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### Research Article

# Resilience Under Pressure: A Case Study of Head Teachers' Ancillary Functions in the Philippine Public Education System

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### Abstract

Head teachers in the Philippine public school system are increasingly burdened with ancillary responsibilities that extend far beyond their instructional leadership roles posing risks to their effectiveness and well-being. This qualitative case study explores the lived experiences of three (3) head teachers in Davao City, Philippines, as they navigate the demands of multiple ancillary functions beyond their core instructional leadership roles. The study gathered rich, detailed narratives of their challenges and coping mechanisms using purposive sampling. Anchored in Role Strain Theory, Transformational Leadership, and Experiential Learning Theory, the findings reveal role conflict, emotional fatigue, and systematic support gaps. Despite these pressures, the head teachers demonstrate remarkable resilience through structured planning, emotional regulation, spiritual grounding, and collaboration. Cross-case analysis revealed shared adaptive strategies and a purpose-driven mindset, highlighting the potential of informal learning for professional growth. The study recommends institutional reforms, including formal training, task delineation, and well-being programs to support sustainable school leadership.

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## 1. Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of public education, head teachers are no longer confined to instructional supervision and academic leadership. Increasingly, they are expected to manage multiple ancillary functions such as program coordination, administrative teaching, and leadership duties. These expanded responsibilities place intense pressure on head teachers, often without commensurate support or institutional resources. The result is a growing burden that challenges their professional effectiveness, personal well-being, and, ultimately, the quality of instruction and students' outcomes in public schools.

Globally, researchers have highlighted the increasing complexity of school leadership roles. For instance, Riley (2020) highlights that principals face alarming stress levels in Australia due to administrative overload and limited systematic support. This global trend is also evident in the Philippine context, where similar patterns of role expansion and institutional inadequacy have been documented. Magno (2021) reports that public school heads are often assigned to manage multiple school programs such as Brigada Eskwela, feeding initiatives, and school-based management, leading to chronic work overload. Similarly, in a localized study by Dela Peña (2022) in Davao City further reveals that head teachers in urban public schools spend most of their time on non-instructional tasks, reducing their capacity to focus on classroom quality and teacher development.

Despite this growing body of literature, a significant gap remains in understanding how head teachers cope with this pressure, particularly in regional and resource-constrained contexts such as Davao. While several national-level studies have focused on school leadership challenges, few have offered qualitative insights into the adaptive behaviors, resilience strategies, and lived experiences of head teachers who juggle core and ancillary

duties. Without such insights, policy and leadership training programs may fail to address the real conditions that affect school leadership effectiveness.

This case study aims to address this gap by exploring the workload, challenges, and coping strategies of head teachers managing multiple ancillary functions in the Department of Education. It seeks to document their experiences, identify strategies to maintain balance and resilience and extract insights that can inform leadership development, workload distribution, and institutional policy.

Cluster 13 in Davao City was selected as the research site due to its representation of typical urban public secondary schools within the region characterized by high student enrollment, limited non-teaching staff, and a substantial volume of ancillary assignments. The cluster's context provides a compelling microcosm of broader systemic challenges faced by head teachers in similar urban divisions across the Philippines.

Grounded on Role Strain Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory, this study offers a theoretical lens to interpret how head teachers respond to conflicting role expectations and how they sustain motivation, commitment, and professional purpose despite overwhelming demands. Role Strain Theory explains the stress that arises from holding multiple competing roles, while Transformational Leadership Theory emphasizes adaptive leadership and the ability to inspire and guide amidst complex challenges.

The study is timely and significant. First, it offers empirical evidence to policymakers and DepEd leaders on the need for structured support systems and rationalized role assignments. Second, it contributes to scholarly discourse by expanding the application of established leadership theories in a localized, real-world

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educational setting. Third, and most importantly, it gives voice to head teachers whose leadership is crucial yet often underrepresented in research

and policy. The findings aim to support strategies that alleviate workload and enhance leadership effectiveness and job satisfaction.

### Research Questions:

1. What are the experiences of head teachers in managing multiple ancillary functions?
2. What are the coping strategies of head teachers in managing multiple ancillary functions?
3. What insights can be gained from these experiences and coping strategies to inform leadership support and policy?

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to gain a deep understanding of head teachers' workloads, their challenges, and the coping strategies they employ to manage multiple ancillary functions. As Yin (2009) explains, a case study is particularly well-suited for exploring a phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly defined. This methodological approach allows for a detailed examination of how teachers navigate their roles, particularly the added responsibilities that extend beyond their core

leadership functions. Consistent with Creswell (2007), this case study draws on extensive, in-depth data collection to provide a rich, empirical investigation grounded in real-world experiences. Multiple sources of evidence were utilized to capture a range of perspectives from participants, offering a nuanced understanding of their workloads, the challenges they face, and the strategies they adopt to cope. The research questions served as the foundation for semi-structured interviews designed to elicit detailed and meaningful participant responses.

### 2.2 Research Participants

This qualitative case study involves three Head Teachers, specifically the Head Teachers of Cluster 13 in the Davao City Division of the Department of Education, who are responsible for both leadership duties and multiple ancillary functions with a high ancillary load. Case study research is characterized by an in-depth exploration of a specific case within its real-life context and typically involves a small, carefully selected number of participants. A sample size of at least three is often sufficient to provide meaningful insights, as the focus is on depth rather than breadth. According to Sethosa (2021), case study research involves a detailed,

contextually grounded investigation conducted over a period of time. It is particularly well-suited to research questions that seek to understand complex organizational and social processes (Hartley, 2004).

The study employed purposive sampling to identify participants who could provide rich, relevant, and diverse perspectives. As noted by Robinson (2024), purposive sampling involves deliberately selecting individuals based on their knowledge and experience related to the research topic. In this case, the participants were head teachers from the Cluster who are directly

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engaged in managing multiple ancillary functions alongside their leadership responsibilities. Participants were fully informed about the nature of the study, including the interview procedures, schedule, and location.

### 2.3 Data Collection Procedure

The researchers employed a systematic and rigorous data collection procedure to ensure the findings' reliability and depth. As Creswell (2007) emphasized, qualitative research involves a series of interconnected steps, including gaining access, building rapport, collecting data, and interpreting meaning. Before data collection, the researchers secured approval from the administrator of the Department of Education, where the participants are currently assigned.

Administrative consent was obtained from the Cluster 13 principals, in lieu of a formal Institutional Review Board (IRB), as required for internal DepEd research.

Participant availability and convenience were given careful consideration to ensure voluntary and stress-free engagement in the research process. The primary method of data collection was in-depth interviews, which were audio recorded. Each semi-structured interview followed a protocol consisting of 10 questions with optional probes, focusing on experiences, coping mechanisms, and institutional support.

### 2.4 Data Analysis

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from the GAWAD Kalasag Assessment Toolkit and the Household Natural Hazards Survey of the Oregon Natural Hazards Workgroup (2007). The instrument was modified for contextual relevance and underwent expert validation. It comprised seven sections: (1) household profile, (2) exposure to

Measures were taken to ensure their confidentiality and protect their identities in accordance with the ethical standards outlined by Fossheim and Ingierd (2015).

On average, each interview lasted 60 to 75 minutes. Following the interview, the recorded data were transcribed to preserve the integrity and richness of the participants' responses. This transcription process, though time-consuming and labor-intensive, is a critical step in qualitative research, as it lays the groundwork for thorough data analysis and theme development.

Several strategies were implemented to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. Member checking was used to return transcripts and preliminary interpretations to participants for verification and clarification. This process ensured that the participants' views were accurately captured. Additionally, triangulation was achieved by comparing data across participants and coding cycles, further enhancing the credibility and dependability of the results. Thick description was used to provide contextual details, supporting the transferability of the findings to similar educational settings.

disasters, (3) quality of emergency interventions, (4) preparedness activities, (5) risk reduction priorities, (6) information sources and dissemination methods, and (7) trust in the CDRRMC. Questionnaires are widely recognized tools in quantitative research for their capacity to gather standardized and reliable data (Taherdoost, 2016).

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### 3. Results and Discussions

**Table 1.** Experiences of head teachers in managing multiple ancillary functions

| Theme   | Core Idea  | Sample Transcript Excerpt   | Relevant Theory   | Interpretation   |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <b>Transforming Burden into Growth Opportunity</b>    | Viewing additional roles as professional development rather than a burden.<br><br>(Mullen & Hall, 2023); (Bass, 1985)          | "I accepted that as an opportunity for me to grow and lead the department." (HT1) | Transformational Leadership (Bass, 1985)                | Head teachers viewed additional responsibilities as opportunities for personal and professional growth. This aligns with Transformational Leadership Theory, which emphasizes the leader's ability to inspire positive change and growth in themselves and others (Bass, 1985; Mullen & Hall, 2023). |
| <b>Leadership Tension Amid Conflicting Priorities</b> | Struggling to fulfill leadership duties while handling multiple roles.<br><br>(Chung & Schneider, 2002); (Katz & Kahn, 1978)   | "My leadership style...was affected primarily because of additional tasks." (HT2) | Role Conflict Theory (Katz & Kahn, 1978)                | Multiple roles created internal role conflict, reducing leadership effectiveness. This is consistent with Role Conflict Theory, which suggests that competing demands across different roles can cause stress and hinder effective role performance (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Chung & Schneider, 2002).    |
| <b>Overwhelm and Adaptive Struggle</b>                | Initial confusion and stress followed by learning and adjustment.<br><br>(Schwab & Iwanichi, 1982); (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)  | "I was shocked and confused....afraid I would make mistakes..." (HT3)             | Transactional Model of Stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) | Initial stress led to adaptive coping strategies, supporting the notion of the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which identifies the process of managing stress through cognitive and behavioral efforts (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Schwab & Iwanichi, 1982).                                |
| <b>Structured Scheduling and Prioritization</b>       | Daily and weekly planning to manage instructional and ancillary duties.<br><br>(Macan, 1994)                                   | "I make a plan for the next day...if that plan is achieved, I am happy." (HT1)    | Time Management Theory (Macan, 1994)                    | Time management strategies helped maintain control of competing tasks, reflecting Time Management Theory, which underscores the importance of prioritization in managing workloads and reducing stress (Macan, 1994).  |
| <b>Collaborative Delegation and Peer Reliance</b>     | Distributing responsibilities among staff and involving peers.<br><br>(Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001); (Spillane, 2006) | "I delegated the Grade 7 to 10 teachers...we collaborated on our efforts." (HT1)  | Distributed Leadership Theory (Spillane, 2006)          | Delegating tasks and relying on peers provided essential support, aligning with Distributed Leadership Theory, which highlights shared responsibility and collaboration in leadership (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2001).   |

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| <b>Emotional Regulation and Self-Preservation</b>                  | Developing mechanisms to cope with stress, including prayer, breaks, or time off. (Koenig et al., 2020); (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011) | "I will walk on the campus...inhale, exhale...ask God for guidance." (HT1)                          | Self-care in Leadership (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011) | Personal coping practices such as mindfulness and prayer contributed to emotional regulation and resilience, consistent with the Self-care in Leadership framework, which emphasizes the importance of leaders managing their well-being (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011; Koenig et al., 2020). |
| <b>Peer-led Informal Learning and Support</b>                      | Consulting experienced colleagues for guidance and emotional reassurance. (American Psychological Association, 2002)                         | "I ask other department heads...they are more experienced." (HT1)                                   | Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977)                      | Experienced peers provided guidance and support, filling the gap created by the lack of formal training, in line with Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes learning through interaction and observation (Bandura, 1977; APA, 2002).  |
| <b>Competency Gaps Due to Absence of Formal Training</b>           | Lack of preparatory training creates inefficiencies and stress. (Inzana, et.al., 1996)   | "Since the multiple ancillary was assigned...I have not had any training." (HT3)                    | Adult Learning Theory (Knowles, 1980)                       | The lack of formal preparation resulted in inefficiency and stress, highlighting the importance of Adult Learning Theory, which focuses on how adults learn and develop through experience and reflection (Knowles, 1980; Inzana et al., 1996).  |
| <b>Blurring of Core Responsibilities Due to Ancillary Overload</b> | Ancillary functions reduce time for department leadership and teaching. (Pagela Jr., 2024)   | "Because of too much workload, we forget our own priorities..." (HT3)                               | Role Strain Theory (Goode, 1960)                            | Ancillary tasks reduced focus on teaching and leadership duties, which aligns with Role Strain Theory, suggesting that an overload of responsibilities can lead to role conflict and strain (Goode, 1960; Pagela Jr., 2024).   |
| <b>Prioritizing Personal Well-being as a Leadership Imperative</b> | Head teachers acknowledge the toll on their health and take steps to protect it. (Howard, 2012); (Sung & Park, 2023)                         | "If you cannot manage your stress, you will be sick...that may lead to serious consequences." (HT1) | Occupational Health Psychology (Quick et al., 1997)         | Maintaining personal health and well-being becomes critical to sustaining leadership effectiveness, reflecting Occupational Health Psychology, which underscores the connection between well-being and effective leadership (Quick et al., 1997; Howard, 2012; Sung & Park, 2023)                  |

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**Table 2.** Coping strategies of head teachers in managing multiple ancillary functions

| Theme                                | Core Idea  | Sample Transcript   | Relevant Theory  | Interpretation  |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| Time Management & Prioritization     | Head teachers rely on schedules, plans, and prioritization to manage diverse tasks effectively. <i>(Horng et al.,2010)</i>   | HT2: 'Number one is prioritization and time management... planning is playing an important role as a leader.'<br>HT1: 'I make planning... posted it in my table... when I arrive, I start with prayer before performing tasks.' | Time Management Theory<br>(Macan, 1994)                            | Head teachers relied on structured planning and task prioritization to balance competing demands. This reflects Time Management Theory, which emphasizes that effective time management reduces stress and increases productivity (Macan, 1994; Horng et al., 2010).  |
| Delegation & Collaboration           | Sharing responsibilities with teachers helps reduce workload and fosters teamwork. <i>(Escobar,2024)</i>   | HT1: 'I asked them to help... Grade 7 will bring soil... Grade 9 and 10 bring plastic bottles...'<br>HT3: 'I delegate tasks according to what capacity they can do... it is our duty.'  | Transformational Leadership Theory<br>(Bass, 1985)                 | Delegating tasks and collaborating with staff reduced individual workload and enhanced team synergy. This aligns with Transformational Leadership Theory, which stresses the importance of empowering others and fostering a shared vision (Bass, 1985; Escobar, 2024).   |
| Emotional & Stress Management        | Teachers adopt spiritual, physical, and mental habits to manage emotional stress. <i>(National Center for Biotechnology Information. ,2021); (Lazarus &amp; Folkman, 1984)</i> | HT1: 'I walk on the campus... inhale, exhale... motivate myself.'<br>HT3: 'I have to manage my stress so that I will not face serious consequences leading to death.'   | Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) | Head teachers employed emotional and spiritual strategies, such as deep breathing and mindfulness, to manage stress. This is consistent with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which focuses on how individuals use cognitive and behavioral efforts to cope with stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; NCBI, 2021). |
| Reflective Practice & Self-Awareness | Continuous self-reflection helps identify strengths and areas for growth. <i>(Kolb, 1984)</i>  | HT3: 'I discover that I have the capacity to handle different responsibilities... I know myself more.'  | Experiential Learning Theory<br>(Kolb, 1984)                       | Engaging in reflective practices helped head teachers develop greater self-awareness, improving their leadership approach. This aligns with Experiential Learning Theory, which suggests that reflective observation fosters learning and growth (Kolb, 1984).  |
| Peer Support & Informal Learning     | When formal training is lacking, head teachers turn to peers for guidance. <i>(Wallace Foundation,2023); (Bandura, 1977)</i>   | HT1: 'I ask older department heads... out of 8, I can confide in 2 or 3.'<br>HT3: 'Support from colleagues I do have... I learn by asking suggestions.'   | Social Learning Theory<br>(Bandura, 1977)                          | In the absence of formal training, head teachers turned to peer support for guidance and knowledge sharing. This behavior reflects Social Learning Theory, which highlights the importance of learning through interaction with others (Bandura, 1977; Wallace Foundation, 2023).   |

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| Purpose-Driven Mindset | Seeing their role as an opportunity for growth or service helps reframe stress positively.<br><br>( <i>Stanford News, 2015</i> );<br>( <i>Park &amp; Folkman, 1997</i> ) | HT1: 'I consider it an opportunity for me to grow and to lead.'<br>HT2: 'I was able to weigh myself as flexible and can actually embrace changes.' | Meaning-Centered Coping<br>(Park & Folkman, 1997) | Head teachers found meaning in their work by viewing challenges as opportunities for personal growth or service to the school community. This reflects Meaning-Centered Coping Theory, which posits that reframing challenges through a sense of purpose helps individuals cope with stress (Park & Folkman, 1997; Stanford News, 2015). |
|------------------------|--|--|---|--|

**Table 3.** Insights that can be gained from experiences and coping strategies in managing multiple ancillary functions

| Theme                                 | Core Idea  | Sample Transcript   | Relevant Theory                                  |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| Adaptability and Flexibility          | Head teachers become more adaptable through exposure to diverse tasks, improving their ability to handle change.<br>( <i>National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2021, March 23</i> );<br>( <i>Richardson, 2002</i> ) | HT2: 'It actually develops them to become more flexible and adaptable to changes... now exposed to more challenging tasks.'<br>HT3: 'This ancillary helped us to be flexible and multitask things...'   | Resilience Theory<br>(Richardson, 2002)          | Exposure to diverse tasks helped teachers become more adaptable, demonstrating growth in flexibility and resilience. This aligns with Resilience Theory, which highlights the ability to thrive amidst challenges and develop adaptive skills (Richardson, 2002; NASSP, 2021). |
| Self-Discovery and Personal Growth    | Managing multiple functions helps head teachers realize strengths and areas for development.<br>( <i>Deci &amp; Ryan, 1985</i> )   | HT3: 'I discover that I have the capacity to handle different responsibilities... stress management is really important.'<br><br>HT1: 'Initially, I did not want to be on the farm, but I had to take on the responsibility of planting. Over time, I came to enjoy and appreciate the experience.' | Self-Determination Theory<br>(Deci & Ryan, 1985) | Managing multiple responsibilities led to greater self-awareness and personal growth, reinforcing Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes intrinsic motivation and the development of personal competencies through meaningful tasks (Deci & Ryan, 1985).                  |
| Mentorship and Leadership Development | Experienced head teachers emphasize the importance of guiding and supporting new leaders.<br>( <i>Greenleaf, 1977</i> )  | HT2: 'I delegate tasks... to groom other members of the team... prepare for the next level.'<br>HT1: 'I motivate others to have promotions and complete the papers.'  | Servant Leadership Theory<br>(Greenleaf, 1977)   | Experienced head teachers placed value on mentoring and guiding newer leaders, fostering leadership development within teams. This reflects Servant Leadership Theory, which focuses on leaders who prioritize the growth and well-being of others (Greenleaf, 1977).          |

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| Systemic Challenges and Policy Gaps  | Lack of training and proper policy support hinders the efficient management of ancillary roles.<br>(Campoamor, 2023);<br>(Eisenberger et al., 1986)                          | HT3: 'I haven't had any training... like going to war without a weapon.'<br>HT1: 'Ancillary should be distributed fairly... promotion points should be considered.'                                 | Organizational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986)  | The lack of proper training and institutional support leads to inefficiencies, revealing gaps in the system. This is consistent with Organizational Support Theory, which underscores the role of organizational support in improving employee outcomes and effectiveness (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Campoamor, 2023).                                |
| Emotional Burden as a Catalyst for Reflective Coping and Transformative Growth | Head teachers initially experienced emotional distress from role overload, but through coping, reflection, and meaning-making, they transformed stress into personal growth. | HT1: "I was shocked and confused... afraid I would make mistakes."<br><br>HT3: "I walk on the campus... inhale, exhale... I have to manage my stress so that I will not face serious consequences." | Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984); Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985); Transformational Leadership (Bass, 1985) | Synthesizing across tables, emotional stress though initially overwhelming became a transformative force. Head teachers employed emotional regulation, meaning-making, and peer support, eventually reframing stress as a source of growth, aligning with multiple theoretical perspectives (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Bass, 1985). |

**Table 4.** Cross-Case Result of Head Teachers in Managing Multiple Ancillary Functions

| Category / Theme                    | HT1  | HT2  | HT3   |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Years of Service as Head Teacher    | 1 year (since March 2023)  | 6 years (since 2019)   | 10 years  |
| Subject Area Supervised             | TLE (Grades 7-10)  | Araling Panlipunan (Grades 7-10)   | Filipino/Wika (Grades 7-10)   |
| Number of Ancillary Roles           | 3 (Feeding Program, Gulayan, Canteen)  | 5+ (Brigada Eskwela, ADAPA, Canvasser, Records, Guidance)  | 3 (Guidance, Testing, HR)   |
| Initial Reaction to Ancillary Tasks | Initially felt sad but saw it as a growth opportunity. "I felt a little sad but I accepted that as an opportunity for me to grow." | Felt confused about how to prioritize tasks initially. "As expected I was confused at first... confusion about giving priorities." | Shocked and overwhelmed due to lack of prior knowledge. "At first I was shocked and confused... I did not have any background knowledge." |

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|                            |  |  |   |
|----------------------------|--|--|---|
| Coping Strategies Used     | Uses planning, prayer, delegation, and regular communication with teachers. "I make planning... then post it in my table. Then when I arrive, I start praying..."  | Applies time management, prioritization, communication, and self-care. "Number one is prioritization and time management... stress management and self-care."    | Plans ahead, delegates tasks, embraces feedback, and manages stress. "Planning ahead, listing tasks... delegate to different persons... manage my stress."                        |
| Sources of Fulfillment     | Feels fulfilled when daily plans are achieved and tasks are completed on time. "If that plan for that particular day was achieved, I will be happy and motivated." | Finds fulfillment in meeting expectations and task delivery. "Satisfaction... that I was able to deliver what is expected of me."                                | Feels satisfied when duties are completed and expectations are met. "I finish my work with fulfillment and satisfaction."   |
| Leadership Impact          | Leadership was initially impacted but improved with adaptation. "Of course yes, at first it was affected but later on I accepted that one..."                      | Leadership capacity reduced due to additional responsibilities. "...affected primarily because additional tasks... deducting time in the leadership aspect..."   | Leadership challenged by the need to divide time across duties. "Challenges my leadership roles... I have to divide my time wisely..."  |
| Support Received           | No formal training; relies on senior colleagues for guidance. "No training so far... I will ask them how to do this and that."                                     | No formal training; admin support was helpful. "No specific training... but leadership provides necessary support."  | No formal training; support mostly from peers. "I haven't had any training but maybe support from colleagues I do have."  |
| Recommendations for Policy | Wants fair distribution of ancillaries and recognition in promotion criteria. "Ancillary should be distributed fairly... included for promotion points."           | Recommends role-specific training and more time for policy implementation. "Head teachers... should be given enough training in handling their ancillary tasks." | Requests better task division and targeted training to ensure effectiveness. "Come up with a better plan to accommodate these ancillaries... right division of responsibilities." |

#### 4. Discussion

The head teachers in this study shared their lived experiences regarding the challenges they face in managing both instructional duties and ancillary roles within the Philippine education system. The findings of the thematic analysis highlight the complexities of their workload, the coping strategies they employ, and the

systematic factors that influence their professional lives. The results are discussed below, integrating theories and reviewing related literature to interpret the findings.

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## Navigating Overload Through Structure Adaptation

Lorenzo & Dizon (2024) confirmed that head teachers use adaptive time-blocking software, which reduces stress and increases instructional focus. Recent research by David & Ramos (2024) reinforces that task overload disrupts instructional leadership by creating cognitive fatigue, requiring adaptive scheduling strategies.

Head teachers often described feeling overwhelmed by the multiplicity of roles they are expected to fulfill, which affects their ability to manage both teaching and ancillary duties effectively. One participant noted, *"Typical day... if one teacher is absent, I have to take over the class, and I cannot perform my other ancillary functions"*(HT1). Another shared, *"Since the day it was implemented... I have to make a new routine again to cater to other workloads"* (HT3). These experiences underscore the ongoing challenge of balancing numerous responsibilities.

The findings resonate with Role Theory (Kahn et al., 1964), which posits that individuals

experience stress when they encounter conflicting role demands. The head teachers in this study demonstrate how these conflicts lead to role strain and stress, especially when unanticipated events disrupt their routines. The need to adapt to these demands by reorganizing schedules and adjusting priorities reflects the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which suggests that individuals prioritize preserving their resources, such as time and energy, in response to stressors. By developing structured routines and re-adjusting their schedules, head teachers are effectively managing these conflicting demands, which helps conserve their resources for the most pressing tasks.

Padilla & Santos (2023) discovered that collective spiritual practices, such as morning reflections, help foster emotional resilience among overburdened educators.

## Coping Through Planning, Faith, and Collaboration

Vargas & Beltran (2023) emphasized the psychological benefits of spiritual grounding and collaborative rituals in high-pressure academic environments.

To cope with the stress associated with their workload, head teachers employ various coping mechanisms. One participant emphasized, *"Planning first... then when I arrive, I will really start praying"* (HT1), while another stated, *"I have to divide tasks... because I only have one body and two hands"* (HT3). These strategies underscore the critical role of planning and faith in managing daily pressures. The combination of cognitive strategies, such as planning and emotional resources, like prayer, represents a holistic approach to stress management.

These coping strategies are well explained by the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which emphasizes the role of cognitive appraisal in evaluating stressors and choosing appropriate coping strategies. Planning and faith help head teachers assess their circumstances and formulate ways to mitigate the stress. Moreover, the Job Demands-Resources(JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) supports the notion that resources like social support and personal beliefs can buffer the effects of job demands. The head teacher's reliance on collaboration with colleagues and the emotional support derived from faith and prayer serve as vital resources that help them navigate the stresses of their multifaceted roles.

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Ocampo & Revira (2023) emphasized that challenging leadership roles in rural schools

serve as formative experiences in shaping visionary leaders.

### Transformative Learning from Multifaceted Responsibilities

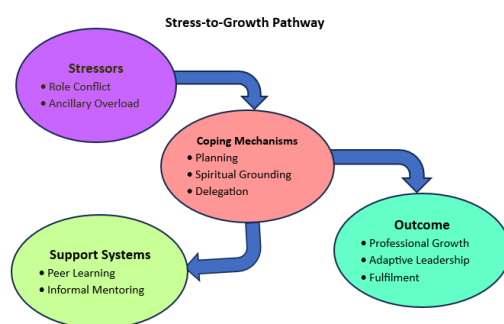
Garcia & Cruz (2023) noted that head teachers in Mindanao perceived their ancillary load as a catalyst for leadership identity formation, confirming Mezirow's learning transformation.

Despite the overwhelming nature of their responsibilities, head teachers often experience personal and professional growth. One participant reflected, *"Even when I was young, I did not want to be on the farm...but I had to learn"* (HT1), illustrating a process of adaptation and learning. Another participant noted, *"I discovered that I have the capacity to handle different responsibilities at the same time"* (HT3), showing an increased ability to multitask effectively. Tan & Cruz (2024) advocated for a tiered induction program for school heads, noting its effectiveness in reducing early burnout in newly appointed leaders.

This personal growth is supported by Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991), which posits that individuals can experience profound changes in perspective through critical reflection on their challenging experiences. The head teacher's ability to reflect on their increasing capacity to handle multiple tasks demonstrates this transformative process. Their experiences of growth and skill development are also supported by Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), which emphasizes that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. As head teachers navigate complex and often stressful roles, they learn not only to manage tasks more effectively but also to develop new perspectives on their leadership capacities.

**Figure 1. Stress-to-Growth Pathway:**

A conceptual diagram showing the transition from stressors (role conflict, ancillary overload) to outcomes (professional growth, fulfillment) through coping mechanism and support systems.



### Institutional Gaps and the Need for Policy Realignment

Martinez et al. (2023) revealed that less than 30% of head teachers receive preparatory

training of ancillary roles, pointing to a critical development void.

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A significant theme emerging from the data is the lack of formal training and institutional support for head teachers in their ancillary roles. One participant noted, *"I have not received any training... I learn from others through experience"* (HT1), while another stated, *"It is hard to work without any background about the job"* (HT3). These reflections highlight the systemic gaps in professional development and organizational support, which contribute to the challenges faced by head teachers. Bernal & Ortega (2023) found that purpose-oriented leadership correlated positively with long-term retention and higher self-efficacy among school leaders.

The lack of structured training and support is reflected in Organizational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986), which suggests that

### **Finding Purpose Despite Constraints**

Navarro & Chua (2023) found that intrinsic motivation among school leaders predicts sustained effort despite unclear job boundaries and emotional strain.

Despite the overwhelming workload and systemic challenges, head teachers find fulfillment in their roles, particularly when they experience a sense of accomplishment or service. One participant shared, *"If I may be able to achieve the task targeted for the day... I will be happy"* (HT1), while another stated, *"When I satisfy everyone... that's when I feel fulfillment"* (HT3). These reflections point to a deep sense of satisfaction derived from successfully meeting the demands of their roles despite the constraints they face.

### **Cross-Case Analysis of Head Teachers' Experiences**

This cross-case analysis compares the lived experiences of three head teachers (HT1, HT2, and HT3) from Cluster 13, each responsible for managing multiple ancillary functions alongside instructional leadership. While differing in years

employees' perceptions of organizational support influence their job satisfaction and performance. The absence of formal guidance on how to manage ancillary tasks leads to feelings of neglect and stress among head teachers, diminishing their motivation and job satisfaction. The Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines has responded to these gaps by issuing Order No. 005, s. 2024, which rationalizes teachers' workloads and delineates ancillary tasks to ensure they are appropriately delegated.

Additionally, the Department of Budget and Management approved the creation of 5,000 non-teaching positions to assist in these efforts. These policy changes aim to reduce the administrative burden on head teachers and offer additional support for the management of ancillary tasks.

This finding is a similar conclusion drawn in the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which underscores the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering intrinsic motivation. The sense of fulfillment that head teachers derive from accomplishing tasks or meeting the needs of others reflects the satisfaction of these basic psychological needs. Moreover, the principles of Servant Leadership Theory (Greenleaf, 1970) are evident in the head teachers' commitment to serving their students and communities. Their ability to find purpose and satisfaction through service, despite the challenges of their workload, exemplifies the servant leader's focus on the well-being of others.

of service, subject area, and ancillary load, their accounts reveal converging patterns in coping strategies, emotional responses, leadership disruption, and policy perspectives.

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### Shared Stress, Varied Experience

All three head teachers reported experiencing emotional strain, sadness (HT1), confusion (HT2), and shock (HT3) upon receiving ancillary assignments. Despite HT3's extensive experience, she felt unprepared, stating, *"I have not had any training... like going to war without*

*a weapon."* These reactions confirm Role Conflict and Role Strain Theories (Goode, 1960; Katz & Kahn, 1978), which emphasize stress from competing demands and lack of clarity in job expectations.

### Coping Strategies and Adaptive Capacity

All participants adopted a blend of time management, delegation, and emotional regulation to cope. HT1 relied heavily on planning and faith: *"When I arrived, I started praying..."* HT2 emphasized stress management, while HT3 focused on scheduling and peer feedback. These strategies reflect the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), as well as

Occupational Health Psychology (Quick et al., 1997), which stresses emotional resilience in leadership roles. Their collaborative efforts, especially task-sharing with teachers, demonstrate Distributed Leadership (Spillane, 2006) and traits of Transformational Leadership (Bass, 1985), such as empowering others and developing team synergy.

### Leadership Under Strain

Each head teacher confirmed that their instructional leadership was negatively impacted by ancillary responsibilities. HT2 explicitly stated, *"It reduces time in the leadership aspect..."* While HT1 eventually adapted, all

recognized that managing multiple roles diluted their focus. This outcome is consistent with findings by Dela Peña (2022) and supports the Job Demand-Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

### Informal Learning as a Survival Strategy

With no formal training, all three relied on peer mentorship for support, a hallmark of Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977). This also reflects a systemic deficiency in leadership

development, reaffirming the value of Adult Learning Theory (Knowles, 1980) and the need for structured context-sensitive professional training.

### Intrinsic Motivation and Fulfillment

Despite the challenges, each head teacher found fulfillment through task completion and community service. HT1 shared, *"If I achieve the day's plan, I will be happy."* These expressions reflect Self-Determination Theory

(Deci & Ryan, 1985) and Meaning-Centered Coping (Park & Folkman, 1997), suggesting that personal purpose and intrinsic motivation sustain leadership under pressure.

### Policy Perspectives: Informed Advocacy

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The participant's recommendations for fair task distribution, ancillary recognition in promotion, and targeted training demonstrate informed advocacy. HT2's approach to mentoring team members reflects the Servant Leadership Theory (Greenleaf, 1977). Their practical insights align with the goals of DepEd Order No. 005, s. 2024 but also reveal gaps in implementation.

The findings of this study have several critical implications for educational policy, school leadership development, and organizational support systems within the Department of Education.

First, there is a compelling need for policy realignment to address the unsustainable workload experienced by head teachers due to the accumulation of ancillary functions. While DepEd Order No. 005, s.2024, and the creation of non-teaching positions signal progress, gaps remain in implementation. Ancillary responsibilities must be equitably distributed and considered in promotion and evaluation metrics. A review of the job description and accountability mechanism is necessary to ensure that the performance of head teachers reflects the full spectrum of their duties.

Second, the study highlights the deficiency in formal training and support for managing ancillary functions. Most head teachers navigate their responsibilities through experiential learning and peer consultation, which, while resourceful, underscores the need for structured professional development programs. The integration of role-specific training, leadership coaching, and mentorship initiatives is vital to enhance preparedness and efficacy among school heads.

## 5. Conclusions

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of head teachers who, in addition to their instructional leadership roles, are burdened with multiple ancillary functions in the

Third, this research underscores the significance of well-being and self-care as integral components of leadership sustainability. Head Teachers' testimonies reveal the psychological and emotional strain caused by their workloads, suggesting a need for institutional support systems that include mental health services, wellness initiatives, and manageable task allocations. Educational leaders must be empowered to prioritize their personal well-being as a leadership competency rather than a secondary concern.

Fourth, the findings suggest that, when supported, ancillary functions can serve as opportunities for personal and professional growth. Participants demonstrated increased adaptability, reflective practice, and a heightened sense of purpose through the experience of managing multiple roles. Encouraging a meaning-centered mindset and embedding reflective practices in leadership development programs may help head teachers reframe challenges as catalysts for transformation.

Finally, the study contributes to the theoretical discourse on school leadership by contextualizing established frameworks such as Role Strain Theory, Transformational Leadership, and Experiential Learning Theory within the Philippine public education system. This opens avenues for further qualitative research on leadership in regional and unserved areas, thereby enriching the global understanding of adaptive leadership in complex educational environments. This study for a holistic approach to leadership supports one that balances role clarity, training, wellness, and purpose to create a more resilient and effective cadre of head teachers in Philippine schools.

Philippine public school system. Drawing on the narrative of head teachers from Davao City, the study revealed a multifaceted reality marked by emotional strain, overwhelming workloads, and

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a systemic lack of formal training and support. And yet, within these challenges, the participants showed remarkable strength, resilience, and a deep commitment to their roles.

One of the central insights from this study is how head teachers manage to cope with their expanding responsibilities. Many turn to structured planning and time management to stay organized. Others rely on their faith, finding comfort and grounding through prayer and spiritual reflection. Peer support emerged as a critical resource, with head teachers frequently turning to more experienced colleagues for guidance, encouragement, and shared solutions. These coping strategies, while deeply personal, also reflect broader theoretical concepts. Using Role Strain Theory, Transformational Leadership, and Experiential Learning Theory allowed for a deeper understanding of how to navigate their roles and achieve professional growth.

Despite these adaptive efforts, the study also highlighted serious gaps within the system. Participants repeatedly emphasized the lack of formal preparation for ancillary functions, often resorting to informal learning or trial and error.

While their resilience is admirable, this also reflects broader institutional neglect. Head teachers face increased risks of burnout and leadership fatigue without appropriate training, recognition, and support.

The cross-case analysis underscored how these experiences are not isolated. Regardless of tenure, participants reported similar reactions, confusion, sadness, and feeling overwhelmed when first assigned their ancillary roles. However, they also shared common strategies for overcoming these challenges, particularly through collaboration, reflective practice, and intrinsic motivation. These moments of self-discovery and growth suggest that with the right kind of support, even the most burdensome roles can become pathways for transformation.

These findings call for a systematic realignment. Leadership development programs must move beyond theory and provide context-specific, hands-on support. Ancillary roles should be rationally assigned and formally recognized in performance and promotion systems. Furthermore, mental health and wellness should be institutionalized to help leaders thrive, not just survive.

## 6. Recommendations

### 1. Training and Professional Development

The Department of Education should institutionalize structured, role-specific training programs for head teachers to enhance their capacity in managing both instructional and ancillary responsibilities. The absence of formal training was a consistent source of stress and

inefficiency. Capacity-building initiatives must be tailored to the complex demands of school leadership, with a focus on time management, delegation, documentation, and administrative systems.

### 2. Policy and Workload Management

There is an urgent need to reassess the distribution, assignment, and recognition of ancillary functions. These roles should be:

- Fairly distributed among staff,
- Aligned with individual strengths and school heads, and

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- Formally considered in performance evaluations and promotion metrics. Reviewing job descriptions and accountability systems will ensure that head teachers are evaluated fairly based on the full scope of their roles.

### 3. Wellness and Mental Health Support

Head teachers' testimonies reveal the psychological toll of role overload. To sustain effective leadership, well-being must be treated as a leadership competency, not a secondary concern. Recommended wellness initiatives include:

- Regular stress management and emotional resilience workshops,
- Institutional access to mental health services,
- Scheduled wellness days and self-care breaks, and
- Peer support networks to reduce isolation.

### 4. Peer Collaboration and Informal Learning Structures

Given the lack of formal preparation, the Department should foster peer mentorship and collaborative leadership development. Creating cluster-level communities of practice, learning

circles, and coaching programs can institutionalize learning while building collective capacity.

### 5. Policy Review Alignment

Finally, policies such as DepEd Order No. 005, s. 2024 must be monitored and evaluated for implementation fidelity. Feedback mechanisms

should be established at the school and cluster levels to ensure that top-down directives are responsive to on-the-ground realities.

## 7. Limitations of the Study

This study involved only three head teachers from a single cluster in Davao City, limiting the generalizability of the findings. As a qualitative study, the results are in-depth personal experiences but may not represent the broader context. Data relied on self-reported narratives, which may be influenced by personal bias or selective memory.

Additionally, given the hierarchical structure of the Department of Education, there is a possibility of social desirability bias, wherein participants may have moderated their responses to align with institutional expectations or avoid negative perceptions. While trust and rapport were carefully established, the potential influence of positional dynamics cannot be fully eliminated.

Despite the small size (N=3), data saturation was achieved as thematic redundancy was observed across all interviews. No new insights emerged during the final coding cycles, confirming that the study reached sufficient depth to draw meaningful conclusions.

The study also focused solely on public secondary schools and captured experiences at a single point in time without exploring how coping strategies evolve.

Given these limitations, future research should explore broader, more diverse samples and longitudinal designs.

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