Navigating Educational Leadership Challenges: Transformations and Policy Implications for Filipino Principals

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the multifaceted challenges confronting Filipino school principals in primary education. It synthesized and analyzed eight significant leadership challenges: corruption, political involvement, socio-economic disparities, systemic Department of Education issues, curriculum challenges, principal-centeredness, religious diversity, and the impact of regional military conflicts. To address these challenges effectively, the research proposes several strategies. Firstly, it recommends adopting a distributed leadership model, promoting collaboration among all education stakeholders. Shifting away from a principal-centered approach can alleviate managerial burdens and enhance teaching and learning quality. The study also emphasizes the need for a cultural shift in educational leadership. Principals should actively engage in re-culturing efforts to instill new values, beliefs, and norms within their school communities, fostering a more conducive learning environment and encouraging innovative teaching practices. At the national level, policy reforms are essential to support principals. These reforms should include clear directives on religious instruction, combating corruption within the Department of Education, and revamping teacher support training programs for personal and professional development rather than mandatory attendance. In conclusion, this research underscores the intricate challenges faced by Filipino principals and proposes a roadmap for practical solutions. They embrace distributed leadership, initiate cultural change through re-culturing, and implement national policy reforms to empower Filipino principals to lead their schools toward improved educational outcomes.

Keywords: *Educational leadership, transformation, principals, systematic literature review, educational challenges*

INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic landscape of education, proficient leadership is crucial in guiding school principals and headteachers through the ongoing challenges. This study delves into the perspectives of Filipino head teachers, aiming to explore the intricacies of their roles and the multifaceted challenges they encounter. Beyond exploration, the researcher aspires to present practical strategies that resonate with established educational leadership and management principles, offering a roadmap for navigating the complexities inherent in the Philippine education system.

This study holds particular significance within the framework of the Philippine education system, especially considering the recent decade-long duration of reforms in both school administrations and the national curriculum. By contributing to the expanding body of literature dedicated to evaluating and presenting challenges in educational leadership, this research aims to provide timely insights into the evolving educational landscape. While the preponderance of the data emanates from the country's southern regions, it is imperative to acknowledge that the synthesized resources and the authors' insights indicate the generalizability of the identified challenges—excluding those arising from military conflicts—to other geographical areas. This assertion is particularly pertinent to schools falling under the direct purview of the Department of Education. Throughout this paper, the terms "principal" and "headteacher" will be utilized interchangeably for terminological consistency and to denote synonymous roles in educational leadership.

Research has shown that educational management is a type of management having strategic planning, materials and human resource management, and relationships with stakeholders and the broader community, which are accomplished within the activities of an institution having resources used effectively and efficiently for the functions of teaching [and learning], extension work and research (Bush, 1999; Deshmukh & Naik, 2010). Thus, a comprehensive effort intended to achieve specific objectives (Deshmukh & Naik, 2010). It also entails accepting the responsibility [and accountability] of those in the educational hierarchy and developing values, attitudes, information, and skills for the proper functioning of the education system (Deshmukh & Naik, 2010; Connolly et al., 2019).

The definition of leadership has evolved throughout the recent decades of practice and research. Turner (2012) defined it as a form of influence between people, allowing the possibility of influencing actions, attitudes, and the accomplishment of colleagues' collaboration on activities grounded on theory, policy, research, and practice (Bush, 2019). West-Burnham (2009) identified that the influence could be either direct or indirect and that leadership is a moral activity requiring leaders to "do the right thing," and effectiveness is drawn from human 'desirable' qualities accompanied by acquired knowledge and behaviors. Another study conducted by Relon (2019) determined the perception of CTE students along with community leadership. They disclosed that the CTE students have high perceptions of community leadership. However, they highly believed in the use of force as a means of resolving conflicts in the community.

According to Northouse (2019), researchers conceptualize leadership in two ways: as a trait or behavior and as an information-processing perspective. However, recent ideas focus more on the process which defines leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2019)

In addition, Lytle (2010) noted that leadership ties back to the classroom, wherein leaders not only walk through but be within and spend time in the learners' classrooms to watch lessons unfold, how students respond, and have relationships with teachers that is open for discussions of challenges and achievements, gearing towards understanding learners' interests and how their culture change. Taban and Cajindos (2018) found in their study that faculty members in SUCs in Region I portrayed the highest level of efficacy in classroom management, efficacy on instructional strategies, and student engagement. However, they were moderately stressed. The main reason for their stress lies in their relationship with their students. These are considered cultural factors in instigating change in educational practices (Connolly et al., 2019).

Leadership and management in education seem to imply the same essence; however, research denotes significant differences (Bush et al., 2010). West-Burnham (2009) noted that although these have a symbiotic relationship, leadership makes a difference. Parker (2015) cited leadership as the agent of change, while management is concerned with maintenance. Also, management is directly linked to authority, while leadership is independent (Bush et al., 2010). This necessitates that those involved in management are accountable for the system's functioning, compared to those practicing leadership being responsible for their own influencing actions (Connolly et al., 2019). Northouse (2019) regarded the difference in their function: (M) provide orders and consistency, (L) produce change and movement; what they seek: (M) order and stability, (L) adaptive and constructive change; and focus: (M) coordinating activities to get a job done, (L) development of mutual purposes.

Although leadership and management are recognized as distinct, Northouse (2019) pointed out that both involve influence and are concerned with effective goal accomplishment. That is why it is vital for leaders and managers to recognize that all employees (not just the teaching staff) are [led and] managed with equal considerations, with an interactive and influential approach rather than directive (Middlewood, 2019), and for an organization's prosperity and effectivity, competent management and skilled leadership is necessary (Northouse, 2019). Furthermore, it is to be noted that although there are apparent differences…[they] overlap. When managers are involved in influencing a group to meet its goals, they are involved in leadership. When leaders are involved in planning, organization, staffing, and controlling, they are involved in management. (Northouse, 2019, p. 14)

It is then undoubted that organizational culture is relevant to educational leadership and management as school culture affects institutions' quality, significantly that effectiveness can be enhanced as organizational culture can be created, measured, manipulated, and changed as leaders stimulate positive behavior and necessary change (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Owens & Valesky, 2011; Walker & Haiyan, 2019).

This study is critical in the context of the Philippine education system, especially considering the ten-year duration of the recent reforms. By contributing to the growing

body of literature on evaluating and presenting educational leadership challenges, this study seeks to furnish a timely insight into the evolving educational realities.

The study is focused on basic education school principals in the Philippines. Although the majority of data come from the southern part of the country, resources mentioned and the author's experiences identify that these (excluding military conflict) also happen to other areas of the country, having schools under the supervision and control of the Department of Education. The terms principal and head teacher will be used interchangeably in this research.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to explore the challenges experienced by educational leaders and their frustration and implications for Filipino principals. It specifically determined the primary challenges experienced by Filipino principals from a leadership perspective and the approaches that have the potential to address these challenges effectively.

METHODOLOGY

The present study focuses on the transformative landscape of teaching and learning within the Philippine education system, a phenomenon propelled by the shift brought about by the K-12 program's implementation, leading to a fundamental alteration in the primary education curriculum (Guadalupe & Perez, 2020). This educational reform has given rise to sweeping national-level changes, particularly in the mandated training of school leadership in response to the escalating demand for proficient educators and influential school leaders, as stipulated in the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, also known as Republic Act 105 3. In effect, these reforms represent a pivotal nexus necessitated by the challenges confronted by Filipino principals, who, in themselves, assume the crucial role of change agents (Parker, 2015; Connolly et al., 2019).

Research Design

The research framework of this study adopts a rigorous methodology grounded in topical analysis and synthesis of relevant studies to construct a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by Filipino principals in the evolving landscape of the Philippine education system. Employing a strategic combination of keywords, which includes "Philippine education system," "Filipino principals," "school leadership challenges," "K-12 curriculum," and "Filipino head teachers."

Data Collection

The application of inclusion criteria mandates the selection of empirical studies spanning the period from 2010 to 2019, thereby ensuring the incorporation of

contemporary insights that directly address the challenges encountered by Filipino principals from a leadership perspective.

The data collection procedure ensured the inclusion of scholarly contributions that meet stringent criteria. Deliberate and systematic exploration of academic databases is undertaken, guided by the defined search terms. The inclusion criteria serve as a discerning filter, facilitating the selection of studies that provide contemporary insights into the challenges faced by Filipino principals from a leadership perspective. This integrated approach ensures that the research design and data collection are seamlessly intertwined, laying a robust foundation for the subsequent analysis of the synthesized literature.

Analysis of Data

The data analysis phase of this study is anchored in a robust and rigorous examination of the collected and synthesized literature, employing thematic analysis to distill critical insights and emergent themes pertaining to the challenges encountered by Filipino principals. The synthesized information is subjected to meticulous scrutiny that involves identifying patterns, connections, and recurring themes across the selected studies. This process adheres to established analytical frameworks, ensuring the extraction of perspectives and a holistic understanding of the multifaceted challenges faced by Filipino principals in navigating the dynamic landscape of educational leadership.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Main Challenges Facing Filipino Principals from a Leadership Perspective

As a result of the conducted systematic literature review, this study identified eight themes of challenges faced by Filipino principals. This section delineates the eight identified prominent challenges faced by schools located primarily on the southern island group of Mindanao, experiences which resonate with principals across the country, into which their role encounters several facets of socio-political and -religious complexities whilst striving to enhance the quality of teaching and learning (Brooks & Brooks, 2019).

Undimmed Corruption

The functions of the country's primary education are mainly managed and influenced by the Department of Education, commonly referred to as DepEd. Mandated by Republic Act 10533, DepEd is entrusted with the responsibility to establish, maintain, and support a complete, adequate, and integrated system of education relevant to the needs of the people, the country, and society at large (Republic Act 10533, 2013).

However, the implementation of DepEd's policies has been subject to scrutiny. Reyes (2010) has asserted that the department, while one of the most enormous bureaucracies in the country, grapples with issues of corruption, whose policy implementations suffer significant deficits (Reyes, 2010; Brooks & Brooks, 2014). This challenge, therefore, significantly affects and is experienced by principals, whose schools are not immune from the lack of essential resources such as classrooms and other learning spaces, desks, teaching-learning materials, equipment such as libraries, computers, laboratories, rehearsal rooms, and sport facilities (Brooks & Brooks, 2019).

Furthermore, initiatives to construct and refurbish buildings or classrooms often face setbacks, with projects left incomplete due to inadequacies in the annual budget allocation reaching the school (Brooks & Sutherland, 201). They mention an annual allocation of 1.1 million Philippine pesos with a principal receiving only eleven (11) thousand pesos after months of follow-up on DepEd (Brooks & Sutherland, 2014) as one example (exchange rate of £1 = ₱ 60, for reference purpose). It is then undeniable and noted that corruption is part of the historical and present-day challenges that principals are facing (Reyes, 2010; Brooks & Sutherland, 2014).

Political Involvement

The challenged allocation and integrity of funds earmarked for essential school services being hampered, leading principals to adopt to political acumen as a practical response — "political savvies" (Brooks & Sutherland, 2014; Brooks & Brooks, 2014). This challenge sees principals becoming adept at discerning potential political engagements, enabling them to address issues, procure facilities, and implement enhancement through donations from politicians, private enterprises, and dedicated parents. These provisions, which should ideally be the DepEd's responsibility, remain unfulfilled and unfunded. (Brooks & Brooks, 2014).

Moreover, this navigation of political networks creates a dichotomy, wherein principals may align themselves with or in opposition to the 'colour' of the ruling political group, a stance that carries potential organizational repercussions manifesting as diminished support or, at a personal level, jeopardizing the position of principals and fellow teachers (Brooks & Sutherland, 2014; Brooks & Brooks, 2014). Furthermore, this regarded practicality then involves the Filipino cultural values of palakasan [trans. Patronage and nepotism] and utang-na-loob [loosely translated as debt-of-gratitude] (Ballano, 2020). Wherein this interplay of cultural norms and professional exigencies shapes the strategies employed by principals in their goal of resource mobilization and support of their schools.

Socio-economic Disparities

In addition to the headteachers' role of facilitating education, they also face gathering resources to provide for the daily health and nutrition needs of their students

(Brooks & Sutherland, 2014; Smyth, 2014). This is mainly considered to be part of the poverty threshold, which pertains to 16.6% of the population (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019). As a consequence, principals often find themselves compelled to prioritize children's well-being and support resources management, compromising the improvement of school and learning (Smyth, 2014). In addition, principalship is further complicated by the socioeconomic challenge of principals' and teachers' own remuneration. This was described by Brooks and Sutherland (2014) as very low, which is not enough for teachers to move above their current community status.

Systemic Department of Education Issues

Student learning decisions and implementations primarily originate from the national office of the Department of Education. This hierarchical structure is characterized by a direct link between the secretary (minister) of the department and the country's president, along with undersecretaries overseeing various educational subdivisions. Resolutions and ratifications from the central office are distributed at large through department memorandums with scanned copy versions posted on a web portal (deped.gov.ph), which are then attempted to be implemented at the school level, under the supervision of respective division officials. Logical as it seems, the implementation realities of this highly centralized top-down approach of the department (Alegado, 2018) bring about a negative impact on education, which principals encounter and handle.

Having corruption on top of the issues associated with DepEd also involves the lack of support for headteachers and teachers in general and its management system. In reiteration, the lack of support is seen in the horrendous status of school facilities and mishandled funds. In addition, support through mandated teacher training is regarded by principals perceived as an unnecessary consumption of time beyond office hours and minimally beneficial to teachers' growth in their respective professional fields (Brooks & Brooks, 2014) – conflicting considerations on the purpose of these for continuing professional development (Republic Act No. 10912, 2016). Furthermore, division-level meetings, which should ideally serve as forums for sharing experiences and best practices, are instead overwhelmed with a vast amount of memorandum updates, overshadowing the potential for collaborative learning. (Brooks & Sutherland, 2014).

In addition, principal rotations augment the problem. Having the seemingly misapplied idea of sharing best practices amongst schools (Brooks & Brooks, 2019), principals are frequently transferred after a relatively short school contribution time frame of about a year or even only six months (Alegado, 2014). This then impacts leadership performance as they (1) solve the problems of the previous principal, (2) tend to limit work because of expected transfer at any time, and (3) fail to establish contributed implementation and evaluation with fellow teachers (Alegado, 2018;

Brooks & Brooks, 2014). This scenario is further aggravated by the identified allocation of principals and teachers that is influenced by cronyism (Brooks & Sutherland, 2014). Indeed, the national hierarchy (Alegado, 2018) of the department poses challenges rather than solutions and necessary assistance to schools and principals.

National Curriculum and Authentic Curricula

The Philippines, being an archipelago, consists of seventeen (17) geographical regions that comprise over a hundred and seventy (170) diverse ethnolinguistic groups. This nature of the population necessitates authentic curricula catered to provide culturally responsive learning. This is implemented with DepEd requesting principals to modify the [only provided] national curriculum to meet learner's needs (Brooks & Brooks, 2014). However, there are no resources provided to support this requirement (Brooks & Brooks, 2014), adding to the existing challenge of insufficient learning materials necessitated by the national curriculum (Brooks & Sutherland, 2014).

Although it argued by Brookes & Sutherland (2014) that the national curriculum provides teachers with direction and focus, it is noted that the curriculum is too ambitious with regard to the quantity of learning content, which leads teachers to move to follow learning units regardless of student performance and achievement. In addition, learners who attend schools come from homes with different mother tongues and learn in school with English as the medium of instruction (Brooks & Sutherland, 2014). Somehow, this dilemma has been purposely addressed by the implementation of the Mother-Tongue Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) approach; however, this also posed the need for learning materials in the local languages that are unsupported as well (Guadalupe & Perez, 2020). It is then undeniable that the need for authentic curricula among community-specific schools that principals lead is challenging in addition to the limitations regarding the national curriculum.

Principal-Centeredness

It is noted by Alegado (2018) that the principal role in the country remains to be interpreted traditionally as principal-centered, wherein the majority of the tasks and responsibilities are fixated on only one individual. Furthermore, this approach places an overwhelming burden of the role on only one individual, focusing predominantly on managerialism and heavily loaded paper works (Brooks & Brooks, 2014). This then leads to little to no attention given to ensuring the quality of teaching and learning taking place in classrooms. Managerialism and meetings overthrow the leading of instructions and the improvement of pedagogical practices (Brooks & Brooks, 2014).

Moreover, principals are regarded as being solely responsible for instances involving students facing communication challenges. This is exacerbated by the tendency of parents to resort to media for one-sided and non-evidence-based complaints and accusations. This not only places head teachers in a disadvantageous

position but also negatively impacts teachers, as public perceptions of the profession's image (Brooks & Sutherland, 2014).

Religious Diversity

The demography of students representing religions in schools shows various beliefs existing in a Catholic-dominated country (Brooks & Sutherland, 2014). Despite the varied beliefs held by students, Brooks (2017) noted that principals exercise the hegemony of Christian beliefs, wherein despite the diversity of beliefs by students and teachers, they are proclaimed and school practicing Christians through paraphernalia, activities, and invitation of nuns to teach – having religious diversity lacking support, thus, resulting to continued social division (Brooks & Brooks, 2014).

Brooks (2017) identified a significant factor contributing to this situation as the insufficient understanding of religious diversity among school principals. Wherein the DepEd provides few preparations and sometimes no training on handling issues related to religious diversity. It is further described by Brooks (2017, p. 657) of principals not being able to consider the implications of religious indoctrination… instruction was treated as adhering to the DepEd order… obliviousness to their complicity in reinforcing socio-religious divisions undergirded their tolerance for religious stereotyping and othering… lack of informed leadership disenfranchised their students who identified as religiously different or religiously unaffiliated.

Military Conflict

The southern island group of Mindanao has been through ethno-religious conflict, which resulted in the displacement of millions and the death of over a hundred thousand lives over the past forty years (Brooks & Brooks, 2014). Disturbingly, schools in effect, face this violence with the mentioned military attacks on Lumad (one Filipino ethnic group) schools (Save Our Schools Network, 2015), having schools used as military bases involving child recruitment (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2012), and teachers suffering harassment, kidnapping, and death (Espina-Varona, 2015).

Finally, principals also face politically motivated violence, which takes them to the brink of being friends with terrorist groups to secure their safety, and being involved in negative political issues such as corruption can cost their lives. That is why it is necessary for them to ensure that however limited their resources and time are, they will gain the trust of the community to protect themselves and everyone in school (Brooks & Brooks, 2019).

Approaches show potential in addressing these challenges effectively.

Undeniably, the challenges faced by Filipino principals are complex and are beyond leading colleagues and students. The extent involves the school, local community, national government difficulties, and personal safety that confront their roe. Having gathered literature on leadership principles and practical recommendations, this section will present some of these possible approaches to address challenges effectively from principals' immediate point of influence and national policy reforms – having the main argument of change.

Knowledgeable and Supported in Effective Principal Role

Knowledgeable on Effective Principal Role. This study recommends the imperative for school principals to adopt a critically conscious and ethically caring approach in the execution of their roles (Brooks & Brooks, 201 4). The journey towards ethical leadership begins with a process of personal reflection, as advocated by Horsford et al. (2011), encouraging principals to examine their roles and identities in the context of inclusion in the context of student diversity and community reality. Such reflection serves as a catalyst for challenging societal inequalities and questioning norms that may perpetuate negative biases, ultimately guiding improved teaching and learning practices (Brooks & Brooks, 2019).

In order to be effective agents of change, principals are encouraged to adopt a proactive stance in embracing culturally relevant leadership (Horsford et al., 201 1). This approach entails a commitment to understanding and addressing the unique needs of diverse student populations, thereby fostering a supportive and inclusive educational environment. The importance of prioritizing student support from a holistic perspective, encompassing the provision of basic needs and the delivery of excellent quality pedagogy is also emphasized (Hosford et al., 2011; Brooks & Sutherland, 2014). Through the integration of critical consciousness and culturally relevant practices, school principals can play an important role in dismantling systemic inequalities and creating a more equitable educational landscape.

These can further be embodied through a paradigm shift in the organizational culture of the current education system, driven by the recognition that the existing structures limit the efficacy of educational leadership (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Owens & Valesky, 2011; Walker & Haiyan, 201 4). The prevalent model, characterized by a principle-centered and heroic leadership approach, has been identified as a hindrance to achieving optimal leadership outcomes and fostering collaborative educational environments.

Drawing on the concept of distributed leadership, as discussed by Alegado (2018) and Bush (2019), this study challenges the conventional notion of a singularly responsible principal. Distributed leadership emphasizes collaboration among all members of the organization, with a particular focus on harnessing the collective

expertise of teachers. This approach is identified as a critical factor in promoting school improvement and facilitating positive organizational change (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Bush, 2019).

The application of distributed leadership is presented as a means to provide practical support and motivation for colleagues within the workplace, thereby redefining the leadership role (Northouse, 2012). This transformation aims to break away from the constraints of a hierarchical leadership structure, fostering a culture of shared responsibility and collective decision-making. By dismantling the limitations imposed by the current educational and organizational culture, the article posits that distributed leadership offers a promising avenue for realizing a comprehensive and sustainable educational system form. Thus, if implemented efficiently, distributed leadership in Philippine schools can be an effective school leadership and management… in terms of their capacity to build solid institutional cultures based on shared values conducive to promoting collaboration in enhancing quality, especially in teaching and learning, thus bringing about school improvement (Dimmock & Walker, 2005, p. 68).

In the pursuit of fostering transformative changes within the educational landscape, this study also advocates for principals to proactively establish and maintain networks of support amongst themselves, challenging the traditional memorandum update meetings (Brooks & Sutherland, 2019). Instead, it proposes the implementation of innovative communication and resource portals designed to facilitate the exchange of best practices and shared learning (Brooks & Sutherland, 2014; Dimmock & Walker, 2015).

This recognizes the limitations of traditional memorandum update meetings and emphasizes the need for a more dynamic and collaborative approach to support educational leadership. By creating communication and resource portals, principals can not only streamline information sharing but also establish a stable platform for the exchange of best practices. This approach aligns with the insights from Brooks and Sutherland (2014) and Dimmock and Walker (2015), who highlight the importance of shared learning in driving meaningful educational reforms.

Furthermore, the role of teachers in these reformative processes is also emphasized. As teachers actively participate in the exchange of best practices and shared learning facilitated in their own schools, the reforms initiated by principals can be effectively implemented from and at the school level. By leveraging modern communication technologies, these collaborative networks of support can contribute to a more agile and responsive educational leadership culture, fostering sustained improvements and advancements within the educational system.

Supported Effective Principal Role. It is imperative for national-level changes to complement school-based innovations, with a specific focus on the redevelopment of

teacher support training. Acknowledging the challenges associated with these endeavors, the study proposes a transformative approach that prioritizes the perceptions and needs of teachers, aiming to shift from obligatory out-of-working-hours attendance to a model that fosters personal and professional development (Brooks & Brooks, 2014). Central to this proposed shift is a reconceptualization of teacher support training programs initiated by incorporating teachers' perspectives on their desired and relevant learning experiences. By embracing a more personalized approach, the training sessions can become a catalyst for both personal and professional growth, steering away from the current practice of compulsory attendance driven by promotion and license renewal requirements (Brooks & Brooks, 2014). In addition to this, and to address religious diversity and social divisions.

DepEd educational policy… should provide clear directives for principals to follow in terms of religious instruction… [to prevent] ad hoc policy implementation… bridge[ing] religious difference and provide learning environments where every religious tradition is valued, supported, and regarded as a positive contribution to society (Brooks, 2017, p. 657-658).

Reyes (2010) identifies the challenges arising from dysfunctions within the DepEd, highlighting the immense size of the bureaucracy and its resource constraints. Rather than solely condemning corrupt practices, this study advocates for a more nuanced approach that delves into the root causes of corruption and aims to minimize the problems of implementation that arise from these dysfunctions.

The proposed strategy involves a comprehensive examination and restructuring of bureaucratic processes, incorporating measures to enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency within the DepEd. By acknowledging the resource constraints and complexities faced by the bureaucracy, the study aims to stimulate a constructive dialogue on instituting reforms that go beyond mere condemnation, ultimately contributing to a more effective and corruption-resistant educational system.

Furthermore, (Reyes, 2010) noted that to tackle ever-growing education challenges, more insightful for practitioners and scholars of educational governance would be to continue to interrogate the experiences and roles carried out by local and the complex linkages that they navigate through as they make sense of the overpowering waves of education reform and the irrepressible stranglehold of systemic corruption.

Agents of Change: Re-culturing

The Philippines is part of the Southern Asia cultural cluster, which was identified by Northouse (2019) to have a leadership profile that places importance on the self-protective and charismatic values that regard the effectiveness of autocracy over collaborative decision-making processes. In light of this cultural backdrop, this

study proposes a transformative journey for educational leaders, commencing with distributed leadership. This shift aims to reculture the education system that can be propagated by principals after acquiring further knowledge of more efficient leadership, thus being more equipped agents of change (Dimmock & Walker, 2005) as they fulfill their crucial role of shaping learning culture (Walker, 2010).

Wherein in reculturing there is the process of developing new values, beliefs, and norms … [involving] building new conceptions about instruction … and new forms of professionalism for teachers (cited in Dimmock & Walker, 2005, p. 69)

Schein (2017) identified that change in organizational culture brings transient disequilibrium and anxiety within members. Moreover, Bush (2011) noted that the absence of a handbook and the nature of cultural change as complex and problematic underscores the need for equipped and visionary principals. Educational leaders must identify and make necessary changes to the culture and create necessary school improvements (Dimmock & Walker, 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

In conducting a systematic literature review, this study underscored the multifaceted challenges confronting Filipino principals in their leadership roles. Eight major themes emerged, encompassing corruption, political involvement, socio-economic disparities, systemic issues within the Department of Education, curriculum challenges, principal-centeredness, religious diversity, and the impact of regional military conflicts. In response to these challenges, the study identified two critical pillars for effective leadership: being knowledgeable and well-supported, coupled with the imperative to drive cultural change.

The literature echoes the sentiment expressed by Brooks and Sutherland (2014, p. 344) that Filipino leadership grapples with ongoing power dynamics fostering instability and corruption, hindering principals' ability to enact lasting change. These challenges not only mirror the struggles faced by Filipino head teachers but also underscore broader concerns that demand a comprehensive approach combining top-down and bottom-up strategies within the Philippine basic education system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is highly recommended that further research and analysis should be done simultaneously with proactive movements of reforms within schools, the Department of Education, elected government officials, and the societal perspectives on education and school principals. Filipino learners are in need of principals who are agents of necessary changes, but concurrently, (our) principals also need sufficient training and support from the school community, the government, and themselves. Not only to be

knowledgeable with principles about good educational leadership and management but also to recognize that they should listen and realize what the students need and the cultural reforms necessary, and place these in influencing policies and implementations. These then can contribute to securing and ensuring that every Filipino obtains excellent quality teaching and learning through practical solutions to leadership challenges of school principals.

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