adequately maintained.

Conduct of the interview. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes, although participants were allowed additional time when needed to complete a meaningful account. With permission, interviews were audio-recorded. The researchers used the semi-structured guide flexibly, asking probes for clarification, examples, emotions, decision processes, and meanings. Field notes were written during or immediately after each interview.

Transcription and preliminary review. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim as soon as practicable after each interview. If participants used Filipino, English, or a combination of languages, the original wording was preserved in the transcript. Excerpts intended for the final manuscript were translated into English when necessary while retaining the original-language version in the research records or appendices for auditability.

Iterative data collection. Early transcripts were reviewed while later interviews were still being conducted. This allowed the researchers to refine non-leading probes, identify areas requiring deeper exploration, and monitor the emergence of recurring meanings. The core interview questions remained consistent across participants.

Member checking and follow-up. Participants could be contacted for brief clarification when a statement was ambiguous. After the preliminary exhaustive description or thematic structure had been developed, participants were invited to comment on whether the description reasonably reflected their experience. Their feedback was documented and considered in the final analytic description, consistent with the validation step in Colaizzi's approach.

Data Processing and Analytical Lens

The interview transcripts, field notes, and reflective memos were organized by participant code rather than by name or school. The study used Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method as the principal analytical lens. Gumarang et al. (2021) discuss Colaizzi's method as a structured approach for organizing, analyzing, and presenting narrative data in educational descriptive phenomenology, while Vignato et al. (2022) illustrate how the method can be supported by computer-assisted qualitative data organization without transferring interpretive responsibility from the researcher to software.

Analysis proceeded iteratively rather than as a purely mechanical sequence. The researchers repeatedly returned to the original transcripts to ensure that formulated meanings and themes remained grounded in the participants' accounts. A qualitative data-management program could be used, if available, to organize transcripts, codes, memos, and theme matrices; however, all meaning formulation, clustering, and interpretation remained the responsibility of the researchers.

Familiarization with the data. Each transcript was read several times while the corresponding audio recording and field notes were reviewed when necessary. The purpose was to gain an overall sense of each participant's experience before fragmenting the narrative into analytic units.

Extraction of significant statements. Statements and passages that directly illuminate multiple organizational demands, leadership pressure, sensemaking, decision-making, coping, balancing strategies, consequences, and support needs were identified and indexed.

Formulation of meanings. The researchers articulated the underlying meaning of each significant statement while remaining close to the participant's intended sense. Interpretations that could not be supported by the transcript were revised or discarded.

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Clustering of meanings into theme groups. Related formulated meanings were compared across participants and were clustered into preliminary theme groups and subthemes. Contradictory or deviant accounts were retained and examined rather than forced into the dominant pattern.

Development of an exhaustive description. The validated theme structure was woven into a comprehensive description of what school principals experienced and how they experienced the management of multiple organizational demands.

Formulation of the fundamental structure. The exhaustive description was condensed into a clear statement of the essential structure or essence of the phenomenon without removing important contextual meaning.

Participant validation. The fundamental structure or an accessible summary of the findings was returned to participants for feedback on resonance and accuracy. Relevant corrections, clarifications, or elaborations were incorporated into the final account.

After the phenomenological themes had been finalized, the researchers examined how the themes answer each research question and how they could serve as inputs for an intervention program. The proposed intervention inputs were derived from recurring leadership demands, identified support gaps, coping practices that participants perceived as helpful or insufficient, and organizational conditions associated with more sustainable leadership. The four theories in Chapter II were then used as interpretive resources in the discussion to explain, compare, or extend the emergent themes; they did not replace the participants' meanings.

Reflexivity and Bracketing

Because phenomenological analysis requires careful attention to the participants' experience, the researchers maintained a reflexive journal throughout the study. Before data collection, each researcher recorded prior assumptions, professional experiences, expectations, and theoretical preferences related to school leadership and organizational demands. During interviewing and analysis, reflexive memos were used to identify moments when these preconceptions might influence questioning or interpretation.

Bracketing was not treated as a claim that the researchers can become completely free of prior knowledge. Rather, it functioned as a disciplined practice of making assumptions visible, suspending premature judgments, and repeatedly checking interpretations against the participants' actual words. The research team also conducted analytic debriefings in which members challenged unsupported interpretations and required transcript evidence for major themes.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Ahmed (2024) describes these dimensions as central pillars for demonstrating rigor in qualitative inquiry. The study used multiple procedures across data collection and analysis rather than relying on a single validation technique.

Credibility. This was strengthened through prolonged engagement with the interview material, iterative probing, transcript review, field notes, peer or research-team debriefing, and participant validation. The researchers preserved negative or divergent cases when they illuminated differences in how school principals experience the phenomenon.

Transferability. The researchers provided sufficiently detailed descriptions of the research setting, participant characteristics in non-identifying form, organizational context, and the conditions under which the themes emerged. This thick description enabled readers to judge whether the findings may be meaningful in comparable public-school leadership contexts.

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Dependability. An audit trail was maintained to document recruitment, interview-guide revisions, coding decisions, theme development, meeting notes, and major analytic changes. The same approved core interview guide and systematic analytic procedure was applied across participants while still allowing phenomenologically appropriate probing.

Confirmability. This was supported by reflexive journaling, retention of de-identified source transcripts, linkage of themes to significant statements, and research-team review of interpretations. The researchers distinguished participant accounts from their own reflections and avoided reporting a theme unless sufficient evidence was traceable to the data.

Ethical Considerations

The study observed the principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, non-coercion, and respect for participants. Participation or refusal had no effect on a school head's employment, professional standing, performance evaluation, or relationship with the researchers, the district, or the Schools Division Office. Participants could decline to answer any question and could withdraw in accordance with the approved consent protocol.

Because school heads might describe sensitive workplace experiences involving personnel, supervisors, parents, community stakeholders, or institutional decisions, special care was taken to prevent deductive identification. Participant codes such as SH1, SH2, and SH3 were used in transcripts and reports. School names, names of employees, and unnecessarily specific incidents or locations were removed or generalized when their inclusion might reveal identity without adding essential analytic value.

Digital recordings, transcripts, consent records, field notes, and analytic files were stored in password-protected or encrypted locations accessible only to the authorized research team. The identity key, when needed, was stored separately from the transcripts. Data were retained in accordance with the period required by university policy and the approved research protocol, with secure destruction stipulated thereafter. These practices were consistent with the confidentiality and security principles of the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173), which requires appropriate protection of personal information and recognizes strict confidentiality for research data.

The interviews were also conducted with sensitivity to possible emotional discomfort. Participants were not pressured to disclose incidents they consider confidential or distressing. If a participant became uncomfortable, the interview could be paused, redirected, or ended. The researchers reported findings in a way that communicates organizational realities without attributing blame to identifiable persons or schools.

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RESULTS

This section presents the findings in the order of the research questions. Consistent with the descriptive phenomenological design described in the Methods section, the interview narratives were analyzed using Colaizzi's method: significant statements were identified, meanings were formulated, related meanings were clustered, and the clusters were refined into themes that described the shared structure of the experience. Participants are referred to through school-head codes (SH1 to SH8) to protect their identities.

The section begins with the profile of the eight participants. It then presents, in turn, the lived experiences of school heads when organizational demands occurred simultaneously; the organizational demands that repeatedly required their time, attention, and resources; how they interpreted these demands and decided what to prioritize; the coping mechanisms and leadership strategies they used; the six essential themes and the fundamental structure of the phenomenon; and the inputs for the design of a context-responsive intervention program.

The analysis showed that simultaneous demands were not experienced merely as a long list of tasks. The difficulty lay in the fact that many demands were legitimate at the same time: a report might have a fixed deadline, a learner concern might require immediate action, a teacher might need guidance, a meeting might be mandated, and school facilities or resources might also require attention. The school heads therefore experienced leadership as a repeated process of weighing urgency, consequence, learner welfare, policy expectations, available people, and the capacity of the school to respond.

Profile of the Participants

School size was presented only as contextual information and not as a basis for statistical comparison. The phenomenological inquiry focused on the depth and shared meaning of the participants' experiences rather than equal numerical representation between school-size categories. To preserve confidentiality, the participants were identified only through the codes SH1 to SH8 in the presentation of the findings.

Table 2. Profile of the Participants

Participant Code	School Size Classification	Number of Years Serving as a School Principal	Number of Years Assigned in the Orion District
SH1	Large	6	6
SH2	Small	2	2
SH3	Large	12	11
SH4	Small	5	5
SH5	Small	13	3
SH6	Small	11	4
SH7	Small	10	3
SH8	Small	12	7

Table 2 presented the profile of the eight participants according to school-size classification and the leadership-tenure information gathered through the participant profile. Two of the eight participants (25%) represented large schools,

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while six (75%) represented small schools. The distribution reflected the actual participants available during the data-gathering period and was descriptive only; the study did not compare the two school-size categories statistically.

Lived Experiences in Managing Multiple Organizational Demands

The lived experiences of the school heads were characterized by simultaneity. Their accounts repeatedly described work arriving in clusters rather than in an orderly sequence. Reports coincided with parent concerns, meetings overlapped with school-level incidents, staff absences created immediate instructional gaps, and emergencies required action while routine administrative requirements remained due. The experience was therefore not simply one of being busy; it was one of having to choose among responsibilities that could all be justified as important.

One school head described the breadth of the role in particularly direct terms. The respondent explained that elementary school heads often operated with fewer administrative personnel than larger secondary schools and, during a period when an administrative officer went on indefinite leave, personally performed administrative, guidance, and school-head functions at the same time. This experience illustrated how organizational demands became heavier when the school lacked personnel to absorb specialized tasks.

"I acted as an administrative officer, a guidance counselor, and a school head at the same time." (SH1)

The statement reflected more than temporary task substitution. It pointed to role expansion, in which the school head became the default person for responsibilities that fell outside the instructional core whenever staffing became insufficient. In the language of the Job Demands–Resources Theory of Bakker, Demerouti, and Sanz-Vergel (2023), the number and intensity of job demands increase while the organizational resources available to meet them remain limited. This imbalance helps explain why the same school head can experience ordinary school operations as cumulative pressure rather than as separate tasks.

Another recurring experience was being pulled away from instructional leadership by tasks with more immediate administrative consequences. One participant described the practical difference between a report and a classroom observation: the report carried a visible deadline, while the observation could be moved to another day. The principal recognized the educational value of observation and coaching, yet the formal accountability attached to reporting frequently made compliance the more immediate choice.

"Reports have strict deadlines, and if you miss them, it is immediately noticed, while class observations or coaching can always be postponed to the next day." (SH5)

This tension was not limited to paperwork. Meetings, trainings, official communications, online forms, financial documentation, safety preparations, teacher concerns, parent complaints, and learner needs also required attention. SH7 summarized the experience by saying that work "does not come one by one, but all at once." In the same narrative, a teacher's extended leave occurred while the school was preparing for a division visit, completing a liquidation report, and monitoring learners' reading progress. The school head responded by spending mornings supporting classrooms and completing administrative requirements later in the day. Although required outputs were completed, the planned reading follow-up was delayed, and the school heads were left with a sense of guilt over the additional burden placed on teachers.

"I have learned that work does not come one by one, but all at once." (SH7)

The emotional dimension of these situations was also prominent. School heads described relief when tasks were completed, uneasiness when another legitimate responsibility had to wait, guilt when teachers carried additional work and worry about whether the decision made was the correct one. During flood recovery, for example, SH6 had to attend to damaged classrooms, coordinate cleanup, submit damage reports, continue learning arrangements, and

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prepare for monitoring. The principal later recognized that visible physical problems received attention more readily than the less visible emotional needs of teachers.

"The physical damage was visible and urgent, while the emotional and instructional needs were easy to overlook." (SH6)

This finding supported the description of school leadership as work that contained both visible tasks and hidden emotional labor. González and Aravena (2021) found that principal stress can be embedded in the continuing organization of leadership work rather than in isolated incidents. Burke, Kinnarney, and Salokangas (2022) similarly described school leaders as being "split in all directions" by daily responsibilities. In the Philippine context, Asuncion (2023) documented physical, emotional, and mental strain among school heads. The present findings extended these observations by showing how strain was produced through repeated choices among simultaneously legitimate demands.

Taken together, the lived experiences revealed an important contradiction. The principals were expected to remain calm, decisive, available, and accountable even when several demands also required the same limited time and attention. Their work was therefore experienced as a continuous balancing act in which success in one area might temporarily require postponement, delegation, or reduced attention in another.

Organizational Demands Commonly Encountered in the Leadership Role

The organizational demands described by the school heads clustered into interrelated areas. Although the specific situations varied by school, the demands repeatedly involved instructional leadership, administrative compliance, personnel management, financial and resource responsibilities, stakeholder relations, learner welfare and safety, and externally mandated activities. Table 3 summarized these areas and showed how each affected other parts of the principal's work.

Table 3. Organizational Demands Commonly Encountered by Public Elementary School Heads

Demand Area	Illustrative Responsibilities	Nature of Competition
Instructional leadership	Classroom observation, coaching, reading and numeracy monitoring, learning recovery, learner attendance, intervention for struggling learners.	Frequently postponed when reports, meetings, or urgent incidents require immediate attention.
Administrative and compliance work	Reports, data submissions, school plans, online links/forms, records, official group chats, memorandum-driven activities, monitoring requirements.	Carries fixed deadlines and visible accountability, making it difficult to defer.
Human-resource and personnel concerns	Teacher workload, attendance, absences, welfare, mentoring, task assignment, substitute arrangements, conflict resolution.	Often requires immediate interpersonal judgment while other scheduled duties continue.
Financial and resource management	MOOE planning, utilization and liquidation, learning materials, repairs, supplies, facilities, condemned or damaged buildings.	Limited funds require prioritization among several legitimate school needs.

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Stakeholder and community relations	Parent complaints, PTA/SPTA concerns, barangay and LGU coordination, community partnerships, conflict de-escalation.	Can become urgent and emotionally charged, particularly when trust or school credibility is involved.
Learner welfare, safety, and inclusion	Injuries, discipline, absenteeism, feeding, child protection, health, emergencies, continuity of learning.	Usually receives priority when immediate safety, welfare, or access to learning is at stake.
Meetings, trainings, policy and external directives	Division/district meetings, seminars, official memoranda, policy compliance, travel, emergency and contingency planning.	May remove the principal from the school and shift on-site responsibilities to teachers or designated teams.

Administrative and compliance work emerged as particularly intrusive because it was frequently time-bound and externally monitored. SH1 described reports, administrative paperwork, meetings, trainings, school activities, and unpredictable online links as recurring demands that reduced the time available for instructional supervision. SH5 and SH7 similarly described same-day or short-notice requests for data and documents as tasks that often took precedence over classroom observation because an external office was waiting for the output.

"There are times that I have to defer classroom observations because I have to answer links, or I have to attend a meeting." (SH1)

The data showed that administrative work did not replace instructional leadership in the principals' values; rather, it often displaced it in their schedules. This distinction was important. The principals generally recognized classroom observation, coaching, and learning monitoring as central to long-term school improvement, yet reports and official activities had clearer immediate consequences if delayed. Gumilao and Dagondon (2026) similarly examined school heads' experiences between teaching-learning and school administration and reported tension between the two domains. Prestoza and Naldoza (2025) also emphasized the challenge of protecting instructional leadership under organizational constraints.

Personnel demands were equally important because they affected school continuity. A teacher's unexpected absence could create an immediate classroom coverage problem. Workload allocation had to consider the standard teaching load, teacher welfare, existing responsibilities, and the need to keep school programs functioning. The principals therefore did not experience human-resource management as a separate office function; it was intertwined with instruction, morale, compliance, and learner safety.

Financial and facility demands added another layer of competition. SH4 explained that MOOE could not be allocated wholly to repairs because the school had several other needs. The principal specifically identified a condemned building that had remained unresolved across administrations and expressed the need for stronger and faster support from the Schools Division Office. SH6 and SH7 likewise described situations in which limited funds required choices between facilities, learning materials, and other necessities.

Stakeholder concerns were described as both relational and organizational. SH2 narrated situations involving angry parents, rumors, conflicting accounts, and unresolved community disputes. These encounters demanded fact-finding, emotional control, protection of teacher credibility, and careful communication. In such situations, the principal had to maintain trust with parents while also supporting teachers and protecting the school's authority. Murray et al. (2025) similarly noted that professional relationships can create tensions that constrain educational work, showing that simultaneous demands are not only task-based but also relational.

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Safety and crisis responsibilities could quickly override routine plans. Flooding, injuries, health crises, possible active attacks, evacuation planning, and child-protection concerns were described as responsibilities for which the principal remained ultimately accountable. Lopez (2024) likewise showed that disaster leadership requires simultaneous coordination of safety, communication, continuity, and resources. The present findings indicated that such responsibilities were especially demanding because the consequences of delay could be immediate and serious.

Overall, the organizational demands were interconnected rather than independent. A staffing issue affected instruction; a parent concern affected teacher morale; a facility problem required financial decisions; a meeting changed on-site leadership arrangements; and a safety concern interrupted both instructional and administrative plans. This interdependence was consistent with Complexity Leadership Theory as applied by Beresford-Dey, Howden, and Martindale (2024), which views leadership in complex organizations as adaptive work across interacting systems rather than control of isolated variables.

Sensemaking and Interpretation of Multiple Organizational Demands

The school heads' accounts showed that prioritization followed a practical hierarchy rather than a single fixed rule. When several demands occurred at the same time, participants considered who might be affected, whether safety or learning was at risk, the urgency of the situation, the consequence of delay, the applicable policy or memorandum, the deadline, whether the task could be delegated, and the resources available at the time. These considerations formed the principals' sensemaking process.

Learner welfare functioned as the strongest decision anchor. SH4 explained that when a teacher raises a classroom problem, the concern should be addressed first when the benefit and welfare of the child are directly involved.

"I-prioritize kasi nga dapat 'yung benefit nasa bata. Hangga't maaari, ibigay natin 'yung best doon sa bata. Dapat solusyonan muna 'yung problema about doon sa bata." (SH4)

(The concern should be prioritized because the benefit should go to the child. As much as possible, we should give the best to the learner. The problem concerning the learner should be solved first.)

This learner-centered reasoning was evident in other narratives. SH3 attended to an urgent parent concern before finishing a report because the issue involved a learner. SH5 described choosing an injured pupil and the family over a division report and then delegating data gathering so that both responsibilities could eventually be addressed. These narratives indicated that principals did not understand priority merely as whichever task arrived first or whichever had the nearest deadline. They also considered the human consequence of not acting.

"Prioritizing is not simply about time management; it is a moral and professional choice about what our school really values." (SH5)

At the same time, the school heads recognized that formal mandates had legitimate weight. SH2 explained that mandatory seminars supported by official memoranda might need to be prioritized, especially when travel was involved, while school-level committees managed on-site matters. SH1 described national, regional, or division requests as urgent because failure to comply could lead to follow-up from higher authorities. The principals therefore made decisions at the intersection of learner-centered values and institutional accountability.

This tension reflects the central concern of Paradoxical Leadership Theory. Lee, Lyubovnikova, Zheng, and Li (2023) explain that leaders frequently face expectations that are simultaneously valid but difficult to satisfy together. The principals' narratives showed this clearly: instructional leadership and administrative compliance were both legitimate; teacher support and accountability were both necessary; urgent problems and long-term improvement both mattered. Their decisions often involved temporary prioritization rather than permanent rejection of one side.

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The findings also reflected the Multifaceted Sensemaking Theory of Turner, Allen, Hawamdeh, and Mastanamma (2023). School heads noticed situational cues, interpreted urgency, consulted people, checked policy, assessed consequences, and then acted. Their interpretations were shaped by previous experience and relationships. SH3 stated that experience taught the principal to remain calm, consult the people involved, and make decisions based on what would most benefit the school and its learners. Sensemaking was therefore social and contextual rather than purely individual.

A further pattern was the distinction between what is urgent and what is important. Participants knew that an immediate administrative demand could be louder than a long-term instructional priority. SH7 explicitly described situations in which "the task that is louder and more immediate often takes over the one that is more important for our learners in the long run." This awareness suggested that the principals were not unaware of instructional priorities; instead, they operated in a system where urgency and importance did not always align.

"The task that is louder and more immediate often takes over the one that is more important for our learners in the long run." (SH7)

Thus, the meaning of simultaneous demands for the participants could be summarized as a continuous exercise of accountable judgment. The principal had to be able to explain why one task was prioritized, why another was delegated or postponed, and how the decision remained consistent with learner welfare, school policy, and the realities of the situation. The value placed on explainable and defensible decisions was evident even when participants admitted feeling uneasy after choosing between equally important duties.

Coping Mechanisms and Leadership Strategies

The participants responded to simultaneous demands through a combination of managerial, relational, adaptive, and personal strategies. The strongest organizational strategy was delegation. Rather than attempting to perform every task personally, principals assigned responsibilities to committees, teachers, non-teaching personnel, or community partners depending on the nature of the concern.

SH2 described established committees for grievances, guidance, and child protection that could act when the principal was away. These structures were connected with the SPTA and barangay and were expected to follow known protocols. Delegation in this case was not simply handing off work; it involved prior planning, role clarity, and reporting back to the school head.

"We have a team who are in-charge to deal with such kind of situation and problem." (SH2)

SH3 also described delegation to non-teaching personnel, clear communication of responsibilities, monitoring of progress, and adjustment of plans when unexpected concerns arose. SH5 and SH6 emphasized assigning responsibilities according to teachers' strengths and current workloads. SH7 described organizing teachers into committees and distributing responsibilities so that school operations could continue even when the principal was not physically present.

"I have learned to lead through people and systems and not just through my own effort." (SH7)

These accounts supported Fullan's (2023) argument that contemporary principals cannot personally perform every leadership function and must build the capacity of others. They were also consistent with Complexity Leadership Theory because adaptive school functioning depended on relationships, distributed expertise, shared information, and local decision-making rather than on a single leader attempting to control every task.

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Communication was another central strategy. Participants described informing supervisors when they needed to be late or absent from a meeting, clarifying responsibilities before delegation, explaining resource decisions to teachers, and talking directly with parents to resolve disputes. SH2's approach to angry parent complaints involved first reducing emotional tension, listening to the parties, and gathering the teacher's account before making judgments. The principal also emphasized protecting the teacher's credibility in front of parents while discussing corrective guidance privately afterward.

"Pagkaharap ang parent, kailangan ko i-shield ang teacher ko. Syempre. And then afterwards, 'pag kami na lang dalawa, then I'm going to deal with her or him." (SH2)

(When facing the parent, I need to protect my teacher. Afterward, when it is only the two of us, I will deal with the teacher privately.)

This approach illustrated relational leadership under pressure. The school head had to acknowledge parent concerns without publicly undermining the teacher, resolve the immediate problem without escalating conflict, and preserve future working relationships. Northouse (2022) emphasizes that leadership is exercised through relationships and influence, while Riley (2022) highlights the value of compassionate and humane relationships in school leadership. The findings showed that relational work became especially important when organizational demands involved conflict rather than paperwork.

Planning and task sequencing were also used to reduce accumulation. SH4 reported completing reports as soon as they arrived to avoid being overwhelmed by several pending requirements. Other participants kept calendars, checklists, and recurring schedules, protected blocks of time for instructional work, and communicated early when a deadline appeared unrealistic. These strategies helped create predictability even when the wider work environment remained unpredictable.

Personal coping strategies included prayer, quiet reflection, brief pauses before making decisions, conversations with fellow school heads, consultation with immediate supervisors, and support from family. These strategies helped school heads regulate emotion and avoid reacting impulsively. SH3 summarized the value of collective support simply: "Teamwork helps me manage pressure." SH5 and SH6 similarly described fellow principals as important sources of understanding because they shared the same leadership realities.

"Teamwork helps me manage pressure." (SH3)

The presence of personal coping, however, did not mean that school heads viewed stress as solely an individual problem. Their recommendations repeatedly called for stronger organizational support, more personnel, more coordinated reporting, mentoring, and practical training. This distinction is consistent with the World Health Organization and International Labour Organization (2022), which emphasize that mental health at work requires organizational prevention and support in addition to individual coping. Kutsyuruba, Arghash, and Al Makhamreh (2024) likewise showed that even effective school leaders require system support for well-being.

Essential Themes Emerging from the Lived Experiences

Following the comparison of significant statements and formulated meanings across the interviews, six essential themes were developed. These themes did not represent isolated categories; they described connected parts of the same lived experience. Table 4 traces representative significant statements through formulated meanings and categories to the themes, and Table 5 presents the final themes with their core meanings. The complete coding matrices are retained in Appendix F of the source dissertation.

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Table 4. Representative Coding Trail from Significant Statements to Essential Themes

Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning	Category	Theme
"I acted as an administrative officer, a guidance counselor and a school head at the same time." (SH1)	The principal absorbs functions normally distributed to other personnel because staffing is insufficient.	Role overload and staffing limitations	Carrying Multiple Roles in an Overloaded Leadership Environment
"There are times that I have to defer classroom observations because I have to answer links, or I have to attend a meeting." (SH1)	Urgent compliance requirements displace planned instructional supervision.	Administrative pressure versus instructional work	Administrative Compliance Displaces Instructional Leadership
"I attended to the parent first because the concern involved a learner, then delegated some tasks and finished the report afterward." (SH3)	Learner-related concerns are prioritized while other work is redistributed.	Learner-centered prioritization	Prioritizing Through Urgency, Consequence, and Learner Welfare
"Dapat solusyonan muna 'yung problema about doon sa bata." (SH4)	The welfare of the learner serves as the primary basis for deciding what should come first.	Learner welfare as decision anchor	Prioritizing Through Urgency, Consequence, and Learner Welfare
"We have a team who are in-charge to deal with such kind of situation and problem." (SH2)	Committees and designated personnel allow school operations to continue when the principal cannot personally attend to every concern.	Distributed responsibility	Sharing Leadership to Keep the School Functioning
"Teamwork helps me manage pressure." (SH3)	Collective effort reduces the concentration of workload on the principal.	Relational and collective coping	Leading Adaptively Through Communication, Relationships, and Emotional Regulation
"…the worries, the pressure, the emotional labor that people don't really see." (SH5)	Leadership strain includes hidden emotional responsibility in addition to visible tasks.	Emotional strain	Managing Multiple Demands Shapes Leadership but Exposes Structural Gaps

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"I have learned to lead through people and systems and not just through my own effort." (SH7)	Experience shifts leadership from personal control toward shared systems and sustainable delegation.	Leadership maturation	Managing Multiple Demands Shapes Leadership but Exposes Structural Gaps

Note. The table presents representative examples from the full coding matrix. SH = school head.

Table 5. Summary Matrix of Essential Themes and Their Core Meanings

Essential Theme	Core Meaning	Key Codes/Clusters
1. Carrying Multiple Roles in an Overloaded Leadership Environment	School heads simultaneously carry instructional, administrative, personnel, financial, stakeholder, safety, and learner-related responsibilities, with limited staff often expanding the principal's role.	Role overload; role substitution; staffing limitations; ultimate accountability
2. Administrative Compliance Displaces Instructional Leadership	Reports, meetings, online submissions, and time-bound directives repeatedly interrupt or displace classroom observation, coaching, and other instructional work.	Compliance pressure; short deadlines; interrupted instructional supervision
3. Prioritizing Through Urgency, Consequence, and Learner Welfare	Principals decide what comes first by weighing learner welfare, safety, urgency, consequences of delay, policy, deadlines, delegability, and available resources.	Learner-centered judgment; urgency assessment; policy-guided prioritization
4. Sharing Leadership to Keep the School Functioning	Delegation, committees, designated personnel, and community partnerships allow work to continue when the principal cannot personally address every demand.	Distributed leadership; teamwork; committee systems; stakeholder mobilization
5. Leading Adaptively Through Communication, Relationships, and Emotional Regulation	Principals rely on flexibility, early communication, conflict management, consultation, calm decision-making, and personal or peer coping to respond to shifting situations.	Adaptive communication; relational leadership; conflict de-escalation; coping
6. Managing Multiple Demands Shapes Leadership but Exposes Structural Gaps	Experience makes principals more organized, realistic, collaborative, and reflective, while also revealing persistent shortages in personnel, time, resources, coordinated reporting, and leadership support.	Leadership maturation; emotional burden; personnel and system support needs

Theme 1: Carrying Multiple Roles in an Overloaded Leadership Environment

The first theme captured the breadth of responsibility carried by elementary school heads. Their accounts combined instructional supervision, school administration, personnel management, financial stewardship, parent and community relations, learner welfare, facilities, disaster preparedness, child protection, and compliance. Because these

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responsibilities frequently occurred at the same time, the principal was positioned as the organizational point where multiple demands converged.

SH1: *"I acted as an administrative officer, a guidance counselor and a school head at the same time."*

SH7: *"I have learned that work does not come one by one, but all at once."*

Insufficient staffing intensified this experience. When administrative or clerical support was unavailable, the school head absorbed additional functions. This made role boundaries porous and increased the amount of cognitive and emotional switching required during the day. Hungo, Casinillo, and Madrigal (2024) likewise described role overlap among Philippine teacher-principals, while the present study showed that even full-time principals could experience a comparable expansion of duties when support positions are limited.

The theme therefore reflected both workload and accountability. School heads did not simply report having many tasks; they described being answerable for what happened across the school even when they could not be physically present in every situation. The perceived responsibility for "everything" created the emotional demands that gave the study its title.

Theme 2: Administrative Compliance Displaces Instructional Leadership

The second theme expressed the most persistent organizational tension in the narratives. Instructional leadership remained important to the school heads, but administrative requirements were often more time-sensitive and externally visible. Reports, data requests, meetings, trainings, and online submissions therefore tended to interrupt observations, coaching, and learning-monitoring activities.

This pattern did not suggest that school heads valued compliance more than instruction. Rather, it showed how the structure of accountability shaped daily time allocation. A missed report could generate an immediate reminder or escalation, whereas a classroom observation could be rescheduled. Over time, repeated postponement could gradually pull principals away from instructional leadership even when they recognized its long-term importance.

SH1: *"There are times that I have to defer classroom observations because I have to answer links, or I have to attend a meeting or else I'll be called up by higher authorities."*

SH5: *"Reports have strict deadlines, and if you miss them, it is immediately noticed, while class observations or coaching can always be postponed to the next day."*

The finding aligned with Gumilao and Dagondon (2026) and with Prestoza and Naldoza (2025), who documented tensions surrounding instructional leadership and administrative responsibilities. It also reflected the paradox identified by Lee et al. (2023): both expectations were legitimate, yet fulfilling one could temporarily weaken attention to the other.

Theme 3: Prioritizing Through Urgency, Consequence, and Learner Welfare

The third theme described how school heads interpret simultaneous demands. The strongest pattern was a learner-centered hierarchy: safety, welfare, and learning received priority when the consequences of delay were immediate. After this, school heads considered deadlines, policy mandates, the seriousness of the consequence, whether the task required the school head personally, and whether another person could act on the principal's behalf.

Prioritization was therefore both practical and ethical. The school heads wanted decisions that could be explained to teachers, parents, supervisors, and themselves. This was why SH5 described prioritization as a moral and professional

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choice. A good decision was not necessarily the one that pleased every stakeholder but the one that could be defended in relation to learner welfare, school needs, and organizational responsibility.

SH4: *"I-prioritize kasi nga dapat 'yung benefit nasa bata. Hangga't maaari, ibigay natin 'yung best doon sa bata. Dapat solusyonan muna 'yung problema about doon sa bata."*

("The concern should be prioritized because the benefit should go to the child. As much as possible, we should give the best to the learner. The problem concerning the learner should be solved first.")

SH5: *"Prioritizing is not simply about time management; it is a moral and professional choice about what our school really values."*

This finding extended conventional notions of time management. The participants were not merely sorting tasks according to urgency; they were making sense of different values. Turner et al. (2023) help explain this process because sensemaking involves interpreting cues, building plausible meaning, communicating with others, and acting on that interpretation.

Theme 4: Sharing Leadership to Keep the School Functioning

The fourth theme showed that sustainable school functioning depended on the principal's ability to distribute responsibility. Committees, teacher leaders, non-teaching personnel, parents, barangay officials, and other partners were mobilized when the school head could not personally attend to every concern. Effective delegation required prior planning, clear designation, trust, and follow-up.

SH2: *"We have a team who are in-charge to deal with such kind of situation and problem."*

SH7: *"I have learned to lead through people and systems and not just through my own effort."*

Several principals described a shift from trying to do everything personally toward allowing others to lead programs or solve routine concerns. This change reduced dependence on the school head's constant presence and simultaneously developed the confidence and capacity of teachers. Fullan (2023) describes this movement as building professional capacity rather than treating leadership as the work of one position alone.

The theme also demonstrated that delegation was not abandonment of accountability. Participants continued to monitor progress, receive reports, and intervene when decisions exceeded the authority of delegated personnel. Shared leadership therefore functioned as a way to extend organizational capacity while preserving principal oversight.

Theme 5: Leading Adaptively Through Communication, Relationships, and Emotional Regulation

The fifth theme captured the human side of managing simultaneous demands. School heads repeatedly used communication to explain decisions, negotiate deadlines, calm conflict, coordinate people, and preserve trust. In difficult parent concerns, communication served not only to exchange information but also to de-escalate emotion and protect working relationships.

Adaptability was equally important. Plans were adjusted when weather, emergencies, staff absences, or new directives changed the situation. School heads described remaining calm, taking a brief pause, consulting colleagues, praying, reflecting, and seeking support before acting. These practices helped them avoid decisions based purely on immediate emotion.

SH2: *"Pagkaharap ang parent, kailangan ko i-shield ang teacher ko. Syempre. And then afterwards, 'pag kami na lang dalawa, then I'm going to deal with her or him."*

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("When facing the parent, I need to protect my teacher. Afterward, when it is only the two of us, I will deal with the teacher privately.")

SH3: *"Teamwork helps me manage pressure."*

Yeh, Ravalier, and Chang (2025) found that school leaders intentionally cultivate well-being through routines, relationships, and purposeful choices. The present findings similarly showed that emotional regulation was part of leadership practice. It allowed principals to continue making decisions under pressure while maintaining relationships with teachers, learners, parents, supervisors, and community partners.

Theme 6: Managing Multiple Demands Shapes Leadership but Exposes Structural Gaps

The final theme reflected the developmental effect of experience. School heads reported becoming more organized, flexible, patient, realistic, and willing to ask for help. They learned to trust teachers, distinguish what required their personal attention, and accept that not every task could be completed perfectly at the same time. Leadership experience therefore produced greater practical judgment.

At the same time, the participants' growth did not eliminate the structural sources of pressure. Their narratives identified insufficient clerical and administrative personnel, duplicate or short-notice reporting, limited funds, unresolved facility needs, inadequate time for instructional leadership, and limited formal preparation in stress management, prioritization, delegation, and decision-making. These gaps indicated that resilience could not be treated as an expectation that principals simply endure more work.

SH5: *"When I was starting as a principal, I tried to do everything on my own, and in the end I was just exhausted and less effective."*

SH7: *"What we need most is personnel support and more predictable systems."*

The finding was consistent with the Job Demands–Resources perspective of Bakker et al. (2023): sustainable functioning depended not only on individual effort but also on adequate resources. The OECD (2025a) similarly emphasizes that successful implementation requires time, skills, motivation, resources, and professional networks. The participants' recommendations therefore pointed toward interventions that strengthen both personal leadership capacity and the organizational conditions in which leadership was exercised.

Fundamental Structure of the Experience

The fundamental structure of the phenomenon could be described as a continuous process of ethical balancing under constrained organizational capacity. Public elementary school principals stood at the intersection of system mandates and immediate school realities. Because demands rarely arrived one at a time, principals repeatedly decided what had to be addressed immediately, what could wait, what could be delegated, and what required their direct presence. Learner welfare and safety provided an important moral anchor, but decisions were also shaped by deadlines, policies, accountability, available personnel, financial limitations, and stakeholder expectations.

The experience contained both strain and adaptation. The same conditions that generated overload, role conflict, emotional labor, and decision fatigue also prompted principals to develop practical judgment, distributed leadership, stronger communication, and more deliberate coping. Yet individual adaptation had limits. When staffing, reporting systems, resources, or organizational support remained inadequate, the school head continued to carry an emotional burden that could not be solved by personal efficiency alone. The essence of the experience was therefore not simply "having too much work," but continuously reconciling simultaneous legitimate responsibilities while trying to protect learners, sustain relationships, and keep the school functioning.

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Inputs for the Design of an Intervention Program

The findings pointed to the need for an intervention that does more than provide another seminar on generic leadership. The program should directly address the situations described by the school heads: simultaneous demands, administrative interruptions, delegation difficulties, conflict and communication pressures, emotional strain, and limited organizational support. Based on the six themes, the researchers proposed the BALANCE Program—Building Adaptive Leadership and Navigating Overlapping Expectations—as a structured set of capacity-building and support activities for public elementary school principals.

The proposed program was intended to complement, not replace, existing Schools Division Office and district mechanisms. Its design emphasized practical school-based application, peer learning, follow-up coaching, and system-level feedback so that support would not become an additional one-time requirement. Table 6 presents the proposed components.

Table 6. Proposed BALANCE Intervention Program

Component	Objective	Suggested Activities	Delivery	Expected Output
B – Balancing Priorities and Decision-Making	Strengthen principled prioritization under simultaneous demands.	Case-based exercises on urgency versus importance; learner-welfare and safety decisions; consequence mapping; policy and deadline triage; personal priority matrix.	District/SDO workshop with quarterly case reflection.	School heads use a consistent, explainable decision framework.
A – Administrative Workflow and Reporting Coordination	Reduce preventable administrative congestion and improve workflow.	Calendar mapping of recurring reports; common report tracker; templates for delegation and follow-up; feedback mechanism for duplicate or short-notice requests; protected instructional-leadership blocks.	School-based application with district consolidation.	More predictable workflow and reduced displacement of instructional supervision.
L – Leadership Distribution and Delegation	Build reliable systems for shared responsibility.	Delegation mapping; committee role clarification; succession and teacher-leader development; workload-sensitive task rotation; monitoring and accountability tools.	Workshop plus coaching and school action plan.	Functional committees and broader leadership capacity within schools.
A – Adaptive Communication and Conflict Management	Improve communication during parent, staff, and stakeholder concerns.	Conflict de-escalation simulations; difficult-conversation protocols; consultation and escalation pathways; communicating delayed outputs; protecting staff credibility while maintaining accountability.	Scenario-based learning and peer feedback.	More consistent handling of difficult interpersonal and stakeholder situations.

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N – Networks for Mentoring and Peer Learning	Reduce isolation and make practical knowledge available across school heads.	Principal learning circles; mentor-mentee pairing; case conferences; sharing of workable templates and local solutions; optional rapid consultation group for complex concerns.	Monthly or bimonthly peer sessions.	Sustained professional network and faster access to context-based advice.
C – Coping, Well-Being, and Emotional Resilience	Strengthen self-regulation while addressing psychosocial risks in leadership work.	Stress and recovery planning; reflective practice; boundary-setting; peer check-ins; referral pathways; supervisor conversations on workload and well-being.	Integrated wellness sessions with follow-up support.	Healthier coping practices and earlier identification of unsustainable workload.
E – Enabling Resources and System Support	Translate recurring structural concerns into actionable organizational support.	Needs mapping for clerical support, facilities, digital systems, and financial/resource constraints; escalation protocol for urgent infrastructure; periodic review of reporting burden; district/SDO response tracking.	School-to-district feedback cycle and annual review.	Documented support needs, clearer response pathways, and improved enabling conditions.

The program may be implemented in phases. An initial needs validation can identify which components require the most immediate attention in the district. A short baseline reflection can then document recurring pressure points, existing delegation structures, reporting challenges, and support networks. The capacity-building sessions should use actual school situations rather than abstract examples, followed by school-level application tasks and coaching. A final review can examine whether participants have improved their priority systems, delegation practices, communication routines, peer support, and ability to protect time for instructional leadership.

The design also recognized that not every issue could be solved through training. Administrative workload, staffing shortages, infrastructure concerns, and repeated reporting requests required organizational action. For this reason, the final component created a feedback pathway through which recurring system-level constraints could be documented and elevated to the district or Schools Division Office. This made the intervention responsive to the participants' central message: effective coping depended on both capable leaders and supportive organizational conditions.

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DISCUSSION

The findings confirmed the central premise established in the Introduction: contemporary school leadership was shaped by multiple legitimate demands that could occur simultaneously. Bolman and Deal (2021) explain that organizations contain structural, human-resource, political, and symbolic dimensions at the same time. The participants' narratives illustrated this overlap in concrete school situations. A parent complaint could simultaneously be a relational concern, a personnel concern, and a matter of school credibility; a facility problem could simultaneously be a safety issue, a financial decision, and an accountability concern; and a teacher absence could immediately become an instructional, human-resource, and learner-welfare issue.

Dulude and Milley (2021) described school leaders as operating under multiple accountability tensions. This was strongly reflected in the present findings, particularly in the competition between administrative compliance and instructional leadership. The principals did not describe one responsibility as unnecessary. Instead, their difficulty came from being required to satisfy several valid expectations with limited time and personnel. This was why the theme of simultaneous administrative and instructional demands was better understood as role conflict than as poor time management.

The Job Demands–Resources Theory of Bakker et al. (2023) provides a useful explanation for Theme 1 and Theme 6. High workload, short deadlines, interpersonal conflicts, safety responsibilities, and limited staffing function as demands that consume cognitive and emotional energy. In contrast, capable teachers, committees, supportive supervisors, community partners, experience, and peer networks function as resources. The narratives showed that school heads coped more sustainably when these resources were available; when they were absent, the same responsibilities became more exhausting and difficult to reconcile.

The Multifaceted Sensemaking Theory of Turner et al. (2023) was most visible in Theme 3. Participants continually interpreted cues and constructed practical meaning before deciding what to do. The presence of an injured learner, an angry parent, a memorandum, a fixed deadline, or a teacher absence changed the meaning and urgency of the situation. Prior experience also influenced decisions, as participants described becoming more realistic and organized over time. Sensemaking therefore connected the objective demand with the school head's judgment about what the demand required in that specific context.

Paradoxical Leadership Theory, as reviewed by Lee et al. (2023), helps explain why the participants did not experience simultaneous demands as problems with simple either/or solutions. School heads attempted to preserve both sides of important tensions: instructional leadership and compliance, staff support and accountability, standard policy and local circumstances, immediate response and long-term improvement. Delegation and temporary prioritization were practical ways of holding these opposing expectations together rather than permanently choosing one over the other.

Complexity Leadership Theory also resonated with Themes 4 and 5. Beresford-Dey et al. (2024) emphasize interaction, distributed expertise, information sharing, and adaptive processes in uncertain systems. The school heads' use of committees, trusted teachers, non-teaching personnel, parents, barangay officials, and peer school heads showed that leadership capacity expanded through networks. The ability of a school to respond to simultaneous demands therefore depended partly on how well the school head had developed relationships and shared routines before a crisis occurred.

The findings also added a distinctly moral dimension to the discussion of principal workload. Several participants placed learner welfare, safety, and learning at the center of difficult decisions. A school head might accept being late to a meeting or report when a child's safety was at risk, provided the decision could be explained, and other responsibilities were communicated or delegated. This suggested that prioritization should not be reduced to efficiency. It was a professional judgment about which consequence the school could least ethically allow to occur.

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At the same time, the data cautioned against romanticizing resilience. Participants did become more adaptable, more willing to delegate, and more capable of regulating their responses. However, they also asked for additional personnel, more predictable reporting systems, better facility support, mentoring, and practical training. The OECD (2025a) notes that successful implementation depends on time, resources, skills, motivation, and professional networks. The findings similarly indicated that sustainable leadership requires changes in organizational conditions, not only stronger individual coping.

Finally, the findings reinforced the importance of protecting instructional leadership. The repeated postponement of classroom observation and coaching was consequential because these were the responsibilities most closely connected to improving teaching and learning. The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Team (2024) emphasizes that school leaders need suitable working conditions and distributed responsibility to create direction, support teaching, and develop people. The proposed BALANCE Program therefore combined individual leadership development with workload, reporting, staffing, and support mechanisms.

Synthesis

The findings revealed public elementary school leadership as work performed under persistent simultaneity. The school heads were not simply choosing between important and unimportant tasks. They were repeatedly choosing among responsibilities that were all legitimate but differed in urgency, consequence, visibility, and human impact. Administrative requirements frequently dominated the schedule because of fixed deadlines and external accountability, while instructional leadership was more easily postponed despite its long-term value.

The participants responded by constructing practical priorities around learner welfare and safety, using delegation and teamwork to extend capacity, communicating with supervisors and stakeholders, and regulating their own emotions during conflict and uncertainty. With experience, they became more intentional and less dependent on personal control. Yet the narratives also made clear that leadership adaptation did not remove the structural burden created by insufficient personnel, resource limitations, repeated reporting, and inadequate protected time for instructional leadership.

These insights supported an intervention that was both developmental and organizational. School heads needed practical skills for prioritization, delegation, communication, conflict management, and coping, but they also needed systems that reduced unnecessary administrative congestion, strengthened peer and supervisory support, and responded to recurring staffing and resource gaps. The conclusions and recommendations that follow are addressed to school heads, district and division leaders, the Department of Education, and future researchers.

Summary of Principal Findings

The analysis generated six essential themes (Table 5). Together, these themes described the experience as continuous ethical and organizational balancing under limited time, personnel, and resources. The findings are summarized below according to the research questions.

1. **Lived experiences in managing multiple organizational demands.** The school heads experienced leadership as a condition of persistent simultaneity. Reports, meetings, learner and parent concerns, teacher absences, facilities, finances, school programs, and emergencies often occurred at the same time. The difficulty was intensified by limited administrative support, causing some school heads to perform functions beyond the instructional leadership role. These experiences were accompanied by worry, pressure, guilt, and the emotional burden of choosing which legitimate responsibility would receive immediate attention.
2. **Organizational demands commonly encountered.** The recurring demands involved instructional leadership; administrative reporting and accountability; human-resource and personnel concerns; financial

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and resource management; stakeholder and community relations; learner welfare, safety, and inclusion; and meetings, trainings, policy, and other external directives. Administrative and compliance requirements were especially disruptive because they carried fixed deadlines and visible consequences. As a result, classroom observations, coaching, and other instructional responsibilities were often the tasks most easily rescheduled.

3. **Sensemaking and interpretation of simultaneous demands.** The school heads interpreted priority through a combination of learner welfare, safety, urgency, consequences of delay, policy requirements, deadlines, available resources, and whether a responsibility could be delegated. Learner-centered concerns generally served as the strongest moral anchor when safety or learning was directly affected. The participants also recognized that urgent administrative requirements could be different from long-term educational importance, creating a continuing tension between immediate compliance and instructional improvement.
4. **Coping mechanisms and leadership strategies.** School heads managed simultaneous demands through delegation, committees, task sequencing, early communication, schedule adjustment, consultation, stakeholder mobilization, and monitoring. They also used relational strategies such as conflict de-escalation and protecting working relationships while maintaining accountability. Personal coping included prayer, reflection, brief pauses, family support, and conversations with fellow principals or supervisors. Teamwork and shared leadership were repeatedly described as essential to maintaining school operations.
5. **Essential themes.** Six themes captured the shared experience. The first two described the pressure created by role breadth and the displacement of instructional leadership by administrative compliance. The third theme described the value-based process through which principals decided what came first. The fourth and fifth showed how principals extended capacity through people, relationships, communication, and adaptation. The sixth showed that experience developed more realistic and collaborative leadership while simultaneously making structural gaps in staffing, reporting systems, resources, and support more visible.
6. **Inputs for the design of an intervention program.** The findings supported an intervention that combined leadership development with organizational support. The proposed BALANCE Program included seven connected components: balancing priorities and decision-making; administrative workflow and reporting coordination; leadership distribution and delegation; adaptive communication and conflict management; networks for mentoring and peer learning; coping, well-being, and emotional resilience; and enabling resources and system support. The program was intended to use real school situations, peer learning, follow-up coaching, and a feedback mechanism for issues that required district or division action.

Implications of the Study

The findings imply that leadership development for public elementary school heads should move beyond generic seminars and address the actual decision environments in which school heads work. Training is more likely to be useful when it uses realistic cases involving overlapping deadlines, parent or teacher concerns, safety incidents, limited resources, and simultaneous instructional and administrative priorities.

The study also implies that instructional leadership requires organizational protection. If classroom observations and coaching are consistently treated as the easiest activities to postpone, the system may unintentionally reward compliance visibility over instructional improvement. District and division processes should therefore consider how reporting schedules, meeting requirements, and administrative demands affect principals' ability to remain present in classrooms and support teachers.

Finally, the findings imply that school heads' well-being should be viewed as an organizational concern. Emotional labor, decision fatigue, and workload are connected to staffing, reporting systems, resources, and social support. Well-being interventions should therefore include preventive organizational measures, not only individual stress-management activities.

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Limitations of the Study

Consistent with the delimitations of the study, the findings are limited to the narratives shared by eight public elementary school heads in a single district during the approved data-gathering period. Fourteen school heads were eligible, but some were unavailable because of prior official commitments, and six of the eight participants led small schools; school size was therefore treated as contextual information, and no comparison between large and small schools was attempted. The findings are not intended for statistical generalization to all school principals in the Philippines. Their transferability to comparable public-school contexts rests on the thick description of the setting and participants provided in this report. The BALANCE Program proposed from the findings has not yet been implemented or evaluated; its piloting and refinement are addressed in the recommendations.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

1. Managing multiple organizational demands was a defining feature of public elementary school principalship rather than an occasional disruption. The school head's role was experienced as an intersection of instructional, administrative, personnel, financial, stakeholder, safety, and policy responsibilities that frequently required attention at the same time.
2. The central tension in the school heads' daily work was not a lack of awareness about instructional leadership but the structural advantage of administrative urgency. Reports, meetings, online requirements, and other compliance tasks carried immediate deadlines and consequences, which made instructional supervision easier to postpone even when principals viewed it as more important for long-term learning.
3. School heads made sense of simultaneous demands through accountable and learner-centered judgment. Safety, learner welfare, urgency, consequence, policy, and available capacity shaped what was prioritized, which showed that decision-making in this context was ethical and situational rather than merely a matter of scheduling.
4. Delegation and distributed leadership were essential mechanisms for sustaining school functioning. School heads who developed committees, trusted teacher leaders, non-teaching support, and stakeholder partnerships were better positioned to respond to simultaneous demands without becoming the sole operational bottleneck.
5. Communication and emotional regulation were core leadership capabilities under simultaneous demands. The ability to explain decisions, de-escalate conflict, consult others, adjust plans, and remain composed allowed principals to manage not only tasks but also the relational consequences of those tasks.
6. Experience transformed school heads into more realistic, collaborative, and reflective leaders, but personal growth did not remove structural constraints. Staffing shortages, duplicated or short-notice reporting, limited resources, facility concerns, and inadequate protected time for instructional leadership required organizational responses in addition to individual coping.
7. A responsive intervention should therefore operate on two levels: strengthening the practical leadership capacities of school heads and improving the organizational conditions that shape their workload. Sustainable leadership cannot depend solely on school heads becoming more resilient to avoidable system pressures.

Recommendations

1. **Schools Division Office of Bataan and District Supervisors.** Establish a coordinated mechanism for recurring reports, data requests, meetings, and monitoring requirements. Where possible, similar requests should be consolidated, recurring schedules should be announced early, and same-day demands should be

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limited to genuinely urgent matters. Supervisors may also protect designated periods for school heads to conduct classroom observation, teacher coaching, and other instructional-leadership work.

2. **Administrative and Personnel Support.** Review the clerical and administrative support available to public elementary schools, particularly schools where the school heads personally absorb records, finance, reporting, and other technical functions. Where additional permanent personnel cannot immediately be provided, cluster-based clerical assistance, temporary support arrangements, standardized templates, or shared digital systems may be considered to reduce preventable workload concentration.
3. **Leadership Capacity Development.** Implement practical capacity-building on prioritization, delegation, decision-making, conflict management, financial and resource decisions, and crisis leadership. Activities should be scenario-based and should use situations similar to those narrated by school heads. Follow-up coaching should be included so that participants can test strategies in their schools and refine them with guidance.
4. **Distributed Leadership at the School Level.** School heads should strengthen committees, designate capable teacher leaders, clarify decision boundaries, and rotate responsibilities according to personnel strengths and current workload. Delegation systems should include clear reporting and monitoring so that shared leadership expands capacity without creating uncertainty about accountability.
5. **Peer Mentoring and Principal Learning Circles.** Create regular opportunities for school heads to discuss difficult cases, exchange templates and strategies, and seek advice from more experienced colleagues. The peer-learning structure should be practical and low-burden, with meetings integrated into existing professional development schedules rather than added as frequent separate requirements.
6. **Well-Being and Psychosocial Support.** Provide school heads with confidential and accessible support for stress, emotional strain, and workload-related concerns. Wellness support should be paired with discussions on workload design, recovery, boundary-setting, and referral pathways. Supervisory conversations should include not only compliance status but also whether the current distribution of responsibilities is sustainable.
7. **Resource and Infrastructure Response.** Develop clearer escalation and tracking procedures for urgent facility, repair, safety, and infrastructure concerns that cannot be adequately addressed through school MOOE. School heads should be able to see the status of requests and the basis for prioritization so that unresolved facility issues do not remain an indefinite source of leadership pressure.
8. **Implementation of the BALANCE Program.** Pilot the proposed BALANCE Program among public elementary school heads in the Orion District. Feedback from participants should be used to refine its content, schedule, and delivery. Evaluation may focus on perceived usefulness, changes in prioritization and delegation practices, quality of peer support, protection of instructional-leadership time, and recurring organizational issues elevated for district or division action.
9. **Future Researchers.** Future studies may extend the inquiry to other districts, secondary-school principals, or school heads in different resource contexts. Researchers may also examine particular aspects identified in this study, such as administrative reporting burden, protected instructional-leadership time, school head emotional labor, or the effect of clerical support. Longitudinal qualitative work may help determine how leadership strategies and organizational demands change across the school year and after implementation of support interventions.

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