

Management Practices of School Heads in Integrated School

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Abstract: Effective school management is essential in achieving educational goals, particularly in integrated schools where multiple grade levels are supervised under one administration. Along this view, this study explored the management practices of school heads in Integrated Schools of Malaybalay City division, school year 2024-2025. Following the research design of transcendental phenomenology, the data were gathered through in-depth interviews, which revealed five management practices of the school heads in integrated schools: promoting fairness while meeting each department's unique needs, flexibility in responding to urgent tasks and respecting teachers' personal circumstances, delegating tasks and fostering teamwork to ease workload, coping with poor facilities, unequal resources, and limited funding, and emphasizing equitable opportunities for professional growth. The participants encountered challenges: difficulties in fostering teacher cooperation and participation, leadership challenges in integrated school management, incorporating technology and providing digital assistance, promoting equity through student-focused education. With the challenges encountered, the schools' heads coped through managing time, tasks, and priorities through scheduling, delegation, and organization; engaging teachers, parents, and stakeholders in collective decision-making, identifying problems, prioritizing solutions, and applying evidence-based strategies; adjusting to diverse personalities, needs, and unexpected challenges with flexibility; and, integrating technology and data-driven tools to enhance efficiency and outcomes.

Keywords: School Head, Integrated School, Management Practices, Challenges Encountered, Coping Mechanism.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A school head's management practices involve leadership, instructional, and administrative responsibilities that ensure the smooth operation of the school. They are responsible for planning and organizing activities, managing resources, maintaining records, and ensuring that school policies are properly implemented. In terms of academic management, they oversee the delivery of lessons, monitor student learning, assess performance, and support teachers' professional growth. As leaders, they inspire staff, resolve conflicts, delegate tasks, and promote teamwork and collaboration. Furthermore, they help build a positive school environment by encouraging cooperation, supporting professional development, and fostering an inclusive and respectful culture. They also ensure students' well-being by promoting holistic development, providing guidance or counseling, and maintaining discipline. Overall, these responsibilities show that school heads perform multiple and complex roles in managing the school effectively.

In addition to their many roles, school heads in integrated schools (IS) face different challenges because they must manage both elementary and secondary levels within one institution. This dual responsibility makes curriculum supervision more complex, as each level requires different teaching approaches and learning standards. Moreover, they have trouble distributing scarce resources, such as classrooms, instructional materials, and funding, to satisfy the various requirements of learners and teachers. Managing teachers also becomes more demanding due to differences in expertise, training needs, and teaching loads across departments. Furthermore, they handle a wide range of student concerns, from the basic needs of younger learners to the more complex behavioral and academic issues of older students.

In most Philippine schools, school heads serve as primary decision-makers and shoulder major responsibilities, including paperwork, decision-making, scheduling, recruitment, faculty evaluation, attendance and discipline, curriculum design, student outcomes, parental involvement, and communication and collaboration (Acharyya, 2023).

These responsibilities become more complex in integrated schools, where administrators oversee both elementary and secondary levels under a single leadership structure (DepEd Memorandum 180, s. 2010; Lino & Lolinco, 2018).

Managing integrated schools involves balancing administrative and instructional duties while addressing challenges related to finances, personnel, and community expectations (Espinosa, 2018; Manger, 2024). These responsibilities require effective coping mechanisms and adaptive leadership strategies. Coping mechanisms are the ways people respond to highly stressful situations (Taylor, 2018), enabling school leaders to handle stress and maintain organizational performance. According to Campbell (2024), active coping strategies are adaptive, meaning they help individuals adjust to challenges rather than respond in harmful or unhelpful ways. In essence, coping strategies refer to how a person manages unusual events that may cause stress.

As observed, school heads serve as administrators and are responsible for carrying out various administrative tasks. They handle administrative duties, coordinate with teachers, and oversee inclusive education programs. In integrated schools, the focus on administrative work is often greater than on teaching, so teachers and staff assist the school head in addressing challenges and carrying out administrative responsibilities.

In a local division integrated school, a single school head manages many challenging responsibilities at the same time. Limited facilities and a diverse student population can make it difficult for the school head to supervise students and ensure that teachers receive regular training and support. These challenges inspired the researcher to study integrated schools, which offer a unique educational structure that combines elementary and secondary education under one leadership system.

Despite the unified educational structure of integrated schools, school heads serving both elementary and secondary levels lack unified policies that clearly guide how to manage both levels which may be the two levels when they operate together (Hallinger, 2011). Managing an integrated school involves handling different age groups, meeting teachers' various needs, and dealing with limited resources, which makes school leadership and management an important topic for research. Resource management is another challenge, as there are often gaps in the fair and strategic distribution of resources, with one level receiving more attention or support than the other. In addition, because each grade level has different expectations and priorities, communication gaps may arise among stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and students.

This study explored how school heads managed integrated schools, the challenges they faced, and the coping mechanisms they employed. It employed transcendental phenomenology, which seeks to understand lived experiences by setting aside preconceived notions to uncover the essence of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994; Sheehan, 2014). To

understand how school heads manage these challenges is essential for improving teaching quality, learner support, and overall school performance. By analyzing current management practices, gaps, and innovations, this study can offer evidence-based insights to improve how school heads manage integrated schools.

➤ *Framework of the Study*

This study is anchored on two frameworks. The first theoretical framework is Bush's (2011) theory of educational management and leadership, while the second framework is Republic Act 9155, also known as the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001. The transformational/collegial leadership model is comprehensive because it provides a normative approach to school leadership, focusing primarily on the process by which leaders influence school outcomes rather than on the specific nature or direction of those outcomes. The theory identifies six major models of leadership: formal, collegial, political, subjective, ambiguity, and cultural.

The first is the formal model, also called managerial leadership, which focuses on successfully managing existing activities rather than envisioning a better future for the school. The second model is the collegial, transformational, or shared leadership model, which is comprehensive because it provides a normative approach to school leadership, focusing primarily on the process by which leaders influence school outcomes rather than on the specific nature or direction of those outcomes. The third model is political leadership, where conflicts between stakeholders are resolved in favor of the most powerful participant. The fourth model is the subjective, or interpretive, leadership model, which emphasizes that the critical focus of leadership should be the values, beliefs, and ethics of the leaders themselves. The fifth model is the ambiguity model, which recognizes that schools often operate under conditions of unclear objectives, limited information, and uncertain decision-making. The sixth model is the cultural model, which views the school as a community with shared norms, values, customs, and beliefs, highlighting the important role of school culture in shaping behavior and guiding decisions.

These models include formal, collegial, political, subjective, ambiguity, and cultural leadership models, which are also referred to as parallel leadership models (Alexander & Joselino, 2018). Each management model corresponds to a specific leadership approach. For example, the formal management model aligns with managerial leadership, which focuses on successfully managing existing activities rather than envisioning a better future for the school. Participative leadership, on the other hand, emphasizes that the group's decision-making process should be the central focus (Leithwood et al., 1992). In addition, another framework for this study is Republic Act 9155, also known as the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, which is reinforced by the Philippine Constitution's guarantee of every Filipino's right to quality basic education. This law permits elementary schools to offer secondary education, particularly in qualified schools where the nearest public high school is at least eight kilometers away.

The head of the school strives to uphold and promote values that encourage cooperation, dedication, and a sense of community among students. The primary goal of establishing integrated schools is to prioritize the welfare of learners, which is a key responsibility of the school head. This is strongly supported by Department Order 91, s. 1999, which provides guidelines for the establishment and operation of integrated schools. Section 1 clearly states that, to promote access to basic education and fulfill the constitutional mandate that the State should “establish, maintain and support a complete, adequate and integrated system of education relevant to the needs of the people and society” (Article XIV, Section 2, paragraph 1 of the 1987 Constitution), the Department encourages and supports the establishment of at least one integrated school (IS) in every region. According to these guidelines, an integrated school offers a complete basic education program, combining elementary and secondary levels within a single school site, under the management of one school head and with a unified instructional program.

➤ *Statement of the Problem*

This study explored the lived experiences of school heads in managing integrated schools during the School Year 2024–2025. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

- How do school heads manage integrated schools?
- What are the challenges encountered by school heads in managing integrated schools, and how do they manage or cope with these challenges?

II. METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the methodology of the study. It includes the research design, research setting, participants, instruments used, procedures for data collection, ethical considerations, and techniques for data analysis.

➤ *Research Design*

The study employed qualitative methods to explore and understand the school context, particularly the leadership approaches of school heads in addressing challenges and coping with the management of integrated schools. Specifically, the research used transcendental phenomenology, as outlined by Moustakas (1994), to examine how school heads manage integrated schools (IS). Transcendental phenomenology emphasizes capturing participants' experiences by setting aside preconceptions and extraneous details, focusing on describing the phenomenon exactly as it appears. This approach allows researchers to uncover the essence of participants' lived experiences.

➤ *Research Setting*

This study was conducted in six integrated schools within a single division, including both large and medium-sized schools. These schools were recognized for their strong performance and efforts to provide high-quality education. The school heads of the selected schools were identified as outstanding leaders and high performers, making them suitable participants for the study.

Selecting these six integrated schools as the research setting is well justified, as they provide a unique environment where both elementary and secondary levels operate under a single administration. This structure presents distinct management practices and challenges that are not commonly observed in single-level schools. The selected schools illustrate the complexity of balancing resources, addressing diverse student needs, and ensuring continuity of learning across grade levels. They also offer a rich context for examining leadership strategies, coping mechanisms, and stakeholder engagement, as school heads must manage multiple responsibilities while fostering collaboration among teachers with different specializations. Furthermore, these schools reflect the broader goals of inclusive and holistic education, making them an ideal setting for exploring how administrators adapt to constraints and implement innovative strategies to sustain quality learning. By focusing on these integrated schools, the study can generate insights that are both practical and relevant for improving educational leadership and policy in diverse learning environments.

The six selected integrated schools offer grades 1 through 6 for the elementary level and grades 7 through 10 for the secondary level. Some of these schools also provide senior high school, covering grades 11 and 12, depending on available resources and student population. This structure allows learners to progress seamlessly from elementary to high school without transferring to another institution. Each school is led by a single school head. The number of teachers and students varies according to the size of the community and the school's resources. Teachers in the selected schools range from 20 to 40, covering both elementary and secondary levels, while the student population ranges from 500 to over 1,000 learners, depending on enrollment.

Parents of students in the integrated schools often face economic challenges due to limited employment opportunities and reliance on seasonal or informal work, such as farming, fishing, or small-scale trading. Their incomes are generally low and unstable, which directly affects their ability to provide consistent educational support for their children. In addition, educational attainment among parents is often limited, with some having completed only elementary or secondary education.

➤ *Research Tool*

The research instrument used in this study was a set of semi-structured interview questions developed by the researcher. This instrument was based on qualitative research methodology, which emphasizes understanding participants' experiences, perspectives, and meanings, particularly within educational leadership contexts (Creswell, 2014; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview questions were specifically designed to gather in-depth insights into the participants' experiences, perspectives, and practices in managing integrated schools. They were formulated in alignment with the study's research objectives, relevant literature, and the conceptual framework.

➤ *Data Gathering Procedure*

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings, the researcher followed established research protocols. Prior to data collection, the researcher sought approval from the adviser after a careful assessment and review of the research manuscript. The researcher then secured an endorsement letter from the Dean of the College of Education and obtained ethical clearance from an ethics committee. Afterward, permission was secured from the Schools Division Superintendent of the Malaybalay City Division.

Following the approval process, the researcher informed potential participants in advance through letters to confirm their willingness to participate in the study. The scheduling of interviews was then arranged based on their availability. Before the interview, participants were provided with an informed consent form that explained the purpose and procedures of the interview, including the number of hours required for their full participation. Only those who signed the consent form were included as participants in the study.

➤ *Ethical Consideration*

Before the interviews were conducted, the researcher notified the respondents in advance about the purpose of the research and their roles as participants. They were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any penalties or negative consequences. The informed consent form clearly explained the ethical safeguards observed in the study.

Considering the respondents' hectic schedules, the researcher inquired about their availability for the interview, and the schedule was arranged at their convenience. The interview guide questions were also provided in advance to allow the respondents to prepare before the interview.

To protect confidentiality, all data gathered were securely stored on a password-protected hard drive that only the researcher could access. The researcher also clarified the professional nature of the relationship with the participants and ensured that no pressure or undue influence was applied at any point in the study. Proper boundaries were observed throughout the research process to maintain respect and objectivity, and any potential issues or conflicts were addressed through ethical transparency and strict adherence to research guidelines.

As a sign of appreciation, a small token of gratitude was given to the participants after the interview, without influencing their decision to participate or the responses they provided.

➤ *Data Analysis*

The interview data were analyzed using Moustakas' phenomenological approach, which is particularly suited for exploring and understanding individuals' lived experiences in depth. This method enabled the researcher to move beyond surface-level responses and to capture the participants'

perspectives, experiences, and feelings about the phenomenon under study.

The analysis began with horizontalization, a process in which every significant statement from the participants was considered equally, ensuring that no single viewpoint was given more importance than another. These statements were then carefully examined and organized into clusters of meaning, forming themes that highlighted patterns across the participants' experiences.

Next, the researcher developed textural descriptions, which focused on what the participants experienced, and structural descriptions, which examined how these experiences occurred, including the context, circumstances, and personal interpretations that influenced them. By combining these descriptions, a composite portrayal of the phenomenon was created, reflecting both the unique and shared aspects of the participants' experiences.

This careful and systematic process ensured that the findings were firmly grounded in the participants' authentic perspectives and provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Ongoing reflection and validation throughout the analysis further ensured the credibility, trustworthiness, and alignment of the findings with the study's qualitative research objectives.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the data and the study's result. This chapter presents a detailed analysis and interpretation of the data collected from school heads managing integrated schools. Specifically, it focuses on how these school heads manage their schools, the challenges they encounter, and the strategies they employ to address these challenges.

The emerging themes from the participants' responses illustrate the diverse management practices of school heads in integrated schools. These practices include promoting fairness by addressing each department's unique needs, responding flexibly to urgent tasks while respecting teachers' personal circumstances, delegating tasks and fostering teamwork to ease workloads, and emphasizing equitable opportunities for professional growth.

➤ *Management Practices of the School Head in Integrated School*

• *Theme 1: Promoting Fairness in Meeting Each Department's Unique Needs*

In managing integrated schools, the data revealed that the school heads demonstrate fairness in their management by ensuring that teachers are treated equitably, while also recognizing that the needs of elementary teachers differ from those of secondary teachers. School heads prioritize fairness (equity), but this does not mean treating everyone exactly the same. Rather, they adapt their approach based on the distinct needs of elementary and secondary teachers, allocating training opportunities and leadership roles accordingly (P1, P3). This is evident in the participants' responses: "Equal

opportunity man to all teachers and staff. Terms of supply equal pud but if need the elementary teacher dili pariah sa need sa secondary teacher. Some is some teacher nga dali maduolan labi na if nay task nga need ko ug tabang.” “Equal opportunity and fairness ang akong gina foster, I deal them fairly.” (P1) “I deal them fairly ... I give chances for training according to what they need.” (P3)

For instance, elementary teachers often require greater support in building strong foundations for young learners, while secondary teachers may need resources that focus on specialized subject areas. Fairness, therefore, does not mean giving everyone exactly the same resources or opportunities; rather, it involves providing support that meets the unique needs of each department. This approach enables school heads to tailor their support to the specific circumstances of each department.

The school heads also recognize deeper structural inequities (P5, P6), such as resource gaps and differences in staff training. Although they strive to foster fairness among staff, they acknowledge that the needs of the elementary and secondary departments are not the same. To address this, they distribute resources and opportunities equitably while tailoring support to the distinct needs of each department. They also recognize that ensuring equal opportunities in an integrated school is challenging, as they must navigate diverse student needs, unequal access to resources, differences in staff training, limited funding, and even unconscious biases that can unintentionally influence decisions. “Limited funding and unconscious biases also make it harder to support everyone fairly.” (P5) “Inadequate Resources and Facilities ... social barriers and discrimination.” (P6)

Fairness in education should not be rigid or the same for everyone; instead, it should be flexible enough to respond to the different needs within a school. School heads try to balance fairness with flexibility, making sure that equity is not just a concept but something that works in real situations. According to Dapat (2025), flexibility allows leaders to handle urgent school needs without affecting the dignity or well-being of teachers, keeping equity practical and relevant. This approach reflects contextual leadership, where management strategies are adjusted to fit the specific needs of each department or group.

This sharing suggests that by managing schools in this way, school heads avoid a one-size-fits-all approach and instead create a supportive environment that helps teachers perform better, ultimately improving student learning outcomes. In integrated schools, fairness is not fixed but flexible, adapting to the unique needs of each department. Rather than simply dividing resources equally, school heads focus on equity by considering the specific challenges that teachers face. Unconscious biases and unequal resource distribution can often result in unequal opportunities for professional growth and student support. According to Gay (2010), school leaders must be intentional in addressing inequities by proactively creating inclusive practices. The responses indicate that while school heads may have good

intentions, their practices do not always guarantee equitable outcomes for all.

These responses underscore that fairness serves as a guiding principle for continuous reflection and improvement in school management. Consequently, ongoing reflective practices and inclusive management training are essential in promoting equal opportunities within an integrated school setting.

This perspective is supported by Khalifa (2018), who emphasized that equity-centered leadership requires recognizing contextual differences within the school system. Similarly, Theoharis (2007) highlighted that equitable leader intentionally tailor support to address the diverse needs of teachers and learners, rather than relying on uniform approaches. Leithwood (2021) further noted that effective leadership ensures access to appropriate opportunities and support for all. Anchored in adaptive leadership theory, this approach emphasizes a leader’s capacity to mobilize others and respond flexibly to context-specific challenges instead of applying fixed solutions.

Overall, fairness in school management is best understood as equity rather than uniformity. It involves providing individuals with what they need to succeed, even if such support varies across departments. Thus, effective leadership requires balancing equal treatment with responsiveness to the distinct realities of teachers while maintaining fairness and inclusivity.

- *Theme 2: Flexibility in Responding to Urgent Tasks and Respecting Teachers’ Personal Circumstances*

The data show that school heads promote fairness by treating teachers with respect, providing equal opportunities, and recognizing the unique needs of each department. By adjusting their support accordingly, they ensure that fairness is not about giving the same resources to everyone, but about providing what each teacher and learner needs to succeed. Through continuous reflection and adaptation, school heads create a supportive environment that fosters growth and improvement within the entire school community. This supportive approach is further reflected in the importance of maintaining a healthy balance between professional responsibilities and family life. “Balance sa life especially sa work and house. Need to be flexible in urgent reports or requirements. Then I need to respect s sick leave of the teachers”. This highlights how school heads practice flexibility by adjusting deadlines for urgent tasks and respecting teachers’ right to take sick leave. As a result, such practices strengthen trust and promote a more inclusive and supportive school environment.

The results show that fairness is not simply about dividing tasks equally, but about recognizing the human side of teaching. It involves treating everyone with respect while adjusting support based on individual needs and specific situations. School heads promote fairness by ensuring that no one feels left out or treated differently. Flexibility also emerges as a key practice, as leaders adjust to urgent tasks and respond to the personal needs of their staff. This ability

to balance demands reflects a supportive leadership approach.

Similarly, Hobbs (2022) asserted that effective school leaders demonstrate a sense of care for teachers, which contributes to relationship development and the creation of safe and nurturing environments. By being flexible, leaders are able to meet urgent school demands without sacrificing the dignity or well-being of their staff.

These results indicate that school heads consistently practice flexibility and show respect for teachers' personal circumstances. They respond to urgent reports and deadlines efficiently while still honoring teachers' rights to sick leave and personal time. This reflects a leadership approach that values both productivity and the well-being of staff, ensuring that teachers are supported without being overwhelmed and that their individual situations are considered. Effective management in integrated schools, therefore, requires a balance of compassion and adaptability.

These findings align with Leithwood's (2021) view that equitable leadership goes beyond the fair distribution of tasks and resources, emphasizing the importance of recognizing the human side of teaching. Similarly, Baldonado and Villocino (2025) highlighted that trust-based leadership is built on respect and individualized consideration, which strengthens morale and professional growth. Together, these perspectives affirm that compassionate and adaptive management is essential for sustaining fairness and inclusivity in integrated schools.

- *Theme 3: Delegating Tasks and Fostering Teamwork to Ease Workload*

The data highlight that effective management involves wisely delegating tasks to department heads and teachers while fostering collaboration and teamwork, thereby ensuring that no one feels overburdened by the workload. In fact, delegating tasks to teachers not only reduces their individual workload but also promotes shared responsibility, cooperation, and a stronger sense of teamwork among staff. To meet the demands of managing an integrated school, Participants 1, 2, and 3 commonly relied on strategies such as task delegation, strategic scheduling, and collaborative teamwork. "Multi delegation sa work sa mga teachers and cooperation to each other." (P1) "Delegation of task, the department head serve as a team, and helping hands from department head." (P2) "Proper coordination with teacher, delegation of task." (P3)

According to Bush (2011), school leadership is not one-dimensional; rather, it can be understood through different theoretical models that guide how school heads manage schools. Consequently, in this context, the school head is portrayed as an integral member of the team, providing guidance and support while working alongside colleagues, rather than exercising authority from above.

Delegating tasks to department heads and teachers, while promoting cooperation and teamwork, is a form of management that goes beyond simply assigning

responsibilities; it demonstrates trust, empowerment, and shared accountability. In other words, effective delegation by school heads recognizes the unique skills of their staff, giving department heads the opportunity to lead in their areas of expertise and allowing teachers to contribute meaningfully to the school's collective goals. Similarly, Torres et al. (2024) highlighted that aligning tasks with staff expertise enhances efficiency and teamwork in schools. Rather than assigning responsibilities randomly, school heads match roles with individual skills and expertise—whether in organizing events, leading committees, or handling curriculum work.

This notion implies that effective delegation not only balances the workload but also fosters a sense of belonging, where everyone feels that their role is essential to the school's success. By nurturing teamwork, school heads create an environment in which challenges are addressed collectively, ideas flow openly, and support systems grow stronger. Consequently, each person can contribute their expertise, which also eases the workload of the school head.

Moreover, it encourages cooperation, ensuring that challenges are faced together rather than individually. To achieve this, school heads make it a point to assign tasks based on the unique strengths of each teacher. As a result, this approach not only enhances school efficiency but also helps teachers feel valued, confident, and motivated, knowing that their talents are recognized and put to good use. This is supported by Baldonado and Villocino (2025), who emphasized that acknowledging teachers' strengths builds trust and motivation.

In addition, sharing responsibilities ensures that work is divided fairly, so no one feels overwhelmed. Moreover, when tasks are distributed evenly, it helps prevent burnout and allows staff to remain energized and motivated. This approach also gives individuals the chance to focus on their strengths, enabling them to contribute their skills in the most meaningful way. As a result, department heads and teachers feel trusted, valued, and empowered in their roles. Consequently, this teamwork strengthens the school as a whole, creating a supportive and collaborative environment where everyone can thrive. Effective delegation not only involves task-sharing but also reflects trust and confidence in the people being led. By thoughtfully handing over responsibilities, leaders signal that they value their staff's skills and contributions, giving them the opportunity to take real ownership of their work. Furthermore, this approach nurtures a spirit of cooperation, where teamwork eases the workload and strengthens bonds among colleagues. Ultimately, such an environment helps schools grow stronger, with staff feeling motivated and connected to a shared purpose.

This finding illustrates the concept of distributed leadership, as highlighted by Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012), who emphasized that empowering staff to share leadership responsibilities strengthens the organization's overall capacity. Accordingly, delegation is framed not merely as the distribution of duties, but as a strategic mechanism for enhancing collaboration, improving

efficiency, and building a cohesive and motivated teaching community. Consequently, successful school management relies on systematic delegation, structured planning, and collaborative problem-solving to address the complex nature of managing integrated schools. Furthermore, this finding supports Banywana's (2025) assertion that delegation is an essential skill for school administrators, enabling them to foster collaboration, enhance efficiency, and promote innovation within their institutions. As a result, school heads are freed from micromanaging day-to-day tasks and can redirect their energy toward strategic priorities, such as curriculum development, policy innovation, and long-term school improvement. In addition, by assigning tasks that align with each teacher's skills and expertise, school heads enable educators to excel in their roles while ensuring that responsibilities are distributed fairly and managed efficiently.

- *Theme 4: Emphasizing Equitable Opportunities for Professional Growth*

It was found that school heads prioritize providing every teacher with a fair opportunity for professional growth. In line with this, Anduyo's (2025) research with school administrators revealed that those who actively engage with, guide, and support their teachers create an environment that promotes professional growth and enhances instructional quality. To achieve this, school heads ensure that training, seminars, and development programs are distributed equally across departments, so no group is left behind. Similarly, Ortiz and Escote (2023) emphasized that school heads are not only administrators but also serve as instructional coaches, professional role models, and stewards of teacher growth. Consequently, this inclusive approach helps teachers develop their skills, supports their individual growth, and simultaneously encourages teamwork, thereby strengthening the overall performance of the school. Moreover, Participants 3 and 4 highlighted that training opportunities should be made accessible to all teachers. "In terms of training hatagan gyud ug chance ang willing gyud nga teacher and also by major man sad ang uban nga training." (P3) "If Makita naku nga need sa us aka teacher ang training siya ako hatagan ug chance. Ang coordinatorship is depende sa strength sa teacher ug mao ni ya strength sa iya ihatag ang coordinatorship." (P4)

Teachers who are willing to attend professional development programs should be given priority; however, the specific needs of each teacher must also be considered when deciding participation. In line with this, Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) argued that sustained professional development is critical for improving instructional quality, particularly in diverse school environments. Consequently, school heads ensure that all teachers, regardless of department, have equal access to training, seminars, and professional development programs. These opportunities are distributed across both elementary and secondary levels, allowing everyone to strengthen their skills and grow professionally. Moreover, this practice demonstrates that school heads view professional growth as a right for all teachers and a shared responsibility. By making development programs accessible to everyone, they prevent favoritism and ensure that all departments benefit equally.

Furthermore, providing equal opportunities for all teachers encourages collaboration, improves teaching quality, and fosters a culture of continuous learning. It also represents a strategic investment in staff, recognizing that supporting teacher growth directly contributes to better student outcomes. In other words, offering teachers equitable chances for professional development is a key aspect of effective school management. When training and development opportunities are distributed fairly, teachers feel valued and supported, which in turn enhances their motivation and commitment. Overall, this approach reflects the principle of fairness in education, ensuring equity in both resources and opportunities for professional advancement.

In integrated schools, providing equal opportunities means creating pathways for all teachers to grow, regardless of their department, thereby promoting inclusivity and excellence. Accordingly, school heads ensure that teachers in both elementary and secondary departments have access to training and professional development programs. This practice reflects Leithwood's (2021) concept of equitable leadership, in which fairness is achieved by guaranteeing equal access to opportunities that enhance teacher capacity. Similarly, Baldonado and Villocino (2025) emphasized that inclusive professional development fosters trust and morale among teachers, while Torres et al. (2024) highlighted that capacity building across departments strengthens collaboration and overall school performance. Therefore, together, these perspectives affirm that equitable professional growth sustains the mission of integrated schools by empowering teachers and promoting collective success.

- *School Heads' Management of Integrated Schools: Challenges Encountered and Coping Mechanisms*

While managing integrated schools, school heads not only implement effective management practices but also face several challenges. The participants shared the difficulties they encountered in this context, from which five (5) key themes emerged: coping with poor facilities, unequal resources, and limited funding; difficulties in fostering teacher cooperation and participation; leadership challenges in integrated school management; incorporating technology and providing digital support; and promoting equity through student-focused education.

To address these challenges and keep integrated schools thriving, school heads developed various coping mechanisms. Specifically, they described strategies that fall under the following themes: managing time, tasks, and priorities through scheduling, delegation, and organization; engaging teachers, parents, and stakeholders in collective decision-making; identifying problems, prioritizing solutions, and applying evidence-based strategies; adjusting to diverse personalities, needs, and unexpected challenges with flexibility; and integrating technology and data-driven tools to enhance efficiency and outcomes. By employing these approaches, school heads are able to overcome challenges while maintaining effective and inclusive school management.

➤ *School Heads' Management of Integrated Schools: Challenges Encountered*

• *Theme 1: Coping with Poor Facilities, Unequal Resources, and Limited Funding*

The data show that school heads face various concerns and challenges in managing integrated schools, such as inadequate facilities, unequal access to essential resources, and limited funding. These challenges reveal how school heads cope with and manage scarce resources, as reflected in their responses. For instance, Participant 6 highlighted the recurring issue of limited resources, noting that not all needs within the school are automatically met. One of the most difficult tasks for school heads is finding a fair way to distribute resources while addressing the diverse needs of both learners and staff. Despite these difficulties, they continue to strive to ensure that resources are shared as equitably as possible. As Participant 6 stated: "Ensuring equal opportunities in an integrated school is challenging due to diverse student needs, unequal access to resources, and varying staff training levels".

This is a defining challenge for many educational institutions and school heads, as these constraints directly affect the quality of teaching and learning. Despite these limitations, schools continue to demonstrate resilience by making the most of available resources. Indeed, school heads are responsible for implementing policies, managing resources, and ensuring quality instruction, as elaborated in the Education Act of 1982 (BP 232).

However, they often face the responsibility of managing institutions under conditions of scarcity, where inadequate facilities, unequal access to resources, and limited funding are persistent realities. Consequently, such constraints require school leaders to exercise exceptional management skills. In line with this, DepEd Orders on School-Based Management (SBM), specifically DepEd Order No. 83, s. 2012, and DepEd Order No. 007, s. 2024, emphasize that school heads are granted the authority to manage resources, implement programs, and lead innovations tailored to their school's specific context. Moreover, they are expected to manage scarce resources effectively while safeguarding the fundamental goal of providing high-quality education.

Meanwhile, DepEd Order No. 91, s. 1999 provides the guidelines for the establishment and operation of integrated schools, directly supporting the constitutional mandate under Article XIV, Section 2(1) of the 1987 Constitution. According to Rosaladaq and Doronio (2024), school heads face challenges due to limited financial and material resources, and therefore, they must adopt adaptive strategies, such as collaborative resource-sharing and proactive management, to sustain school operations.

In practice, school heads must prioritize urgent needs and creatively maximize the limited resources available. To address these constraints, they adopt adaptive strategies that enable them to maintain educational quality despite shortages. Moore (2023) emphasized that school heads often

face difficult decisions regarding the allocation of resources, such as budget, staff, and technology, to provide the best possible education for students. One key strategy is setting clear priorities by identifying needs that require immediate attention. Additionally, they practice resource maximization by making the most of the materials and resources already available.

According to Liu and Thien (2025), sustaining school improvement requires equitable distribution of resources, ensuring that both teachers and students benefit fairly despite existing constraints. These coping strategies highlight the resilience and adaptability of school heads, who continue to lead effectively despite persistent challenges. Ultimately, this approach demonstrates that effective management is not determined by the abundance of resources, but by the ability to mobilize people toward a shared vision even in the face of adversity.

Moreover, Leithwood (2021) noted that effective leaders tailor their practices to meet diverse student needs rather than applying uniform solutions. He emphasized that fairness in schools is not about uniformity but about equity, which requires school heads to adapt support according to the distinct needs of different departments and learners. Schools often face resource shortages, making it difficult to meet everyone's needs. Consequently, limited funding can result in some departments receiving adequate support while others experience gaps.

• *Theme 2: Difficulties in Fostering Teacher Cooperation and Participation*

The results show that school heads often struggle to foster collaboration and full participation among teachers. Participant 1 noted that managing an integrated school is challenging because it is composed of different departments. He also encountered difficulties in overseeing both elementary and secondary levels, each with its own unique programs. He explained: "School head me sa amo school lahi elementary ug lahi sa secondary. Dili suod ang secondary teacher to the elementary teacher and lahi ang program sa elementary sa secondary".

As observed, secondary teachers do not have a strong connection with elementary teachers. This highlights the difficulty of leading an integrated school, where the elementary and secondary levels each have their own programs and cultures. Consequently, collaboration across levels is weak, which can lead to disjointed practices, gaps in the curriculum, and reduced continuity in student learning. For the school head, this underscores the importance of bridging these gaps, fostering stronger relationships among teachers, and establishing systems that encourage cooperation despite differences.

In simple terms, divisions between departments and weak teacher connections make school management more challenging and hinder the development of a unified school culture. Moreover, such weak connections undermine teamwork, which further slows the creation of a cohesive school environment (Tajaran & Bustamante, 2025). In

addition, heavy workloads and limited time make it difficult for many teachers to participate in planning or engage in meaningful discussions, weakening collaboration across the school. Some teachers also resist new methods or shared responsibilities due to fear, low confidence, or comfort with established routines.

Furthermore, social issues such as discrimination, personal conflicts, and divisions between elementary and secondary departments can erode trust and discourage collaboration. Similarly, Villapaz and Paglinawan (2025) found that differences in teaching styles, resource allocation, and perceptions of authority often create tensions between elementary and secondary teachers.

From the school heads' perspective, getting teachers to cooperate and participate is an ongoing challenge that affects the smooth flow of daily school operations. For instance, during meetings, some teachers actively share ideas, while others remain silent, resulting in uneven decision-making and weakened shared ownership of plans. Furthermore, collaboration between grade levels is often irregular, as many teachers focus solely on their own classes, leaving gaps in the curriculum and continuity of student learning. In addition, heavy workloads, competing priorities, and social issues such as discrimination or divisions among staff discourage teamwork and erode trust. Consequently, teacher cooperation reflects the overall culture of the school, and when teachers struggle to work together, it signals a need for greater support, trust, and shared responsibility from school leaders. To address these challenges, school heads can practice transformational leadership by motivating and inspiring teachers, involving them in decision-making, and fostering an inclusive school environment.

This finding supports Tatro (2023), who emphasized that effective leaders not only manage administrative responsibilities but also foster teamwork, which in turn positively influences educational outcomes. Moreover, school heads do much more than handle paperwork, schedules, and day-to-day administration. Beyond these tasks, they play a vital role in building a culture where teachers feel encouraged to collaborate. This involves creating opportunities for joint planning, maintaining open communication, and fostering trust across different departments. Similarly, Ongcoy and Guhao (2025) argued that when leaders inspire and empower teachers, participation increases and inclusivity is strengthened. Without such cooperation, teaching becomes fragmented, and students miss out on a consistent learning experience.

Furthermore, Dum Dum and Villocino (2024) found that managing multiple levels—elementary, junior high, and senior high—creates overlapping responsibilities, making it difficult for school heads to balance instructional supervision with administrative tasks. Therefore, school heads act as agents of change in educational institutions, engaging in practices such as information-sharing, mentoring, and fostering supportive social connections. Indeed, strong leadership practices are closely linked to improved teacher performance (Aquino et al., 2021). Collectively, these

findings highlight that effective school leadership requires balancing administrative duties with fostering collaboration and teamwork to achieve better outcomes for the entire school.

- *Theme 3: Leadership Challenges in Integrated School Management*

Another prominent challenge identified by the participants is the administrative burden and leadership complexity faced by school heads. In integrated schools, leaders must balance administrative responsibilities with academic oversight, which presents significant difficulties. According to Participant 6, managing both administrative and academic duties in an integrated school is challenging due to limited time, overlapping priorities, and the need to ensure smooth school operations while maintaining student-centered learning. Consequently, school heads often struggle to balance paperwork, staffing, and policy compliance. At the same time, they must support teachers, monitor student progress, and foster an inclusive and positive school environment. He stated: "Balancing administrative and academic responsibilities in an integrated school can be difficult due to time constraints, competing priorities, and the need to address both operational efficiency and student-centered learning. Administrators often struggle to manage paperwork, staffing, and compliance while also supporting teachers, monitoring student progress, and fostering an inclusive school culture". Participants 1 and 5 shared the same sentiment, saying that managing three departments described preparing multiple reports and facing unexpected demands. "School head me sa amo school lahi elementary ug lahi sa secondary. Dili suod ang secondary teacher to the elementary teacher and lahi ang program sa elementary sa secondary." (P1) "Managing multiple school levels workload and complexity and need for broader expertise in both administration and academics." (P5)

On the administrative side, school heads are responsible for managing staffing, budgets, policies, and facilities, all of which require strong leadership and organizational skills. At the same time, on the academic side, they need to coordinate elementary and secondary programs, which differ in goals, teaching styles, and assessments. Since elementary programs build foundational skills while secondary programs emphasize specialization, gaps in curriculum continuity and teacher collaboration often arise. Consequently, school heads must act as both managers and instructional leaders, using broad expertise and flexibility to ensure that operations and learning remain aligned.

Moreover, the complexity of managing integrated schools stems not only from their larger size but also from the greater diversity of academic programs and organizational needs. Because elementary programs focus on foundational learning and secondary programs prepare students for higher education, differences in teaching approaches can create fragmentation in instructional practices and teacher relationships, making it harder for school heads to unify the institution. This is supported by Villapaz and Paglinawan (2025), who found that differences in teaching styles, resource allocation, and perceptions of authority often

generate tensions between elementary and secondary teachers.

Therefore, school heads face challenges that require resilience and flexibility. Not only are they administrators managing rules and resources, but they are also instructional leaders connecting departments and aligning the curriculum. Their role further includes motivating teachers to extend beyond their usual responsibilities. Overall, leading an integrated school demands broad skills, adaptability, and the ability to build a unified school culture. In this way, school heads ensure that efficient school operations go hand in hand with high-quality learning, contributing to the overall success of the institution.

This finding reflects the principles of organizational behavior theory, which suggest that leaders in complex adaptive systems must balance administrative (technical) responsibilities with adaptive challenges. Without sufficient support, adaptive tasks—such as fostering a cohesive school culture—may be neglected or poorly addressed. Moreover, there is an empirical critique of distributed leadership: although it can enhance collaboration, issues such as role ambiguity, lack of training, and unclear accountability may undermine its effectiveness. In line with this, Banua et al. (2022) emphasized that administrators must balance administrative duties with instructional leadership to strengthen teaching practices and improve overall school performance. Consequently, having a strong leader who provides excellent leadership and possesses both instructional and administrative competencies can positively influence the overall improvement and success of the institution (Caritativo & Fernandez, 2022).

This result also reflects the findings of Horng et al. (2010), who noted that school leaders spend a significant amount of time on administrative tasks, which often limits the time available for instructional leadership. Therefore, according to Arambala (2025), school heads must be skilled in both administrative management and academic leadership to meet the demands of 21st-century education. Similarly, Caritativo and Fernandez (2022) found that leaders equipped with both administrative and instructional competencies positively influence the improvement of institutions. In practice, a school operates efficiently when its leader effectively manages administrative responsibilities, such as staffing, budgeting, and regulatory compliance. At the same time, by guiding instruction and supporting teachers, the leader helps create an environment where learning can thrive.

Furthermore, as cited by Banua et al. (2022), school administrators must balance administrative duties with instructional leadership to strengthen teaching practices and enhance school performance. This balance is crucial because if school heads focus only on administrative tasks, teaching quality may decline, whereas concentrating solely on academics can compromise organizational efficiency. In line with this, Pangandoyon et al. (2022) argued that resilient leadership is essential for navigating the ever-changing demands of integrated schools, particularly in maintaining an

effective balance between administrative and instructional roles.

- *Theme 4: Need for Incorporating Technology and Providing Digital Assistance*

From the data, it can be inferred that integrating technology and digital support in schools has become a significant challenge for many education leaders. While traditional teaching methods still hold value, the rapid growth of digital tools requires schools to adapt in order to better prepare students for today's world. Participant 1 emphasized that technology plays a vital role in their responsibilities as a school head, viewing it as a reliable tool that helps them accomplish tasks more quickly and efficiently. For example, school heads are regularly required to prepare and submit various reports, and in these instances, they depend on technology to complete their work effectively. However, a major challenge arises because the internet connection is often very slow. As one participant shared: "Internet connection is very necessary which is one of helping hand to submit the reports. But in our school hinay ang internet connection".

Meanwhile, Participant 2 emphasized that internet connectivity plays a crucial role in their communication as a school head. With a stable connection, they are able to coordinate effectively with teachers, staff, and parents through emails, messaging platforms, and online portals. As the participant noted: "Internet connection and chatting communication are essential." This aligns with the findings of Alampay and Capule-Navarro (2023), who highlighted that lack of internet access creates digital divides, limiting communication and contributing to learning poverty.

Participants 3 and 4 highlighted that schools need both government and internal support to thrive in a digital environment. Specifically, the government should provide computers so that teachers and students have the necessary tools for learning and handling school tasks. At the same time, all members of the school community must have access to a stable internet connection to facilitate communication, reporting, and online classes. Moreover, the school itself has a responsibility to allocate sufficient budgets for its three departments—elementary, junior high, and senior high—so that each can maintain the technology and connectivity it requires. As the participants noted, these combined efforts are essential for ensuring that digital resources effectively support teaching and learning. "AI, Computer from government, internet connection sa tanan, dapat budgetan gyud sa integrated school ang 3 department." (P3) "Applications, internet connection, television, dapat departmentalized ang internet, integration sa gamebase learning, clear ang instructions dapat, what is in the plan mao gyud dapat masunod." (P4)

When technology is not used effectively, schools miss opportunities to personalize learning, streamline classroom tasks, and improve communication among teachers, students, and parents. Moreover, challenges such as limited access to devices and unstable internet connections often slow down progress. In addition, Department of Education (DepEd)

reports highlight that many schools, particularly in rural areas, face difficulties with electricity and internet connectivity. As a result, this lack of infrastructure contributes to learning poverty and hinders digital inclusivity.

Given these conditions, it is clear that in today's schools, technology and digital support are essential rather than optional. Consequently, school heads are moving away from outdated, paper-heavy methods by adopting tools such as management systems, online platforms, and AI-driven insights. Through these innovations, the burden of daily tasks is reduced, and clearer channels of communication are established. Furthermore, technology helps create classrooms that are more engaging, connected, and responsive to student needs. Ultimately, with technology in place, schools can operate more smoothly and transparently, allowing teachers and school heads to focus on delivering high-quality education.

This result implies that integrating technology into school management helps address many everyday challenges by improving efficiency and fairness. For instance, automated systems handle tasks such as admissions, attendance, grading, and compliance, thereby reducing workload and increasing accuracy. Moreover, communication becomes more efficient through digital platforms that keep teachers, parents, and students connected. In addition, digital libraries, online learning tools, and AI-based applications provide personalized support that meets students' individual needs. Most importantly, technology promotes inclusivity by ensuring that learners from diverse backgrounds have equal access to the resources they need to succeed.

As a result, school heads can devote more time to improving teaching quality and supporting student well-being rather than being burdened with paperwork. However, the effective use of technology requires careful planning, including ensuring equal access to digital tools, providing adequate training for staff, and managing costs with long-term sustainability in mind. Ultimately, technology should be viewed as a valuable partner that enhances human leadership and teaching rather than replacing it.

According to UNESCO (2015), information and communication technologies (ICTs) must be harnessed to strengthen education systems, enhance knowledge dissemination, improve access to information, promote quality and effective learning, and ensure more efficient service delivery. In line with this, the Asian Development Bank (2023) highlights the importance of integrating technology into education to further strengthen teaching and learning processes. Consequently, the project supports reforms in the K to 10 curriculum by promoting technology-enabled instruction, improving digital infrastructure in schools, and strengthening teachers' capacity to deliver quality education through digital tools.

- *Theme 5: Promoting Equity Through Student-Focused Education*

Participant 6 shared that one of the common challenges faced by school heads is promoting equity through student-focused education, in which one of their key roles is to address the diverse needs of learners. In support of this, Meador (2019) explained that the role of the principal encompasses various areas, including leadership, teacher evaluation, and student discipline. Furthermore, Participant 6 emphasized that students differ in their learning styles, abilities, and backgrounds. As a result, schools serve learners from diverse cultures, languages, and varying abilities, making it essential to ensure that all students feel supported and engaged through intentional strategies. However, the participant noted that balancing operational efficiency with student-centered learning remains a challenge, often making it difficult to foster an inclusive school culture. As stated, "There is a need to address both operational efficiency and student-centered learning, which often makes it challenging to foster an inclusive school culture."

Equity in education means ensuring that all learners, regardless of their socio-economic background, gender, culture, or ability, have access to quality learning opportunities. In integrated schools, achieving equity becomes more complex because students come from diverse contexts and require differentiated support. Consequently, school heads often struggle to balance resources, policies, and instructional practices to ensure that no student is left behind. This challenge largely arises from the gap between what education policies promise and how they are actually implemented in schools. Although these policies emphasize inclusivity and fairness, their success depends heavily on the effectiveness of school leadership.

Moreover, limited resources, crowded classrooms, and variations in teacher skills make it difficult to put equity into practice. Therefore, school leaders must carefully navigate these challenges while ensuring that teaching, curriculum, and assessments effectively meet the diverse needs of their students. According to Marinaki (2024), school principals oversee all high-level operations within a school: they create a safe learning environment, set performance goals for both students and teachers, and monitor processes to ensure that these goals are achieved.

Thus, equity in education is not merely a policy goal but an ongoing responsibility that requires flexible leadership, close collaboration with teachers, and strong involvement from parents and the wider community. Accordingly, promoting equity involves creating a school culture in which diversity is respected, support systems are strengthened, and opportunities are shared fairly. In this way, student-centered education becomes a vehicle for social justice, ensuring that every learner has the opportunity to grow and succeed, regardless of their circumstances.

However, school heads face multiple challenges in this endeavor, including structural fragmentation, multi-level complexity, administrative overload, and severe constraints in both resources and personnel. Literature confirms that

leaders in integrated and low-resource contexts confront systemic barriers that impede both instructional and managerial functions. Therefore, achieving equity requires not only sound policies but also strong, adaptive leadership capable of addressing these interconnected challenges.

UNESCO (2021) emphasized that equitable education requires inclusive policies and leadership that prioritize marginalized learners, ensuring that those who are often left behind—such as students from low-income communities, minority groups, or those with disabilities—receive targeted support and attention. Similarly, OECD (2022) reported that school leaders play a crucial role in bridging equity gaps by fostering teacher collaboration and promoting differentiated instruction. Consequently, school heads serve as both administrators and instructional leaders, creating conditions in which every student feels supported and has an equal opportunity to succeed. Moreover, the complexity of integration was highlighted by participants, who described diverse student needs and misaligned curricula. In this context, integrated campuses function as “complex adaptive systems,” requiring school heads to respond to unpredictable challenges (Murray & Zautra, 2020). Without adequate support structures, these complexities are further intensified.

➤ *School Heads’ Management of Integrated Schools: Coping Mechanisms*

• *Theme 1: Managing Time, Tasks, and Priorities Through Scheduling, Delegation, and Organization*

Data gathered from the participants indicate that effective school management relies heavily on strong organizational skills, particularly in handling time and responsibilities. By using simple tools such as calendars, alarms, and to-do lists, school leaders can stay organized and ensure that important tasks are completed on time. Participants also emphasized the importance of delegation, assigning responsibilities to department heads, coordinators, and teachers so that tasks do not accumulate on a single individual. This aligns with the findings of Estinor and Digo (2021), who highlighted that management techniques, task delegation, and time management serve as coping mechanisms for dealing with school-related challenges. Consequently, urgent matters receive timely attention, and both academic and administrative duties are managed more efficiently. These insights were drawn from the statements of Participants 2, 3, and 4.

“Delegation of tasks allows the department heads to work as a team and provide support as helping hands.” (P2)

“Proper coordination with teachers and delegation of tasks are essential.” (P3)

“I delegate work to department heads and coordinators. I also use a to-do list to outline every activity and identify what is most urgent. Additionally, I rely on a calendar and alarms to keep track of scheduled tasks.” (P4)

To navigate the demands of managing an integrated school, the participants commonly relied on delegation of

tasks and strategic scheduling. In particular, delegation allowed responsibilities to be shared among department heads, coordinators, and teachers, preventing overload on a single individual. Furthermore, strategic scheduling helped school heads prioritize urgent and important tasks, ensuring that both administrative and academic duties were managed effectively. This finding aligns with Covey’s (2013) time-management quadrant, which emphasizes the importance of distinguishing urgent tasks from important ones to maintain productivity under pressure. In the same vein, Kraft and Gilmour (2016) observed that effective school leaders depend on structured routines to manage competing demands efficiently.

The participants shared that they often carry a heavy load, balancing both teaching-related and administrative responsibilities. To manage this effectively, they reported practicing good time and task management, which involves setting clear schedules, assigning duties, and staying organized. For instance, simple tools like calendars, reminders, and task lists help them track deadlines and address urgent concerns. In addition, delegating responsibilities to department heads, coordinators, and teachers makes the workload more manageable and ensures it is shared evenly. This finding aligns with Spillane’s (2006) and Harris (2013), who claimed that distributed leadership enhances organizational resilience, particularly in complex school structures. Furthermore, with organized planning, priorities become clearer, resources are used more efficiently, and school activities run smoothly and on schedule.

This implies that by setting schedules, school heads can organize their tasks effectively, ensuring that nothing important is overlooked. Furthermore, sharing responsibilities with other leaders and teachers not only eases the pressure on the school head but also fosters teamwork and collaboration. In addition, staying organized ensures that tasks are completed efficiently and aligned with the school’s overall goals. Without these practices, leaders may experience exhaustion, inefficiency, and poor decision-making. Conversely, when applied consistently, these strategies enhance productivity, strengthen communication, and create a smoother, more balanced workflow.

For instance, setting schedules demonstrates planning and foresight, while delegating tasks reflects trust and empowers others, and staying organized provides clarity and direction. When these practices are combined, school heads can focus on broader management goals instead of being burdened by daily routines. Moreover, this approach highlights that effective management relies on relationships—by involving teachers and coordinators, leaders foster a culture of shared responsibility and accountability. Consequently, these practices improve both the academic performance of the school and the efficiency of its operations.

Moreover, these statements highlight how school heads manage responsibilities through delegation and organization. Specifically, tasks are shared with department heads and coordinators, who work as a team to support the execution of

school functions. In addition, proper coordination with teachers ensures that responsibilities are clear and that everyone contributes to achieving school goals. Furthermore, the use of tools such as to-do lists, calendars, and alarms help the school head outline activities, set priorities, and keep track of urgent matters. Altogether, this system promotes efficiency, reduces workload stress, and ensures that both academic and administrative tasks are handled smoothly. Supporting this, Northouse (2021) noted that effective leaders practice delegation to empower others and build collective responsibility. Similarly, OECD (2022) reported that school leaders who organize tasks and foster collaboration among staff are better able to bridge equity gaps and sustain school improvement. Therefore, when school leaders keep tasks well-organized and encourage teachers and staff to work together, schools become both fairer and more effective.

- *Theme 2: Engaging Teachers, Parents, and Stakeholders in Collective Decision-Making*

Another important coping strategy emerged from the participants' responses, referring to stakeholder, teachers, and parents' engagement and collective decision-making. Epstein and Sheldon (2016) emphasized that strong community involvement enhances support systems, especially in resource-limited schools. This means that school heads involve teachers, parents, and community members in the decision-making process. Through this approach, the responsibility of managing an integrated school becomes shared rather than borne by the leader alone, while also bringing in broader support and resources from the community. Rosalada and Doronio's (2024) idea relates to this finding. They mentioned that building trust and collaboration with parents, communities, and local government units is a constant challenge, and school heads must maintain strong relationships to secure support and resources. Working together in this way not only eases the pressure on the school head but also builds trust, openness, and a sense of shared ownership among everyone involved. Participants 1 and 5 shared some practices in managing an integrated school, such as collaboration and engaging stakeholders. "Engaging stakeholders is important because they need to participate in school activities and address school challenges. This also involves tapping barangay officials for support." (P1) "Collaboration and teamwork, resourcefulness and transparency, and stakeholder involvement. These strategies help school leaders balance the complex demands of running an integrated school, ensuring both academic excellence and effective administration." (P5)

In addition, Participant 4 highlighted that collective decision-making serves as a key strategy for coping during difficult times. By involving teachers, parents, and other stakeholders, school heads can share responsibilities, which not only provides much-needed support but also prevents the burden from resting solely on them. Consequently, management becomes lighter, more manageable, and more effective. "Collective decision gyud, part ng teacher sa sulotion making, apil sad ang stakeholders sa sulotion, patch up system by department, e open gyud sa teacher ang

problem kay e collects dayon ang possible solution. Identify and define the problem".

This sharing indicates that when teachers, parents, and community members are included in school decision-making, the school becomes a place where everyone has a voice and a role. Rather than having rules and programs imposed solely by the school head, they are shaped collaboratively, making them feel like shared commitments. Consequently, this teamwork not only reduces the leader's workload but also leads to better decisions, as diverse perspectives contribute fresh ideas, balance, and practical solutions. Relatedly, Sheldon (2016) emphasized that strong community involvement strengthens support systems, particularly in resource-limited schools. Moreover, when everyone participates, policies are more likely to be sustained because people support what they helped create. In the long run, this shared ownership fosters trust, openness, and a stronger commitment to the school's vision. Similarly, Tatoy (2023) noted that effective leaders manage administrative responsibilities while fostering teamwork, which directly improves educational outcomes.

This result suggests that involving teachers, parents, and community members leads to a more inclusive and balanced approach to school management. Specifically, teachers contribute their classroom expertise, parents provide perspectives focused on their children's growth, and stakeholders offer resources and broader community support. As a result, this kind of teamwork ensures that different voices are heard, making decisions more practical and widely accepted. Moreover, when cooperation and coordination are fostered, schools become stronger, more sustainable, and better equipped to meet the needs of their communities. Furthermore, when school heads make decisions together with teachers, parents, and the community, they no longer carry the full weight of management alone. Instead, this approach builds stronger partnerships and fosters a sense of shared responsibility for the school's success. Consequently, such teamwork fosters trust and openness, as decisions emerge from dialogue rather than being imposed, reflecting a more democratic approach to school management.

This finding aligns with Kyomugisha (2025), who highlighted that collaborative governance improves democratic processes and educational outcomes. Similarly, Soliva and Escote (2024) revealed that collaboration and stakeholder involvement are essential for addressing challenges and sustaining integrated school operations. Therefore, in integrated schools, collaboration with teachers, parents, and the community is crucial for success. Moreover, involving stakeholders—such as barangay officials—in decision-making processes helps schools address issues effectively and identify practical solutions to challenges within the school community. This perspective is also supported by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which underscores the importance of social interaction in effective learning and problem-solving. Accordingly, when schools face challenges, decisions should be made collaboratively: teachers play a key role in solving problems, while parents, administrators, and community members contribute their

ideas and support. In addition, Oriente (2023) found that stakeholder participation strengthens school-based management and enables schools to achieve educational goals under the Department of Education's decentralized framework.

- *Theme 3: Identifying Problems, Prioritizing Solutions, and Applying Evidence-Based Strategies*

Based on the responses, another effective coping mechanism for school heads in managing the complex demands of an integrated school is their ability to systematically identify problems, prioritize solutions, and apply evidence-based strategies. First, they identify the problems that require attention. Next, they determine which solutions should be prioritized. Finally, they implement approaches that have been proven to be effective. This process allows them to stay focused and make better decisions. At the same time, it helps them handle their duties more smoothly without feeling overloaded. In line with this, Participants 5 and 6 shared that not all problems can be solved at once, so school heads must first concentrate on the issues that are most urgent and have the greatest impact on teaching and learning. "Prioritize based on urgency and impact, form collaborative teams, analyze data to select evidence-based solutions, implement, monitor, and adjust strategies, and reflect on and share lessons learned." (P5)

"In an integrated school, issues are prioritized based on their impact on student learning, safety, and inclusivity. Solutions are developed through collaborative problem-solving, data analysis, and open communication with staff, students, and parents to ensure that decisions are well-informed and inclusive." (P6)

In addition, they value teamwork and inclusivity by involving teachers, staff, and sometimes parents in the decision-making process. Furthermore, they emphasize that decisions are guided not solely by instinct but by evidence and reliable information. As part of this approach, they follow their plans while continuously monitoring progress to make timely adjustments whenever necessary.

This result shows that school heads rely on their ability to systematically identify problems, prioritize solutions, and implement evidence-based strategies. The process begins with observing and assessing the school to identify issues that affect progress or efficiency. Once problems are recognized, school heads focus first on the most urgent issues while addressing others later. After setting priorities, they turn to evidence-based strategies, relying on proven practices, research findings, and data-driven approaches rather than guesswork or personal preference. In addition to data-driven solutions, collaborative problem-solving is emphasized as a key approach for developing effective solutions. By working together, the school community can more accurately identify the root causes of problems and design solutions that are both practical and sustainable.

This finding indicates that the school head addresses the challenges of managing an integrated school using a thoughtful and systematic approach. They began by listening

to teachers and parents, observing classrooms, and assessing the school's overall needs. Recognizing that not all problems could be solved at once, the school head prioritized solutions based on urgency and impact. To tackle these challenges effectively, they relied on practical solutions that were tested and supported by research. This approach demonstrates transformational leadership, as the school head carefully identified problems, set priorities, and avoided being overwhelmed by multiple challenges simultaneously. In support of this, Bass and Riggio (2006) argued that transformational leaders inspire followers by creating a clear vision, encouraging innovation, and emphasizing collective goals. Furthermore, by using evidence-based strategies, the school head ensured that decisions were grounded in proven practices rather than personal opinions. Similarly, Jones (2014) emphasized that school leaders should base their decisions on reliable data and research instead of relying on tradition or guesswork.

This mechanism demonstrates resilience, as the school head established a clear and structured path toward improvement. It also reflects inclusivity, since the most urgent needs—such as supporting marginalized learners and assisting teachers under stress—were prioritized first. By making decisions openly and grounding them in reliable data, this approach strengthened trust within the school community and increased confidence in the school's management and direction. This finding aligns with Leithwood and Riehl (2003), who emphasized that effective school leaders build trust by making transparent, fair, and evidence-based decisions. It also supports Robinson et al. (2009), who noted that leaders who use evidence-based strategies and involve stakeholders in decision-making foster confidence, commitment, and a sense of shared responsibility within the school community. Ultimately, this collaborative and evidence-driven leadership style makes school improvement efforts more credible, sustainable, and embraced by the entire community.

Furthermore, as cited by Shakman et al. (2020), it is valuable for school leaders to prioritize problems using the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle. This approach helps prevent feeling overwhelmed and ensures that efforts have the greatest impact. Leaders are encouraged to focus first on the most important or urgent issues rather than trying to solve everything at once. By addressing the problems that matter most, schools can implement changes that truly count. In practical terms, school heads should start with the most pressing issue, test a solution, evaluate its effectiveness, and make improvements as needed. This method allows leaders to use their energy wisely, make informed decisions, and achieve meaningful, lasting change.

- *Theme 4: Adjusting to Diverse Personalities, Needs, and Unexpected Challenges with Flexibility*

The participants shared one essential coping mechanism that school heads use to manage an integrated school: adjusting to diverse personalities, varied needs, and unexpected challenges with flexibility. Participants 1 and 2 emphasized the importance of being open-minded, responsive, and adaptable to sudden changes, whether these

involve teacher concerns, urgent reports, or student needs. They stated: "Being flexible has been a big help, listening to teachers' ideas, gathering suggestions first, and being considerate." (P1) "Dapat flexible gyud kay lalilahi gyud ang personalities sa mga teachers ug staff. Sabay sabay lang." (P2)

In addition, Participant 4 underscored the need to understand individual teacher behaviors, strengths, and weaknesses to offer appropriate support and guidance: "To be flexible is very important kay maka adopt ka sa different situation. Open minded in order to adopt s new ng mga trends. Sa integrated school lahi lahi ang mga behavior dapat kamao ka mo deal. Dapat kabalo ka sa ilang weakness ug strength kay para makabalo ka unsaon pag deal sa ila. Adjustment gyud."

This practice aligns with Goleman's (2000) concept of emotional intelligence, which identifies empathy, social awareness, and adaptability as key competencies for effective leadership. In addition, Participant 6 emphasized continuous improvement, problem-solving, and maintaining staff morale as essential aspects of being a flexible leader. These points are also consistent with the transformational leadership framework, which highlights innovation, motivation, and individualized consideration. Participant 6 stated:

"Being flexible allows a school head to adapt quickly to unexpected challenges, whether they involve students, staff, or operations. It helps in making timely decisions, adjusting plans when needed, and finding creative solutions that keep the school running smoothly and inclusively".

This statement highlights that practicing adaptability is an essential way for school leaders to cope with the complex realities of school management. Specifically, this management style demonstrates a leader's ability to handle challenging situations effectively. For instance, flexibility helps school heads manage stress and prevent conflicts by recognizing that people have different personalities and needs, and by adjusting their responses accordingly. Furthermore, it allows leaders to adapt their strategies to suit the demands of each situation. In practice, this means being open to different opinions and ensuring that decisions consider the perspectives of teachers, students, and parents. Leaders exhibit flexibility when they adjust their approach as circumstances change—for example, by experimenting with new teaching methods or finding ways to use limited resources more effectively. This adaptability also enables them to remain calm during unexpected problems, maintaining stability in the school and instilling confidence among the community. Since teachers, students, and parents all have distinct personalities and expectations, rigid leadership can easily lead to conflict. By being flexible, school heads can tailor their responses so that everyone feels heard and understood, fostering a more harmonious and productive school environment.

This statement further suggests that in integrated schools, flexibility is especially important because leaders must balance the playful needs of younger children with the

more serious academic demands of older students. Moreover, when sudden problems arise—such as a lack of resources or new policies—adaptable leaders can quickly shift priorities to keep the school running smoothly. This ability to adjust helps maintain stability and ensures continued progress, even during difficult times. Flexibility, therefore, is more than simply changing plans; it embodies the essence of an adaptive management style. It reflects a leader's capacity to remain resilient, inclusive, and responsive in varying situations. For example, by adjusting to the diverse personalities and needs of the school community, the school head builds trust and fosters collaboration. Furthermore, when challenges occur, adaptability enables the leader to stay composed and ensure that learning continues without disruption. Ultimately, flexibility enhances the school environment, creating a supportive space where everyone feels respected and valued.

Heifetz and Linsky (2002) described adaptive leadership as the capacity to navigate ambiguity and thrive in challenging environments. In this context, flexibility has emerged as a critical leadership trait for managing the complex demands of integrated schools. When leaders are flexible, they can respond effectively to situations involving students, staff, or school operations without becoming overwhelmed. As a result, this adaptability enables them to make timely and effective decisions, preventing minor issues from escalating into larger problems. Moreover, by staying composed and responsive, flexible leaders maintain stability within the school community and foster confidence that challenges can be addressed constructively.

- *Theme 5: Integrating Technology and Data-Driven Tools to Enhance Efficiency and Outcomes*

The data from the participants indicate that, particularly in integrated schools, using technology and data tools helps school heads work more effectively and efficiently. These innovations simplify administrative tasks, enhance teaching practices, and support better decision-making. For example, technology enables faster communication, more efficient use of resources, and closer monitoring of student progress, while data provides clear insights to guide strategies that address the diverse needs of learners. By leveraging these tools, school leaders can streamline their work, reduce the burden on staff, and foster a more inclusive and adaptable learning environment.

Participant 3 identified several technologies that significantly enhance administrative efficiency in integrated schools. Specifically, these tools are particularly useful in platforms such as the Learner Information System (LIS) and the Enhanced Basic Education Information System (EBEIS), which are essential for managing data and creating accurate school profiles. This observation aligns with the research of Anderson and Dexter (2005), which demonstrated that effective IT leadership is critical for successfully integrating technology into school operations. Furthermore, Participant 3 shared: "AI, Computer from government, internet connection sa tanan, dapat budgetan gyud sa integrated school ang 3 department."

Participant 6 also highlighted data-driven planning using information to guide scheduling, communication, and delegation: “In the DepEd context, technologies like the Learner Information System (LIS) and Enhanced Basic Education Information System (EBEIS) are essential for managing student data and school profiles. Tools such as Google Workspace for Education and Microsoft 365 also support administrative tasks, communication, and collaboration among teachers, staff, and stakeholders.”

This statement reflects the same idea noted by Mandinach and Gummer (2016): that data literacy supports informed decision-making and enhances adaptability in school leadership. In addition to data analytics, other tools such as Google Workspace and Microsoft 365 were cited for improving communication, scheduling, and document management. Furthermore, using learning management systems (LMS) and data analytics tools to track performance and manage resources is particularly important in the context of the Department of Education. These tools also align with the findings of Bebell and O’Dwyer (2010), which demonstrated that LMS usage enhances administrative productivity and supports more effective decision-making. This perspective is reflected in the response of Participant 5: “Collaborative Technology Leadership-establishing technology integration teams and vetting tools through trials ensures selected technologies are cost-effective, easy to implement, and meet the school’s needs. Data Analytics Tools-these provide insights into learner performance and resource utilization, enabling evidence-based decisions to improve school outcomes. Learning Management Systems-it is a platform automate routine tasks like enrollment and attendance tracking, freeing administrators to focus on strategic planning and educational initiatives.”

This statement highlights that modern school management increasingly relies on technology and data tools to make operations more efficient. In integrated schools, where school heads oversee both elementary and secondary levels, technology supports everyday tasks such as communication, resource management, and teaching. Meanwhile, data tools provide a clear picture of student performance, identifying areas where learners struggle and the support they need. By leveraging these tools, school heads can respond more effectively to diverse learner needs and develop strategies tailored to their school community. Overall, technology and data make school management more practical, responsive, and supportive for everyone.

Digital platforms play a key role in improving administrative efficiency by simplifying scheduling, reporting, and resource management, thereby reducing the workload of school heads. In addition, technology supports instructional delivery by enabling blended learning and differentiated instruction, while also providing access to digital resources that enhance the quality of teaching. For decision-making, data analytics allow leaders to make evidence-based choices, ensuring that school policies and interventions are aligned with actual performance trends. Finally, stakeholder engagement is strengthened through online communication tools, which foster collaboration

among teachers, parents, and students, thereby building trust and promoting transparency within the school community.

This finding suggests that integrating technology and data into school leadership enables leaders to become more adaptive and innovative. It also highlights their ability to handle complex challenges accurately while ensuring that everyone feels included. For example, with technology, school heads can work more efficiently, enable personalized learning, and ensure equitable access to resources. Meanwhile, using data helps them stay accountable, track progress, and continuously improve.

Overall, the data confirm that when used effectively, technology streamlines task, facilitates collaboration, and supports informed leadership in complex school environments. In addition, the coping strategies of school heads in integrated schools revolve around shared leadership, structured planning, collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and data-informed decision-making. These strategies, supported by relevant literature, strengthen school management, particularly in multi-level and resource-limited settings.

Furthermore, the findings presented in this chapter highlight the multifaceted challenges and adaptive strategies of school heads managing integrated schools. From the challenges of fragmented school cultures and administrative overload to the pressing issues of equity, flexibility, and technological integration, the experiences shared by the participants provide a vivid picture of the complexities involved in leading integrated schools. Despite varying contexts and levels of experience, the respondents exhibited resilience, strategic thinking, and a strong commitment to inclusive and student-centered leadership. Together, these lived experiences, supported by relevant literature, affirm the significance of responsive, collaborative, and flexible leadership in navigating the demands of integrated school operations.

IV. SUMMARY

This study investigated the management practices of school heads in integrated schools. Specifically, six (6) school heads participated, sharing their experiences through in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted during the 2024–2025 school year. In addition, the study examined the challenges these school heads faced in managing integrated schools and the coping mechanisms they employed. To achieve this, a qualitative research design was used to highlight their management practices. Finally, the data collected from the individual interviews were analyzed using a thematic data analysis procedure.

V. FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study, based on the analysis of participants’ responses. The analysis revealed the following key findings:

There are four (4) key management practices of school heads in integrated schools: (a) promoting fairness while addressing the unique needs of each department; (b) demonstrating flexibility in responding to urgent tasks and respecting teachers' personal circumstances; (c) delegating tasks and fostering teamwork to reduce workload; and (d) emphasizing equitable opportunities for professional growth.

There are five (5) challenges encountered by school heads in managing integrated schools: (a) coping with poor facilities, unequal resources, and limited funding; (b) difficulties in fostering teacher cooperation and participation; (c) leadership challenges in integrated school management; (d) incorporating technology and providing digital support; and (e) promoting equity through student-centered education. Aligned with these challenges, there are five (5) corresponding themes for coping mechanisms employed by the school heads: (a) managing time, tasks, and priorities through scheduling, delegation, and organization; (b) engaging teachers, parents, and stakeholders in collective decision-making; (c) identifying problems, prioritizing solutions, and applying evidence-based strategies; (d) adjusting to diverse personalities, needs, and unexpected challenges with flexibility; and (e) integrating technology and data-driven tools to enhance efficiency and outcomes.

VI. GENERAL STATEMENT

Running an integrated school is a challenging task that requires fairness, flexibility, teamwork, and creativity. School heads must ensure that both the elementary and secondary levels receive equal attention while still addressing their specific needs. Collaboration is equally vital, as working together with teachers and staff lightens the workload and helps build a positive school environment. In addition, they are responsible for ensuring that every student—regardless of background—has equal access to quality education.

These realities highlight the need for leaders to be flexible, creative, and inclusive, since relying on rigid or traditional approaches is often insufficient to meet the diverse needs of integrated schools. Despite these challenges, school heads demonstrate resilience by finding practical ways to cope: they organize their time effectively, set clear priorities, and share responsibilities through scheduling and delegation. Moreover, they involve teachers, parents, and other stakeholders in decision-making, ensuring that solutions are grounded in evidence and actual needs.

Ultimately, their management is characterized by adaptability and inclusiveness, which strengthens the school community. This leadership approach not only sustains continuous improvement but also equips schools to succeed in an ever-changing educational environment.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, the researcher formulated the following recommendations. These recommendations are directed toward the following groups:

- The Department of Education (DepEd) may provide sustained funding and ensure equitable resource allocation for integrated schools, with a focus on infrastructure development, digital tools, and professional development. Furthermore, the Department may invest in digital platforms and analytics systems to support instructional delivery, streamline administrative tasks, and guide evidence-based decision-making. In addition, the Department may provide training for teachers, school heads, and staff to develop skills in flexible leadership, teamwork, and the effective use of technology.
- School heads should strengthen delegation and teamwork strategies to ease workloads, as encouraging teacher participation in decision-making fosters cooperation, builds trust, and creates a culture of shared responsibility across departments.
- Teachers, stakeholders, and school leaders may develop programs that place students at the center and ensure that learning is fair and inclusive. Moreover, by participating in consultations, forming partnerships, and contributing to collective decision-making, they can enhance transparency, strengthen trust, and provide additional support, thereby increasing the success of school programs and initiatives.
- Future studies should examine how leadership in integrated schools influences student learning outcomes, teacher motivation and retention, and community-school relations. In addition, comparative studies between integrated and non-integrated school settings may provide further insights.

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