

Rising from the Embers: Learning Continuity Experiences of School Leaders in the Throes of COVID-19 Pandemic

Alicamen, Daryl Benedict L^a, Alugar, Ritchelee B^b, Barreto, Rogelio^c, Daffon, Catherine C^d
Dayagbil, Filomena T^e, Maute, Karen Salve M^f, Mobida, Fanny Mae G^g

^a Philippine School Doha – Doha, State of Qatar; Cebu Normal University

^b Bukidnon State University

^c DepEd Southern Leyte, Philippines

^d Visayas State University-Isabel

^e Office of the President, Cebu Normal University

^f Western Philippines University-Puerto Princesa City

^g Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan

Abstract

The need to ensure learning continuity in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic warrants school leaders to remain at the front line in the continued business of education delivery. This study explored the experiences, perspectives, and practices of school leaders in the continuous quest of providing learning opportunities. Transcendental phenomenology was employed and facilitated with in-depth interviews of 18 school leaders from various basic and higher education institutions in the Philippines. Thematic data analysis revealed emergent themes in the 3 pre-determined components. For issues and concerns: attrition, curriculum recalibration, quality of teaching and learning, instructional materials, faculty well-being, preparedness of stakeholders for a new ICT infrastructure, and restriction of ancillary functions were revealed.

Meanwhile, empowering faculty and staff, prioritizing learners, digitizing processes, collaborating with stakeholders, embracing resilient leadership traits, restructuring budget allocations, and conducting crisis-responsive research are the strategies employed. The use of faculty and staff-centered approach, periodic and sustained strategic controls, optimization of linkages, and provision of student supports are the best practices that aided the school leaders to walk their way through this educational crisis and to rise from the embers.

Keywords: Learning Continuity, School Leaders, School Organizational Resilience, Best Practices

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has been an emerging frontier and has created the largest disruption of education systems in history (United Nations, 2020). It birthed the necessity to maintain learning continuity, by which countries and schools have responded with a package of education interventions, a variety of remote options and solutions, and many other mechanisms of establishing a resilient learning system. This structural breaking of what is the past, cut through by the pandemic, reprises crucial and exceptional roles of educational leaders to lever, define and procreate doing things with a transformative and innovative difference. Along with this growing Coronavirus strain, it can be recalled from a Chinese proverb, "May you live in intriguing times.", as the bulk of human civilization displays a predilection for an unmatched, exploratory, and risky period of human existence.

Rising from the Embers: Learning Continuity Experiences of School Leaders in the Throes of COVID-19 Pandemic

The combination of opportunity and global crisis brought by the pandemic fused unprecedented hazards with unparalleled potentials in our generation to restructure and organize in a disconcerting, yet intriguing avenues for new events, occurrences, and resulting potentials that extend beyond the habitual reality which people normally know - health care systems, economic systems, political systems, and educational systems (Harari, 2020). It necessitated the human core managerial character especially among educators to act critically, radically, and in a business-like manner, a once-in-a-generation chance to remake society and build a better future encompassing the test of CoVid-19 upheaval, a lofty mission to assure that learning continues.

The continuation of education in the event of a prolonged school shutdown or student absence is known as continuity of learning. It is considered a critical part of school's emergency management and has raised the challenge for school leaders to craft critical solutions, and provide clarity and direction, resilience, and inspire hope to remain focused on the best outcomes for the students and the school communities (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2020). Hence, a resounding demand for Organizational Resilience.

British Standards Institution (2021) defines Organizational Resilience as the organization's ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond and adapt to incremental changes and sudden disruptions to survive and prosper". In the field of education, resilience is the ability to overcome challenges of all kinds— trauma, tragedy, crises, and bounce back stronger, wiser, and more personally powerful (Henderson, 2012 as cited by Dayagbil et al. (2021). In the Philippines, educational institutions across all levels remained committed to seeking innovative ways of providing opportunities for Filipino learners. Given the ambiguity of the unprecedented COVID-19 health crisis, understanding how the dynamics of resilience may interplay in the phenomenon of learning continuity has assumed a greater degree of urgency.

Along with the discussion of learning continuity, issues and concerns, strategies, and best practices in the field of educational management offer a search for new systems of ideas and educational leadership approaches to work with the possibilities of education functioning. Since, apart from governments, specialists, employees, and services, including the necessary investment of commitment, time, and money, there must be sufficiency to measure shifting human approach to leadership and image of a new normal set of the educational system and institutional models (Mazurkiewicz, 2021); since both leadership and the educational process requires collaboration, rapport, and influence rather than being misdirected or hanged through.

To Karpen and Conduit (2020), empirical research especially in the field of existential humanism in composition with day-to-day progressivists and positivist's view of educational leadership delineates socio-educational imperatives if not CoVid-19 restrictions and challenges, such as in disruptions in student's attendance, difficulties in faculty well- being, level of ICT infrastructure, teaching-learning quality, and revisiting instructional materials platforms towards its preparation.

Meanwhile, the creativity of school leadership enhances several strategies that encompass issues and concerns defined concerning the organizational culture and zone of influence. These include empowering faculty and staff (Beteille et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017), digitizing the school's process and procedures (Pietraszek, 2021) strengthening stakeholders collaboration (Baxter & Casady, 2020) embracing emergent traits of resilient leaders (Heath, and von Ungern-Sternberg, 2020) restructuring budget allocation priorities (Almenfi et al., 2020), giving premium of learner's needs and welfare (Schwab-Reese et al., 2020), and conducting educational crisis-based pieces of research (Zhu & Liu, 2020).

Additionally, resiliency approaches and the constructivist's context of the community in terms of best practices view emerging leadership contest in education as to incline faculty and staff-centered leadership (Calhoun & Johnson, 2020) linkage optimization (Nandi et al., 2021) student's purpose-driven support (Hamoud et al., 2021) and the place of rigid authentic of evaluation (Rahmah et al., 2020) are the most of integrated reviews of literature.

It is in this context that the present inquiry aims to add to the ongoing empirical discussion through an in-depth understanding of the essence of experiences, practices, and perspectives distinct to school leaders in the educational' systems feat of learning continuity. Additionally, this inquiry explores issues and concerns, strategies, and best practices as researches are limited pertinent to school leadership experiences during the

COVID-19 virus pandemic (Varela & Fedynich, 2020). Transcendental Phenomenology was employed as this methodology provides logical, systematic, and coherent design elements that lead to an essential description of their experiences, perspectives, and practices.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to have an in-depth understanding and description of the school leaders' experiences, perspectives, and practices in ensuring learning continuity even in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, common themes are extracted along with the following research questions:

1. What are the issues and concerns experienced by school leaders in ensuring learning continuity amidst the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What strategies were employed by school leaders to ensure learning continuity? and,
3. What are the best practices of school leaders in ensuring learning continuity?

METHODS

Design

This qualitative research employed transcendental phenomenology. It is a design for acquiring and collecting data that explicates the essence of the human experience. This philosophical approach to qualitative research methodology seeks to understand human experiences and is grounded in the concept of setting aside all preconceived ideas to see phenomena through unclouded glasses, thereby allowing the true meaning of phenomena to naturally emerge with and within their own identity (Moustakas, 1994).

Participant Sampling

The key informants were purposively selected using the following criteria: a.) he/she is holding a managerial/leadership position in his/her affiliated institutions, whether it is a public/private basic or higher education institution b.) he/she has served as a school leader even before the COVID-19 pandemic; c.) he/she may be contacted using mobile/cellular phone; d.) he/she is willing to participate and provide honest responses. The participants were considered for withdrawal of consent when they no longer wish to remain in the study.

Moreover, the researchers used the data saturation technique as the basis for deciding the number of informants. Urquhart (2013) describes saturation as the point in coding when you find that no new codes occur in the data. It determines when there is adequate data from a study to develop a robust and valid understanding of the study phenomenon. Saturation Point was achieved at Participant 18.

Instrument

The researchers were the primary instrument in collecting the data with the use of the expert-validated interview guide. The researchers recorded field notes about each interview and maintained a reflexive journal with information about ongoing bracketing, details about interview scheduling and logistics, details about the rationale for decisions regarding the study, and any additional insights.

Data Collection and Analysis

To gain insights into the experiences of these school leaders, the researchers employed phenomenological interview procedures. An augmented form called an online interview was administered. Proper protocol in gathering data was also observed. Electronic and/or printed informed consent forms were provided to all the informants. The consent specified that their participation is strictly voluntary, and the augmented interview will be recorded.

Interviews were conducted through a modality that is mutually agreeable to both researcher and participant. Research information was always kept in locked files and participants were assigned code names and any participant identifiers (e.g., names) were removed. Only the researcher team has access to the information gathered. Informants were informed that follow-up interviews may be requested when necessary.

Rising from the Embers: Learning Continuity Experiences of School Leaders in the Throes of COVID-19 Pandemic

To analyze the data gathered, Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive phenomenological method was employed. This method consists of seven steps. First informants' descriptions of the experiences were read to acquire a sense of the whole. Transcription of responses was done accurately and objectively. After that, significant statements were extracted. Meanings were formulated from the significant statements. Formulated meanings were organized into themes. Themes were integrated into an exhaustive description. Exhaustive descriptions for the three components (issues and concerns, strategies, and best practices) as specified in the research questions were analyzed to formulate the essential structure of the learning continuity phenomenon.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the data collection, informants shared their feelings, experiences, views, and reactions when asked various questions about the learning continuity of their institutions. From the recorded interviews, the researchers identified various themes that captured and exhaustively described the pre-determined components namely: Issues and Concerns, Strategies, and Best Practices.

Issues and Concerns

Several educational repercussions had sprung due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As COVID-19 continues to surge in many nations across the world, sustaining continuous education has become a tremendous challenge in the education sector. The following themes reflect the issues and concerns of the educational leaders while grappling with the current phenomenon about teaching-learning continuity.

Emergent Theme 1: Increased Attrition Rate

This theme emerged from the informant's common accounts about the managerial challenges and concerns that the school administrators experience in this type of educational landscape. No matter the abruptness of the shift of the situation, school leaders need to be responsive to change. However, even the most prepared administrator cannot grapple with the changing needs of education if one of the most important components in the realization of this virtual learning which is the school's budget is deficient. Many institutions, both public and private, across all levels have reported an increase in the attrition rate of their students. This concerns most of the private institutions that rely heavily on the number of enrollees to ensure that the financial capacity can sustain the needs of every component of the school's needs. Hence, the informant quipped:

"It was overwhelming. Several students are withdrawing their enrolment. I'm preparing for the school year was mainly on the infrastructure. You must look at who will be enrolling because in school when you talk about infrastructure, it entails budget, and in private school, budget is concomitant to the number of students or the number of learners who are going to enroll."

The financial resource of the schools is directly proportional to the kind of program goals and objectives they wish to pursue. School funding policies play a key role in attaining such a vision of the school too, especially since there are emerging priorities and identified needs in this new normal of education (OECD, 2017). In the current situation, as an aftermath of the pandemic, some parents opt to let their children study in public schools as a way of cost-cutting in their respective family's budget while in a pandemic. Aside from that, both the public and the private have almost the same educational strategy which is modular distance learning. It is in this aspect that the increased attrition rate of the private schools can be mended by having an effective and captivating marketing plan that would attract the stakeholders to stay or perhaps enroll in their institutions.

Corresponding to the study on crisis management, a school's ability to respond and adapt in the face of a crisis is likely to be influenced by three major factors: flexibility and autonomy, family and community ties, and economic ability (Squire, 2020). Given the stronghold of the private institutions to their stakeholders, the tenacity of the leadership of the administrators, and the less bureaucratic process in providing the financial arm of the school, it can always sail amid the crisis because of the leaders' agile response to the changing educational landscape.

Emergent Theme 2: Contextualized Curriculum Recalibration

The Philippines is currently confronting relatively similar COVID-19 education issues as other nations. Even so, these issues present a chance to advance the decisions we make about education and employ long-term, effective policies that will improve the quality of our academic institutions. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has mandated that Philippine institutions create an institution continuity plan for the adoption of a flexible learning system (CHED, 2020). However, from the accounts of the school leaders, CHED provisions and guidelines are broad, and it necessitated the leaders to "tailor-fit" in their respective institutions.

Policies, Standards, Guidelines, and Frameworks were provided to both basic and higher education institutions in the Philippines, as a suggestive reference in the continued educational service. Yet, the implied challenge is for the school leaders to put contextualized substance, to further recalibrate these provisions, innovatively transforming them to fit the kind of clientele they serve, the geographic make-up of their institutions, and the mission, visions, and goals they desire to continuously uphold. The following statement was derived from one of the informants:

"We have the flexible learning modality, and we subscribe to the CHED stipulations and provisions regarding flexible learning mode. However, it is only good on paper, but a lot must be done in terms of putting a substance in the flexible learning framework considering the diversity of our students, and in terms of economic gaps."

The Philippines needs a clear set of policies and guidelines based on an innovative educational framework. This requires a careful and sincere assessment of the country's readiness to offer learning programs that demand more than the traditional requirements. There is also a need to recalibrate or repurpose the syllabi so that this still be in line with what is required in the new context during the pandemic time since the previous syllabi were designed for face-to-face set-up. To Joaquin et al. (2020), several aspects must be considered when the Philippines embarks on a new form of learning. This comprises educator capacity, the learner's condition and context, and the effectiveness of the educational process. These are in addition to the more obvious difficulties of internet speed, material cost, and manner of delivery.

Emergent Theme 3: Compromised Teaching and Learning

Learning crisis, determined by the potential loss of learning due to instantaneous implementation of emergency remote solutions, is one of the concerns perceived by school leaders. While the provision of quality teaching and learning experiences is the paramount mandate of any academic institution, the urgent demand to sustain access and delivery of emergency/crisis education has served a huge toll, which potentially held quality in the next line.

In the case of Higher Education Institutions (HEI), especially for board courses (courses with post-baccalaureate licensure examination requirements), the initiatives of streamlining outcomes by only focusing on the most essential (Most Essential Learning Outcomes – MELC), and the less interaction with the students have invited some extent of apprehensions to some school leaders. Informants shared:

"The greatest risk I have anticipated so far is the limited content we have delivered to our students, against the approved standards and curriculum at the national level and the institutional level. My greatest fear is that these students will one day take the board exam and they have only acquired the minimum, which we call, Essential".

"The quality of education is affected since teachers were not able to maximize students' interaction."

This resonates with the concern of another informant, in the light of the increased workload of faculty due to the needed preparations for flexible learning, at top of the continued conduct of quality assurance measures and fulfilling other targets of the university.

Rising from the Embers: Learning Continuity Experiences of School Leaders in the Throes of COVID-19 Pandemic

“...the quest of meeting the set targets of the university, the college, and the program at some point faculty workload has become heavier and instructors have fewer time for their classes as they are involved in various activities related to quality assurance. Quality of teaching and learning is somehow affected because the faculty have less time to interact or communicate or follow up their students.”

Meanwhile, as the pandemic has caught everyone off guard - physically, emotionally, mentally, and financially unprepared; keeping employee morale and motivation to work at their best, became a concern for the school leaders.

“The risk if the teachers are not motivated is that their students will not learn.”

Teachers, particularly in the first few months of the COVID-19 crisis were so preoccupied with the impact of the pandemic on their lives, that it is so hard for them to stay focused on their duties and responsibilities. Faculty and staff have very low morale during this pandemic, and it is a great challenge for school leaders to keep them motivated to maintain or even increase their work productivity and efficiency. Because of the COVID-19 outbreak, the great challenge for educators now is how to shift their pedagogy to “emergency remote teaching” (Hodges et al., 2020).

Additionally, the work-from-home scheme as a measure to lessen the possibility of workers getting infected with the virus has also some downsides. For instance, some faculty who are supposed to do their work and are asked to submit accomplishment reports failed to comply because most often than not, they are doing other tasks not related to their job while at home. Evaluating the work performance and efficiency of employees who are on the work-from-home arrangement is difficult to measure.

Emergent Theme 4: Threatened Faculty Well-Being

Teachers are by far the most essential in-school element impacting students' academic success and satisfaction, and at times of crisis, like the massive COVID-19 outbreak, teachers' role is more vital than ever. Teachers' well-being has progressively emerged as a prominent real issue due to the changing educational landscape and workload that they have not initially signed up for in this profession. The following accounts were derived from the informants' responses,

“Teachers are drained because of the number of students, 65 in one class. Checking assessments could be tiresome especially you are an adviser, you have to follow up with each of the students.”

Several teachers believed that the screen-based connections hampered classroom interaction, how pupils demonstrated their learning, and teacher support. To Anderson et al. (2020), because of the virtual structure of distance learning, several professors felt they couldn't read students' facial expressions, pick up on subtle ambiguities of their body language, build connections with new students, or provide psychological support to students. Aside from that, this health outbreak has impacted the impression of well-being in the face of the teaching profession, causing some educators to be concerned about their career development and productivity in their respective stations. The following accounts emerged,

“Faculty and staff have very low morale during this pandemic, and it is a great challenge for school leaders to keep them motivated to maintain or even increase their work productivity and efficiency.”

“During the first semester, the faculty were able to cope with the demand of blended learning and were able to submit the requirements on time. But, as this continues, the faculty found it hard to sustain the performance since some were already experiencing burnouts. The school should consider lessening the workload of the faculty members to sustain work-life balance and thus, improve the quality of outputs.”

It is also crucial to emphasize that the well-being of teachers impacts the well-being of learners; that is, when professors are satisfied with the job, learners are more driven since their professors are anticipated to play a significant part in the social and psychological modeling of the students (Alves et al., 2021 and Dabrowski, 2020). The COVID-19 outbreak has resulted in a rapid shift to remote schooling and in this environment, it is critical to understand the immense pressures that instructors are under. As the ambiguity of expectations rises, the stress adds to an already exhausting line of work.

The COVID-19 outbreak has wreaked havoc on the planet in ways that no one could have predicted. It has led not just to an economic crisis, but also to educational difficulties (Alicamen and Abadiano, 2020). This educational difficulty also constitutes teacher well-being. School leaders must bear in mind that it is an important factor because instructors who are demotivated or anxious are less successful at promoting student well-being and results. Even though the teaching profession already faces unique obstacles and demands from students, families, and a continuously changing system, the COVID-19 scourge is likely to add to the sector's worry and lethargy.

Emergent Theme 5: Restrained Performance of Ancillary Functions

This theme emerged from the challenges of the faculty in higher education institutions to implement other significant thrusts and mandates of the university such as the extension and research, especially in administering in-person/residential/locked-in methodologies of gathering data for various types of research projects. Hence the following accounts are congregated out from the responses of the informants.

“If you are a researcher one of the challenges is the gathering of data because of the travel restrictions.”

“The most concern is apprehensiveness of the faculty to implement the projects (extension projects). In the first place, we aren't sure if the stakeholders can participate well, especially that we cannot see them face to face.”

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on how educational and community services are provided across the world. Owing to the pandemic, it had resulted in the greatest online mobilization in educational history. To El Said (2021) no matter this advancement there are still certain mandates that cannot be simply managed by sitting in front of the computer screen. A new hybrid educational paradigm is anticipated to develop, and given the digital divide, new educational techniques might increase inequality disparities. Ramirez (2020) purports that doing community service and research are just a few of the recognized personal obstacles in a work-from-home setup. It is in this aspect that school leaders must still put a premium on quality assurance even if processes and strategies are done digitally amid the disruptive scenario.

Emergent Theme 6: Unprepared Stakeholders for a new ICT- Infrastructure

In most cases, academic institutions are pooling out resources for ICT infrastructure to sustain online teaching and learning. Certainly, it caught not just the IT systems and the school leaders unprepared, but significantly the other stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and the students. School leaders are looking into several ways to provide the faculty with stable internet connectivity and even an avenue for easy access to online sources for teaching and learning platforms. The use of different platforms for online classes became a huge problem and school leaders have nothing to do but to capacitate their faculty on the new modalities to assure learning continuity.

“It needs much patience in doing online tasks because of intermittent internet connectivity.”

“The pedagogies of the faculty in the new normal. Like how we teach our students in terms of the new normal and for this, I think the teachers are not prepared.”

“Many are prepared especially the young ones, it's easy for them to teach but and for those teachers who are of age, those who are not willing to learn much about the new technology and how to integrate the technological pedagogical thing.”

Similarly, students also have difficulty in attending online classes because most of them don't have internet access and some are living in areas where there is no internet reception. According to the faculty that most of their students cannot receive the lessons or activities, they are sending because they don't have stable internet connectivity while others don't have even gadgets to use and money for the load. This is held in the study of Dayagbil et al. (2021), that most of the students are living in remote areas where internet access is not possible. To add to this, the technical, emotional, and social preparedness of students for this kind of learning

Rising from the Embers: Learning Continuity Experiences of School Leaders in the Throes of COVID-19 Pandemic

environment has risen to be a concern. To, Alicamen et. al (2021), although there are certain difficulties as a result of the tremendous changes in the educational setup, education leaders have to make decisions that are cohesive, purposeful, and coordinated toward logical and realistic educational policies.

“We have students who do not have money to buy load and who do not have gadgets for an online class.”

“Also, the geographical diversity of the students that our school caters to. There are some places with connectivity, there are some places that cannot be reached by any signal and so that hampers the flexible learning modalities. Also, the students aren’t prepared to learn in the new normal.”

Poor internet connectivity results in less productivity for both faculty and students. Therefore, the role of technology in this pandemic and even beyond should be considered by the school leaders. This will not settle only on internet connectivity, but an equal amount of concern should also be extended to those students who do not have internet access at all. Teaching and learning should be equal to both students who do have and don’t have internet connectivity.

The migration to a remote learning environment has created a big change in the roles of parents in their child’s education. Now more than ever, parents have become more involved in the teaching-learning process especially with the implementation of flexible learning modalities. And it is of the irrefutable fact that they also were caught off-guard. School leaders, especially in the case of basic education, have expressed that parents’ preparedness for the new normal is also a concern.

“The preparedness of the parents under learning from home situation. First thing, because we are dealing with the minors, and we are dealing with parents.”

Emergent Theme 7: Instructional Materials (IMs) preparation

Since face-to-face instruction was suspended, the school considers modular distance learning as a good recourse. Though feasible, it was so hard for school leaders to let teachers prepare and submit their instructional materials as scheduled. The delays in the preparation and distribution of IMs are attributed to several factors that are of major concern. First, the school budget allocated to produce IMs was so meager and requests for additional funding took some time. Second, there was also an inadequate number of workforces assigned in the reproduction and packaging of instructional materials, since the hiring of an additional task force entails a lot of considerations. Third, not all teachers are well-versed in making learning modules, thus, training should have been given to teachers before the making of IMs. However, there was also not ample time to schedule training because the pandemic came with short notice. Fourth, there is no stable internet connection readily available for teachers’ use.

“The school supported training for IMs preparation.”

“Teachers find it difficult to access online sources for IMs.”

To support the teachers in the preparation of instructional materials, schools have conducted either webinars or limited face-to-face training. Inasmuch, the need to assess the learners’ preferences on the kind of instructional materials to be used as well as the learning platforms should be considered. This is to assure that the teachers’ preparations in terms of the kind of learning materials will suffice to the needs and preferences of the learners and be able to address the demands of the new learning set-up (Besa et al., 2021).

Strategies

When the COVID-19 pandemic stunned the world and brought spillover effects to education continuity, school leaders need to instantaneously formulate and implement operational strategies that served as their blueprint in the various aspects of continually running the business of education. The next six themes represent the strategies and avenues for research work in the phenomenon of teaching-learning continuity.

Emergent theme 1: Empowering Faculty and Staff

This theme emerged from informants' common accounts of actions taken to potentially address the concerns on the preparedness of faculty and staff in the implementation of remote-learning setup. Whether it be wired or non-wired modalities, public or private institutions, and whether it from a basic or higher education level; school leaders' need to judiciously strategize on the appropriate support mechanism to capacitate their faculty and staff and maintain the sense of community while groping through the adverse threats of the health crisis to quality and continuity of teaching and learning.

People are a prime element of Organization resilience. The British Standards (BSI) Model (2014) for Organizational Resilience highlighted people as a determinant to business continuity success. Moreover, it acknowledges that the people's level of awareness, training, and testing is instrumental in how the school or business interacts with stakeholders, the environment, and even w/ social responsibility issues. Faculty and staff as the prime-movers and lifeblood of schools' operation systems remained a significant element in learning continuity. Hence, school leaders employed various capability-building strategies. An informant shared:

"The sudden change from face-to-face instruction to distance learning entails a lot of adjustments considering that not all faculty are digital natives. To bridge the gap, webinars were conducted to acquaint the faculty with the use of virtual learning platforms. As head of the organization, you have to give constant support and encouragement to your employees to boost their level of confidence and to keep them going amidst the difficulties."

Mechanisms in empowering faculty and staff were employed in various ways. The faculty's professional development was strengthened by the continuous conduct of capability building that reskills and upskills their competencies on handling flexible learning. These capability-building initiatives include the training on module development, the use of digital learning tools, virtual learning platforms, assessment in flexible learning, etc. These supportive provisions to upskill teachers' competence resonates with the statement of these three school leaders.

"Good thing, the school supported training to capacitate or increase the capability of its faculty in module preparation which could be useful for both faculty and students."

"Well, one first is pedagogical leadership. I must make sure because the teachers are also the front liners, and these teachers are the ones carrying the standard of the school. And the only way that I can do that is to make sure that I assist them technically in terms of how to teach at this time of the pandemic."

"Provision of enhancement program, digital capability building among faculty members, identification of an effective remote learning or flexible learning framework."

Anchoring on the principle that no educational system can be above the quality of its teachers (FRN, 2004), teachers remain a critical part of the epicenter of education more significantly in the pursuit of continued service even with the unprecedented crisis. The strategy of empowering faculty and staff might serve as a good starting point.

Emergent Theme 2: Digitalizing School's Processes, Procedures, and Services

The pandemic precautions called "social or physical distancing" forced many schools around the world to instantaneously close to reduce face-to-face contact and thereby minimize community transmission that could expand quickly in dense social networks like schools (Lindell, 2020). To minimize disease transmission, school administrators' strategic directions include the digitalization of almost all school services, processes, and procedures.

Digitalization is defined as the conversion of business processes and interactions into their digital equivalents, basically through the intervention of digital technologies (Next Service, 2011). In the school set-up and the context of learning continuity, schools were prompted to digitalize processes like recruitment, admission, induction, student services, instructional services, non-teaching services, and even processes and procedures of other school mandates/thrusts and faculty's ancillary function.

Rising from the Embers: Learning Continuity Experiences of School Leaders in the Throes of COVID-19 Pandemic

In order not to hamper student service delivery, digitalizing services were of advantage as accounted by the informants:

“We move to the digitization of our library. So, at this time of a pandemic, we just continue. Each student has an account to access more than 5000 books, developmentally appropriate.”

“The Librarian finds ways to make sure all books will be available on our website for teachers and students to be able to freely access.”

Aside from the migration of instructional delivery into flexible learning, whereby schools adopt various blending modes, non-instructional processes, and supports services and procedures of schools were able to migrate into digital and online delivery modes. This Digitalizing Strategy is evident in the statements of informants who stated that:

“The virtual conduct of program planning and other preparation became the norm. However, everything is hard at the beginning when everyone is still adjusting, but when we already grasp the flow of it, everything will just come naturally.”

“We implemented online enrolment, student consultation, and guidance services. Even meeting, faculty training, and graduation have evolved out of the new normal situation.”

The digitalization strategy was rightfully claimed by the respondents to be their school’s innovation in mechanizing their continued education service. The creation of online platforms for enrolment, grade uploading, student information system, and even online information and publication system is viable innovations that aid their affiliated institutions towards resilience and continuity. The statement of the next school head expresses an innovation employed:

“We have converted our enrolment platform from face to face to online. There was a creation of the “Gateway” especially that we couldn’t entertain enrollees physically, so our university designed an online enrolment platform so our processes will be done safely, protecting our faculty, and the students. “

“Also, the strengthening of our Social Media platforms, I think that is included because that is an innovation that we have learned to adapt to what is required by the new context.”

Strengthening the use of social media platforms has also been a strategy that school leaders adopt in their institution’s learning continuity, which maximized their reach and information- communication/delivery to its stakeholders.

Emergent Theme 3: Strengthening Stakeholders’ Collaboration

In this time of the pandemic, collaboration with stakeholders must be emphasized. School leaders should always communicate with the stakeholders to promote teamwork and unity between the institution and the community. They should work hand in hand in deliberating plans in facing unprecedented changes. School leaders shared the following responses:

“We couldn’t do something w/o consultative meetings/sessions w/ our stakeholders. I am very confident that the university through the various units has undergone those steps...”

“We always ask the support from our parents so through the student council and PTA.”

“A school leader must have a collaborative spirit and initiatives in work with teachers, parents, and community to develop a plan for working with students learning through remote instruction. Strong collaboration efforts among them are required for the provision and successful implementation of the program.”

One of the strategies applied by school leaders in collaboration with stakeholders, according to Pellicano et al. (2014), Stakeholders can be engaged in many ways, which goes from information sharing to participation in decision-making, following one of five engagement levels: inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower. In addition, the collaboration must be intended to ensure that stakeholders will have a meaningful voice in designing a strategy, plan, or policy. Thus, everyone will feel confident that his/her interests will be considered and addressed (National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy & Public Policy Forum 2010).

Furthermore, stakeholder involvement in environmental decision-making improves the quality of decisions (Beierle, 2002). Therefore, schools need to realize how necessary to engage with their respective stakeholders particularly in this time of the pandemic.

Emergent Theme 4: Embracing traits of resilient leaders

As the pandemic continues to wreak havoc on the school's systems, school leaders needed to display resilient characters to remain firm amidst the fast-paced, overwhelming turn of events. Resilient leaders are the ones who see the pandemic situation as a challenge and know how to face its changes and move forward. Some of their statements are the following:

"I became flexible, open-creative and innovative with my colleagues to find ways to simplify the delivery of learning as well as those services that support diverse learners, parents, and families within the community during the time of crisis."

"A contextualized school leadership because, of course, when we say leadership, managing the entirety of the school, the personnel and the physical and everything in school. I think that we need to look at and help our school administrators at how they will tailor fit a certain leadership in such a way that everyone else sails towards the journey..."

"I must let go of four teachers. But this was extremely hard because of the issue of the cash flow. You know according to the philosophy; you must choose the lesser evil. But I believe at this time of the pandemic, there are things that we need to sacrifice."

"Not to brag, but as I said, as a school head, you really must project, you must have the foresight. You really must have a few steps ahead. And so, it was because I believe that I was prepared even if I was not entertaining that there might be a pandemic because who wants a pandemic anyway. But I think, I am prepared."

From the common accounts above, it can be gleaned that decisiveness, firmness, and accountability are critical traits that must be present. In organizational crisis management, these traits are necessary for resilient leaders in facing disruptions and risks. As the modern world changes, higher education is also shifting dramatically from a stable institution for more than 500 years to a dynamic entity that requires new leadership to meet the expectations for innovation and change. Such innovation and change are not easy and demand the best leaders to create organizational innovation driven by those willing and able to lead. Resilient leaders are the different class of organizational leaders motivated by higher education institutions acceptable to innovation (Lane et. al, 2013).

Emergent Theme 5: Restructuring budget allocation priorities

The restructuring of the budget based on the priorities in this pandemic is one of the strategies mentioned by the school leaders. This will allow the school leaders to make a budgeting plan based on the needs and goals of the institutions. Restructuring of the budget is necessary this time since there are unexpected changes.

"The administration allocated some budget in improving internet connection and providing support such as training and re-tooling its faculty members."

"Realignment of budget for materials and supplies needed in continuity learning."

Rising from the Embers: Learning Continuity Experiences of School Leaders in the Throes of COVID-19 Pandemic

The goal of the budget reallocation of the existing general fund process was to adjust base budgets up or down to make them more consistent with the goals of the Academic Plan (OSU, 2002).

Emergent Theme 6: Giving premium on learners' needs and welfare

"The welfare of our teachers and learners remains to be our priority and we will ensure that School Year 2020-2021 will be bearable for all while still promoting effective learning engagement," Education Secretary Briones said. In Memorandum OUCI-2020-307 released on October 30, 2020, Undersecretary for Curriculum and Instruction Diosdado San Antonio outlined ten highly recommended measures to field units to ensure flexibility in teaching and learning. The policy was also in response to the request of the teacher and student groups to ease the components of distance learning implementation (DepEd, 2020).

To address the challenges in this pandemic, the school leaders have mentioned the following measures in their institutions:

"The students' welfare is prioritized by the institution. Retention and promotion policies were revised to give students a better chance of completing the program."

"There should be a revision in the curriculum and instructional materials that will fit the needs of the students."

"I'm more on the social-emotional balance of the students. It was a challenge for me because there were one to two instances of turning to incidents. It's at this time of the pandemic, more than the curriculum, is more on that social-emotional and the wellbeing of the students. Schools should create an asymmetry of the curriculum. And at the same time, the recipient, who are the students that is where I think school should also focus on while we put so much effort and emphasis on the design of our core curriculum and how to deliver it in our home base and other modalities. And I think that the school head should also pay attention to, is the students' wellbeing."

The pandemic affects not only the physical and intellectual well-being of the students but also their mental and psychological well-being (Cao et al., 2020). Schools should offer crisis-oriented programs that would support the students' psychological well-being.

Emergent Theme 7: Conducting educational crisis-responsive research

The phenomenon of Organizational Resilience also gives a premium on Products. In the context of learning continuity, Innovation also occupies a huge toll. The challenge does not only require institutions to survive but more significantly, to thrive and flourish. Product, as one key element of organizational resilience, dwells on the emphasis that organizations must seek to understand how their strategies, innovations, product, and services meet the needs of clients (BSI, 2017). Moreover, the need to conform to regulatory requirements is a constant present force that needs to be considered. Hence, this necessitated the school leaders to engage in a forward-looking approach, to innovate by creating new products and even create new knowledge. These are possible mainly through the conduct of crisis and needs-responsive research.

The shift to flexible learning has redefined the roles of teachers. It has changed the landscape of educational delivery and has brought disorientations to everyone. Since the educational community has been reeling with the fast-paced turn of events, the long-term effects of the new adjustments remain uncertain. Thus, a need to determine and understand how to better provide education is an avenue of exploration. The interviews resulted in w/ informants suggesting the dire need of conducting not a study to ascertain preparedness of faculty and students, but also parents whose role heightened-up w/ the learning from the home set-up. One informant expressed:

"Research on the parent's involvement in Teaching and Learning process, and their preparedness because they play a very crucial role in the learning in the new normal. Some parents have access to technology, some don't have access, some are not prepared, some are not open to the new modes of learning and they resist."

Another common avenue for inquiry is on evaluation of effectiveness and quality of instructional materials which were done rush and the employed learning modalities; the development of much contextualized and innovative learning modalities; the evaluation of the authenticity of Assessment tools; the development of new pedagogies and establishment of models and frameworks to assure quality learning amidst the pandemic.

“Research on development and validation of more effective innovative learning modalities applicable for the new normal can also help bridge the gap. Evaluation of existing programs for continuity of learning amid the CoViD-19 pandemic may be done as a basis for improvement as well.”

“Research of how do we as an institution or college or program or instructors determine that our students are indeed learning.”

In the case of private school leaders, research explorations on developing effective marketing strategies, and even addressing issues on student attrition were commonly suggested. In the strategic management area, school leaders may explore systematically examining information and situation to identify threats, risks, and opportunities, or a process called Horizon Scanning. Adaptive Capacity may also be measured.

Best Practices

Innovative and resilient solutions sprang out due to the pressing necessity of restructuring the educational landscape in response to COVID-19 and operationally preparing the path forward. Out beyond the fear and disruptions arose leadership creativity that has aided schools to thrive and transform threats into opportunities, and weaknesses into strengths. The next four themes will showcase best practices from various schools that were able to respond differently and adapt to the new normal.

Emergent Theme 1: Faculty and staff-centered Approach

Teachers in many countries have been increasingly struggling with excessive workload, limited resources, large class sizes, and lack of recognition. This year, Covid-19 has uprooted their lives, burdened them with new responsibilities, and some even dented their morale. There have been reports and studies showing that Teachers also had their fair share of high levels of stress and anxiety during this pandemic: Covid-19 has turned the education sector upside down.

Through the pandemic, Education Leaders and Management had discussions about well-being at work that have been bubbling into the mainstream, with some organizations helping in addressing the problem, most especially mental health. And so, both national and international have published educational support and guidance on how to cater and protect teachers in this unprecedented time. If teachers are well, our students will also be well.

Commonalities in participants’ responses can be gleaned in statements like:

“For the teaching-learning process, I have. You see. I cannot burden my teachers writing lesson plans, because the core principle is this, there is already the module. The module or the design of the module is like a lesson plan. It is more in detail. At this time of the pandemic, teachers should be looking or spending their time gathering online materials. What I require is an accomplishment report. Because I must make sure that the vertical articulation of our most essential learning competencies is attained.”

“Well, one first is pedagogical leadership. I must make sure because the teachers are also the front liners, and these teachers are the ones carrying the standard of the school. And the only way that I can do that is to make sure that I assist them technically in terms of how to teach at this time of the pandemic.”

“Financial support and gadget assistance through “Project Tanglaw” have been launched to assist our students. Monthly connectivity allowances and distribution of gadgets to faculty members allowed them to be more efficient and resilient in the new educational setup.”

Rising from the Embers: Learning Continuity Experiences of School Leaders in the Throes of COVID-19 Pandemic

Several studies internationally have found teachers are at relatively high risk of common mental disorders and work-related stress compared to other workers (Stansfeld et al., 2011).

“I would say individualized supervision, meaning that at this time of a pandemic, you're going to just supervise in general. When I supervise, I also must make sure that my teachers' emotional balance and wellbeing are there. To tell you, I had a teacher who had gone through a lot at this time a pandemic. She lost her husband.”

Leithwood et al. (2008) found that leadership has a greater influence on schools and pupils when it is widely distributed. Their evidence suggests that the combined leadership as a team of leaders is far more influential than the efforts of any one individual. Effective communication is very critical as it plays a major role in the success of the organization.

Through distributed leadership, organizational improvement and change become a collective rather than individual responsibility. Dean's (2007) eight hallmarks of distributed leadership also suggest that decision-making is decentralized with individuals engaging in collaborative activities and willingly sharing or overlapping roles with others whose skills and knowledge complement their own. Teachers around the world face a variety of pressures, but every school benefits from them being motivated, engaged, and mentally healthy.

“Distributed leadership has been used, and having an open communication helped a lot. We were able to determine what are urgently needed by the faculty, such as laptop loans, subsidizing their internet and electricity usage, more educational training to enhance their ICT preparedness, wellness activities for their mental and physical health and all these will lead to the increase of their confidence and creativity.”

Emergent Theme 2: Linkage Optimization

Governments are all stepping up efforts to provide training and resources to support teachers in adapting to this new learning environment. Teachers nationwide have been participating since the lockdown happened, to enhance their learning, training, and seminars from Deped/CHED Seminars and even to the non-government organizations like the Vibal group and many more.

Turning teaching materials into digital format at short notice has been a challenge as few teachers have strong digital and ICT skills. As per the report by the Computer Coordinators, only 22.5% of the computers and laptops in schools are available for teachers' use. Moreover, less than half of the computers in the schools are connected to the internet. This condition, however, would require strong commitment and positive ICT attitudes of school administrators and of course support from the local government units to provide funds for this purpose. Access and availability of different ICT equipment and facilities in educational institutions are of great importance to ICT integration. Providing the teachers with appropriate technology infrastructure could empower them to develop their teaching strategies and activities and enhance teaching and learning.

Commonalities in participants' responses can be gleaned in statements like:

“We have ongoing linkages which relate to our 4-thrusts. We have linkages in various organizations, both international, national, or even local agencies and groups and these linkages of ours have been very helpful in the conduct and implementation of our thrust in the university. These efforts of the university are an indication of the value of collaborative work.”

“Participated in a series of capability-building initiatives in the form of in-service training, webinars, workshops, faculty mentoring for online instructions.”

“In partnership with Parasat Cable TV to provide free educational material and content to Northern Mindanao viewers.”

To Sasota et al., (2019), the first implication pointed to the need and the importance of teacher development in ICT. Teachers play a very important role in facilitating student learning, and in developing diverse teaching strategies in the classroom, particularly for the effective and appropriate use of technology in the classroom. It is important to mention that the role of teachers in the classroom has already evolved, they are now expected to be

computer literate, tech-savvy, and innovative in their teaching methods to improve teaching, and student learning. However, the integration of ICT in teaching has become a challenge in the education sector, considering the huge number of teachers (about 700,000) to build up their ICT skills and to teach about 21 million students in public schools (Arayata, 2017).

Thus, the Department of Education, policymakers, including School Administrators are encouraged to support and provide opportunities for more in-service training in the field of ICT to its faculty and push for enhanced pre-service ICT courses. Likewise, schools must be proactive in developing capacity-building plans for effective teaching and learning through technology, specifically in science and mathematics. With adequate ICT skills training, teachers may acquire positive attitudes (e.g., cognitive, affective, and behavioral components), confidence, and interest in integrating ICT with the existing traditional classroom practices. Moreover, there is a need to revisit the ICT policies in education, particularly its implementation and integration in the K to 12 curricula.

“We encouraged our teachers to join Government and Non-Government Organizations Seminars and Training during the start of the pandemic, and they’re still participating until now. There has also been some collaboration within some partners like Ayala Foundations and USAID to promote continuous learning and enhance ICT skills by inviting Speakers despite this pandemic.”

Emergent Theme 3: Students’ Purpose-driven Support

“One of the biggest challenges we are facing is how to keep children on board,” said Ms. Anne- Fleur Lurvink, who teaches at a school in Rotterdam Netherlands, where students come from very diverse backgrounds. “Teaching children at a disadvantage runs the risk of losing many. Home situations don’t always allow them to participate in lessons,” she said. Then the government has put in place measures to provide laptops and Wi-Fi for families without digital access while teachers from her school call parents every week to keep in touch. Commonalities in participants’ responses can be gleaned in statements like:

“Administration promised to provide load allowance to its faculty members and have provided flash drives to some students.”

Teachers also need to check on students regularly, especially those who are less skillful with digital tools (Snelling and Fingal, 2020).

“Mentoring session started in 2018 and it was a great practice for teachers to be accountable, not only for their students but also to their peers, to their partner/buddy in their workplace. Through mentoring sessions, students who are on the edge for mental health problems were slowly progressing and adapting to this new normal.”

A step-by-step guide on accessing the curriculum and the online tools is beneficial for providing such information. And using various formats such as video, text, and screenshots enhances the chances that all individuals involved in the teaching and learning process will know how the program functions (Snelling and Fingal, 2020).

“Modules are available upon request, to cater to students who really can’t access or are having a hard time with their internet connection. It will only be printed after their enrollment, to make sure, the school will be able to save on the printing cost.”

Some schools were doing online self-directed learning and knew that this approach could not guarantee equal access to technology. To keep schools connected to their students, many telecommunication companies made commitments to expand their coverage and not terminate their services despite being unable to pay and provide extensions for them to pay the bills.

Rising from the Embers: Learning Continuity Experiences of School Leaders in the Throes of COVID-19 Pandemic

“There was a drive for the students: “Pandemic Assistance Program.” The University was giving iPads and internet broadband to students who don't have gadgets but had good connectivity. Students also had their share of mental health programs, and some webinars and training to enhance their ICT skills.”

Student-centered learning poses a significant shift from traditional approaches to education. However student-centered learning focuses on involving teachers in the creation of a superior learning environment for everyone to be involved. Skilled educators help communicate the school's student-centered learning based approach to their students. It's also essential for teachers to guide their students' curriculum choices and ensure that they align with the goal of an outcome-oriented learning environment. There must be intentionality. Not only is this student-centered approach beneficial for creating lifelong learners, but it is also particularly important for digital learning (Ryan and Deci 2000; Schneider et al., 2018).

Emergent Theme 4: Periodic and Sustained Strategic Controls

In strategic management, strategies do not end after implementation. Organizations need to determine whether they are heading in the right direction and if the trends are keeping them on the right path. Hence, strategic controls which involve monitoring and continuous evaluation are done to constantly evaluate deviations and make necessary adjustments.

The interview exposed that one best practice that keeps the school leaders' organizations functioning is the sustained conduct of evaluations and monitoring. Commonalities in participants' responses can be gleaned in statements like:

“Virtual Class Observation – it is conducted to monitor and evaluate the performance of faculty members in terms of their teaching delivery to students.”

“There is always regular monitoring of the preparedness and even in the implementation of the plan. This is through regular submission of monthly reports indicating the challenges, risk, barriers, weaknesses and even the opportunities of the program.”

Teachers should therefore avoid assigning busy work and motivate students by communicating through live chats, virtual meetings, and video tutorials (Snelling and Fingal, 2020).

“Feedbacking will also occur and further discussion on similar issues and concerns will be done during the regular monthly meeting of the faculty and staff.”

“In the accomplishment of the targets. Each unit has its management reviews. Aside from that, we have university-wide management reviews which we do quarterly.”

With constant evaluation, questions never answered will soon be uncovered. The results will be very helpful in developing guidelines and policies to address and remove barriers that have negatively influenced this flexible learning and will improve teachers' confidence. Teachers' competence with computer technology is a key factor for the effective use of ICT in teaching. Buabeng-Andoh (2012) also stated that “many teachers who do not consider themselves to be well skilled in using ICT feel anxious about using it in front of a class of children who perhaps know more than they do.”

“There is a need to conduct periodic evaluation of the practices through consultation and dialogue with internal and external stakeholders to strengthen the delivery of quality services to the clientele. Workloads of teachers and overloading of administrative functions to some faculty may be looked into to improve their work efficiency.”

Program-level assessment is not about evaluating individual students or faculty teaching effectiveness. Rather, it is about examining student performance and experience across a cohort of students and using the information to continuously improve curriculum effectiveness. The proceeding table shows the summary of Emergent Themes in the three pre-determined areas of this phenomenological exploration.

Table 1: Summary of Emergent Themes in the 3 pre-determined areas of Inquiry for Learning Continuity

Pre-determined Components of Inquiry for Learning Continuity	Emergent Themes
1. Issues and Concerns	<p><i>Theme 1: Increased Attrition Rate</i></p> <p><i>Theme 2: Contextualized Curriculum Recalibration</i></p> <p><i>Theme 3: Compromised Teaching and Learning</i></p> <p><i>Theme 4: Threatened Faculty Well-Being</i></p> <p><i>Theme 5: Restrained Performance of Ancillary Functions</i></p> <p><i>Theme 6: Unprepared Stakeholders for a new ICT- Infrastructure</i></p> <p><i>Theme 7: Instructional Materials (IMs) preparation</i></p>
2. Strategies	<p><i>Theme 1: Empowering Faculty and Staff</i></p> <p><i>Theme 2: Digitizing School's Processes and Procedures</i></p> <p><i>Theme 3: Strengthening Stakeholders' Collaboration</i></p> <p><i>Theme 4: Embracing Traits of Resilient Leaders</i></p> <p><i>Theme 5: Restructuring Budget Allocation Priorities</i></p> <p><i>Theme 6: Giving Premium on Learners' Needs and Welfare</i></p> <p><i>Theme 7: Conducting Educational Crisis-responsive Research</i></p>
3. Best Practices	<p><i>Theme 1: Faculty and staff-centered Approach</i></p> <p><i>Theme 2: Linkage Optimization</i></p> <p><i>Theme 3: Students' purpose-driven Support</i></p> <p><i>Theme 4: Periodic and Sustained Strategic Controls</i></p>

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The experiences of these school leaders in ensuring learning continuity paralleled some findings from previous inquiries and empirical discussions on educational crisis and organizational resilience. Yet, it also revealed new insights that may inform the education community of other angles of challenges and viable strategies, together with innovation opportunities and best practices.

Undeniably, the pandemic wreak havoc on the educational community and posted constraints and risks. School leaders at the front-line of the quest for continued educational operation, particularly in learning continuity, faced concerns primarily on the preparedness of process, people, and products. The increased attrition, the well-being of the faculty, and preparedness of stakeholders for a new ICT infrastructure are people-focused issues; while the challenges of contextually recalibrating the curriculum, the restrictions with the performance of ancillary functions, and the preparation of instructional materials are issues that concern with the processes. Most significantly, a pressing issue springs from the concern with the product which is the quality of teaching and learning which may potentially be compromised when the previously mentioned concerns weren't managed well.

Rising from the Embers: Learning Continuity Experiences of School Leaders in the Throes of COVID-19 Pandemic

Consequently, strategies anchoring on the elements of organizational resilience such as people, process, product, and leadership have been evident in the exploration of strategies employed. The premium given on people by bolstering their capacities and attending to their needs; the leadership that considers the need of embracing resilient traits; the strengthening of collaboration with stakeholders; the decisive adjustments of school's processes, procedures, and services, the restructuring of budget priorities, and the equivalent focus given to innovation and innovation opportunities are common threads reflecting strategies employed in ensuring learning continuity.

Out beyond shared issues and concerns, and the innovative strategies to address them exists the loftier pursuit of displaying commendable practices with the hope of correctly structuring the new normal and continuously offering learning opportunities. These school leaders, while groping the dark, and leading their institutions at the throes of the pandemic, exhibited leadership with a premium on the faculty, staff, and student support. The optimization of linkages and the sustained conduct of strategic controls served as best practices that aided them to walk through this educational crisis and to rise from the embers.

In light of the results and conclusions, this study recommends increased collaboration between and among institutions to facilitate the culture of moving forward together and learning from one another's best practices. Further, to guarantee educators and students with the most ideal teaching and learning experiences despite the health crisis, continuous communication and collaboration between school administration, faculty, parents, and learners are important in evaluating what succeeds, what doesn't succeed, and what requires updating. To prepare staff and students for the realms of a new normal in learning, sustained initiatives in instructional resources, capacity-building interventions, and necessary institutional services are required. Lastly, on the classroom-based instructional concerns, the authors recommend that quality assurance mechanisms and mentoring be institutionalized to ensure effective implementation of the flexible teaching and learning modality amid the pandemic.

REFERENCES

- [1] Alicamen, D. B. L., & Abadiano, M. N. (2020). Parents as Study Buddy in the New Normal of Teaching: A Grounded Theory. *Psychology and Education Journal*, 57(9), 5434-5447.
- [2] Alicamen D.B.L., Eulalio-Jabagat A., Becamon, A.M.K.M., & Abadiano, M. (2021). Philippine Public Basic Education amid the COVID-19 Pandemic through the Reconstructionist Lens. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry (TOJQI)*. 12 (7), 13723 – 13732.
- [3] Almenfi, M., Breton, M., Dale, P., Gentilini, U., Pick, A., & Richardson, D. (2020). Where is the Money Coming From? Ten Stylized Facts on Financing Social Protection Responses to COVID-19.
- [4] Alves, R., Lopes, T., & Precioso, J. (2021). Teachers' well-being in times of Covid-19 pandemic: factors that explain professional well-being. *IJERI: International Journal of Educational Research and Innovation*, (15), 203-217.
- [5] Anderson, R. C., Bousselot, T., Katz-Buoincontro, J., & Todd, J. (2020). Generating buoyancy in a sea of uncertainty: Teacher's creativity and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in psychology*, 11.
- [6] Arayata, M. C. (2017, December 15). DepEd to boost ICT in schools starting 2018. Philippines News Agency. Retrieved from <http://www.pna.gov.ph/article/1018975>
- [7] Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. (2020). The role of school leadership in challenging times. <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/>. <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/>.
- [8] Baxter, D., & Casady, C. B. (2020). Proactive and strategic healthcare public-private partnerships (PPPs) in the coronavirus (COVID-19) epoch. *Sustainability*, 12(12), 5097.
- [9] Beierle, T. C. (2002). The quality of stakeholder-based decisions. *Risk Analysis: An International Journal*, 22(4), 739-749.
- [10] Besa, L.M., & Parcon, R.E. (2021). On instructional materials: The pre-service teachers' preferences in time of pandemic. *Basic and Applied Education Research Journal*, 2(1), 23-28. <https://www.baerjournal.org/index.php/baerj/article/view/25> .

- [11] Beteille, T., Ding, E., Molina, E., Pushparatnam, A., & Wilichowski, T. (2020). Three principles to support teacher effectiveness during COVID-19.
- [12] British Standards Institution. (2021). Organizational Resilience. <https://www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/our-services/Organizational-Resilience/>.
- [13] Buabeng-Andoh, C. (2012). Factors influencing teachers adoption and integration of information and communication technology into teaching: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Education and Development using ICT*, 8(1).
- [14] BUDGET RESTRUCTURING BASICS. January 10, 2002. http://www.rpia.ohio-state.edu/br/docs/archive/BR_basics.pdf
- [15] Calhoun, Shawn P. and Johnson, Erika, "Building Strategic Consensus: A Grassroots Planning Process" (2020). Gleeson Library Faculty and Staff Research and Scholarship. 21.
- [16] Cao, W., Fang, Z., Hou, G., Han, M., Xu, X., Dong, J. (2020). The psychological impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on college students in China. *Psychiatry Res.* 287:112934. doi: 10.1016/j.psychres.2020.112934
- [17] CHED. (2020). CHED Memorandum Order No. 4, series 2020. Guidelines on the implementation of flexible learning. <https://ched.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/CMO-No.-4-s.-2020-Guidelines-on-the-Implementation-of-Flexible-Learning.pdf>
- [18] Colaizzi, P. (1978). Psychological research as a phenomenologist views it. In: Valle, R. S. & King,
- [19] Dabrowski, A. (2020). Teacher wellbeing during a pandemic: Surviving or thriving?.
- [20] Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). Effective teacher professional development. Learning Policy Institute.
- [21] Dayagbil F.T., Palompon D.R., Garcia L.L. and Olvido M.M.J. (2021). Teaching and Learning Continuity Amid and Beyond the Pandemic. *Front. Educ.* 6:678692. doi: 10.3389/educ.2021.678692
- [22] Dean, D. R. (2007). Thinking globally: The National College of School Leadership: A case study in distributed leadership development. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 2(1), 1-62.
- [23] Department of Education. (2020, June 24). Briones, education ministers unite to ensure learning continuity amid COVID-19. <https://www.deped.gov.ph/2020/06/24/briones-education-ministers-unite-to-ensure-learning-continuity-amid-covid-19/>
- [24] El Said, G. R. (2021). How Did the COVID-19 Pandemic Affect Higher Education Learning Experience? An Empirical Investigation of Learners' Academic Performance at a University in a Developing Country. *Advances in Human-Computer Interaction*, 2021.
- [25] FRN. (2004) National Policy on Education. 4th Edition, NERDC, Yaba Lagos.
- [26] Hamoud, A. K., Hussein, M. K., Alhilfi, Z., & Sabr, R. H. (2021). Implementing data-driven decision support system based on independent educational data mart. *International Journal of Electrical & Computer Engineering* (2088-8708), 11(6).
- [27] Harari. (2020). The world after coronavirus | Free to read. *Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/content/19d90308-6858-11ea-a3c9-1fe6fedcca75>.
- [28] Heath, C., Sommerfield, A., & von Ungern-Sternberg, B. S. (2020). Resilience strategies to manage psychological distress among healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic: a narrative review. *Anaesthesia*, 75(10), 1364-1371.
- [29] Hodges, C., Moore, S., Lockee, B., Trust, T., & Bond, A. (2020, March 27). The difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning. *EduCAUSE Review*. <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/3/the-difference-between-emergency-remote-teaching-and-online-learning>
- [30] Joaquin, J. J. B., Biana, H. T., & Dacela, M. A. (2020, October). The Philippine higher education sector in the time of COVID-19. In *Frontiers in Education* (Vol. 5, p. 208). Frontiers.
- [31] Karpen, I. O., & Conduit, J. (2020). Engaging in times of COVID-19 and beyond: theorizing customer engagement through different paradigmatic lenses. *Journal of Service Management*.

Rising from the Embers: Learning Continuity Experiences of School Leaders in the Throes of COVID-19 Pandemic

- [32] Lane, K. E., McCormack, T. J., & Richardson, M. D. (2013). Resilient leaders: Essential for organizational innovation. *International Journal of Organizational Innovation (Online)*, 6(2), 7.
- [33] Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2008). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. *School leadership and management*, 28(1), 27-42.
- [34] Lindell, T. L. (2020). Teachers calling for organizational support to digitalize teaching. *The International Journal of Information and Learning Technology*.
- [35] Mazurkiewicz, G. 2021. Educational Leadership in Times of Crisis. *Risks* 9: 90. <https://doi.org/10.3390/risks9050090>
- [36] Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- [37] Nandi, S., Hervani, A. A., Helms, M. M., & Sarkis, J. (2021). Conceptualising Circular economy performance with non-traditional valuation methods: Lessons for a post-Pandemic recovery. *International Journal of Logistics Research and Applications*, 1-21.
- [38] National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy & Public Policy Forum (2010) *Progress through process: achieving sustainable development together*, National Round Table.
- [39] Next Service. (2011). Digitize vs. Digitalize: Why you need to know the difference. Retrieved from: <https://nextservicesoftware.com/news/digitize-vs-digitalize-know-the-difference/#digitalization-definition>
- [40] OECD. (2017), *The Funding of School Education: Connecting Resources and Learning*, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264276147-en>
- [41] Pellicano, M., Vesci, M., Troisi, O., Cosimato, S., & Tuccillo, C. (2014). Stakeholder engagement for sustainable development in banking industry. An Italian case study. In 13th EBES conference— Istanbul, Turkey (pp. 1-17).
- [42] Pietraszek, Ł. (2021). Digitization in the Era of Coronavirus – A Review.
- [43] Rahmah, L., Ariyanto, S. R., Iskandar, Z., & Dewi, I. C. (2020). Development of Authentic Psychomotor Instruments for Vocational School in the Covid-19 Pandemic. *Jurnal Kependidikan: Jurnal Hasil Penelitian dan Kajian Kepustakaan di Bidang Pendidikan, Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran*, 6(3), 349-355.
- [44] Ramirez, V. E. (2020). Resilience Amidst Pandemic: HEI Sustaining Quality Assurance in a Digital World. Working paper, Retrieved from www.researchgate.net/publication/346715052_Resilience_Amidst_Pandemic_HEI_Sustaining_Quality_Assurance_in_a_DigitalWorld
- [45] Sasota, R. S., Cristobal, R. R., Sario, I. S., & Biyo, J. T. Factors affecting the integration of ICT in science and mathematics teaching in selected Science, Technology, and Engineering (STE)–implementing schools in the Philippines.
- [46] Schwab-Reese, L. M., Drury, I., Allan, H., & Matz, K. (2020). " Oh, this is actually okay": Understanding how one state child welfare training system adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 110, 104697.
- [47] Snelling, & Fingal. (2020). 10 strategies for online learning during a coronavirus outbreak. <https://www.iste.org/>.
- [48] Squire, J. (2020). In pandemic, private schools face peril. *Education Next*, 20(4).
- [49] Stansfeld, S. A., Rasul, F. R., Head, J., & Singleton, N. (2011). Occupation and mental health in a national UK survey. *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology*, 46(2), 101-110.
- [50] The British Standards Institution. (2014). Annual report and financial statements. <https://www.bsigroup.com/>.
- [51] United Nations. (2020). Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond. <https://www.un.org/>.
- [52] Urquhart C. *Grounded Theory for Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide*. Thousand Oaks: Sage; 2013.

Alicamen, Daryl Benedict L, Alugar, Ritchelee B, Barreto, Rogelio, Daffon, Catherine C
Dayagbil, Filomena T, Maute, Karen Salve M, Mobida, Fanny Mae G

- [53] Varela, D. G., & Fedynich, L. (2020). Leading schools from a social distance: Surveying south Texas school district leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. In *National Forum of Educational Administration and Supervision Journal* (Vol. 38, No. 4).
- [54] Zhu, X., & Liu, J. (2020). Education in and after Covid-19: Immediate responses and long-term visions. *Postdigital Science and Education*, 2(3), 695-699.