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Collaborative Finance: Understanding the Financial Roles of Teachers, Master Teachers, and School Heads

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***Abstract*: This research investigates the unique but related financial roles of Teachers I–III, Master Teachers, and School Heads in public schools, highlighting the significance of teamwork in attaining successful financial management. Through thematic analysis, the research uncovers six main themes: comprehension of roles in financial management, degrees of accountability and financial participation, essential financial management competencies, difficulties in overseeing school finances, approaches to tackle financial difficulties, and insights on financial management. Teachers I–III act as resource managers, aiding in financial planning and engaging in fundraising efforts, although they do not hold direct budgeting responsibilities. Among the leadership duties of master teachers are budget involvement, financial spending planning, and financial literacy peer mentoring. The financial responsibilities of school principals are the most significant and include procuring outside funds, following financial regulations, and strategic planning. Every role faces challenges involving limited funding, transparency issues, and the need to maintain a balance between financial limitations and educational objectives, regardless of differences in scope and power. Strategies to address these issues involve utilizing resources, developing professional skills, encouraging financial literacy, and actively involving stakeholders. The results confirm that joint financial decision-making, openness, and skill enhancement at all educational tiers are crucial for sustaining a financially viable and educationally nurturing school atmosphere.**

***Keywords*: Financial management, school finance, collaborative budgeting, educational leadership, financial literacy, resource allocation.**

1. Introduction

In the current educational environment, financial management is viewed not just as an administrative task but as a strategic foundation that greatly impacts school efficiency, teaching quality, and student success. As stated by Odden and Picus (2014), the intentional distribution and use of financial resources are closely linked to educational results. As public schools deal with budget limitations, unequal resources, and rising accountability demands, the need for a more decentralized method of financial responsibility becomes clear. This involves the active participation of all school staff—especially Teachers I–III, Master Teachers, and School Heads—in the planning, monitoring, and utilization of school funds.

Although school principals or heads have typically been seen as the main custodians of school finances, studies show that sustainable and effective financial practices necessitate the joint efforts of the whole educational team (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). For example, teachers are seen as frontline executors who consistently make choices about the use of instructional resources. According to Flores and Derrington (2017), their closeness to the teaching-learning process allows them to recognize affordable instructional methods and often start fundraising and resource-generating initiatives within the school. Although not directly engaged in official budgeting processes, their financial choices in classrooms greatly influence overall budget effectiveness and educational results.

Master Teachers, who hold hybrid positions that blend teaching with leadership, are vital in financial discussions within educational institutions. As per Danielson (2006), Master Teachers frequently act as mentors, instructional leaders, and participants in school improvement planning. These positions require knowledge of budgeting, resource coordination, and financial clarity. Study conducted by Wenner and Campbell (2017) highlights that empowered teacher leadership can act as a catalyst for improved financial governance and instructional consistency.

In contrast, the financial duties of School Heads are more structured and include budget creation, allocation of funds, financial documentation, and adherence to national policies and regulations. As highlighted by Bush and Glover (2012), School Leaders must manage both the technical and ethical aspects of school financing, such as audits, reporting, and strategic fund distribution. Nonetheless, their effectiveness frequently relies on robust cooperation with educational staff. Harris (2004) noted that a lack of participatory leadership and collaborative decision-making can impede the effective allocation of school funds, especially when the immediate educational needs are misinterpreted or inadequately represented in financial planning.

Compounding these structural roles are systemic issues like postponed fund distributions, restricted allocations, and

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inadequate financial literacy among educational staff. As stated by Gurr, Drysdale, and Mulford (2006), these obstacles more heavily impact low-resourced schools, compelling educators to utilize their own finances and limiting the instructional creativity of Master Teachers. Furthermore, School Leaders frequently grapple with the combined responsibilities of financial oversight and the demand to fulfill educational requirements. These challenges highlight the necessity for a comprehensive method to school financial management—one that focuses on enhancing capacity, fostering transparency, and promoting collaborative leadership among professional roles.

Aligned with these viewpoints, this research aims to investigate the views and actions of Teachers I–III, Master Teachers, and School Administrators in handling school funds. In particular, it seeks to comprehend how each position impacts the financial stability of public schools, tackles financial issues, and participates in joint decision-making. Utilizing thematic analysis, the research aims to provide detailed insights into the collective financial environment in schools, promoting a transition from a top-down financial approach to a more inclusive and decentralized framework. Fullan (2007) suggests that educational progress is most enduring when it is founded on a common vision, shared responsibility, and collective expertise, particularly concerning financial governance.

2. Methodology

A. Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative approach, employing thematic analysis to explore how Teachers I–III, Master Teachers, and School Leaders understand and engage with financial management in public schools. The qualitative method was selected to obtain a more profound understanding of the different roles educators play in handling school finances, acknowledging the intricate and context-dependent aspects of these duties (Merriam & Tisdell,2016).

Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that qualitative methods are appropriate when the objective is to investigate the interpretations individuals or groups give to specific matters. In this study, grasping how educational staff perceive and execute financial responsibilities necessitates an approach that can record comprehensive, subjective narratives influenced by institutional procedures.

The main method used was thematic analysis, a well-liked strategy developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method offers flexibility and structure by enabling the identification and examination of recurring themes in qualitative data. Thematic analysis, according to Nowell et al. (2017), is particularly suitable for practical research in fields like education as it emphasizes the wide range and depth of participants' perspectives. It supports both deductive analysis, which employs accepted theories for clarifying results, and inductive analysis, which allows concepts to emerge from the data.

This research was based on the constructivist framework, highlighting that reality is shaped socially through interactions and collective understanding (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This philosophical viewpoint supports employing qualitative research to investigate how educators and school leaders work together to define and participate in financial activities.

Earlier research underscores the importance of qualitative methods in investigating financial decision-making in educational institutions. One aspect of school leadership that is frequently disregarded in research is the fact that it involves both academic administration and financial oversight, as discussed by Oplatka (2013). Similarly, Mestry (2016) highlighted the significance of transparency and responsibility in school financial problems, suggesting that management and teachers should have the appropriate financial skills and knowledge.

Taking these factors into account, employing qualitative research backed by thematic analysis presents a trustworthy and efficient method to investigate how financial duties are perceived and distributed among various educational positions in the school setting.

B. Research Locale

The study was conducted in public schools in Digos City, Davao del Sur.

C. Research Participants

To guarantee that the research obtained valuable insights, purposive sampling was employed to choose individuals who are directly engaged in managing school finances. According to Palinkas et al. (2015), this method is useful when the aim is to collect detailed insights from individuals possessing pertinent experience or expert knowledge.

The participants consisted of educators from public schools in Digos City, Davao del Sur. They consisted of classroom teachers (Teachers I–III), five Master Teachers, and School Principals who are all actively working in their positions throughout the academic year. These positions were specifically chosen based on their distinctive and important inputs to the process of establishing and carrying out school-level finance choices.

For the effective management of school resources, collaboration between teachers and administrators is important, according to Nguyen, Parker, and Tien (2020). Similarly, Abadiano and Cajigal (2021) highlight that involving numerous stakeholders in budgeting can enhance decision-making, accountability, and transparency in schools.

D. Research Instrument

This study used interview guide questions. The interview guide questions were evaluated by experts before the data gathering. This was to ensure that the questions asked were appropriate for the study.

E. Data Gathering Procedure

Data were gathered via semi-structured interviews, a technique appropriate for investigating in-depth viewpoints in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were informed in advance about the study's goals and ethical aspects. Consent was obtained, and interviews were arranged according to participants' availability, adhering to ethical guidelines in qualitative research (Bryman, 2016).

Interview guides were created to investigate participants' involvement in financial planning, budgeting, resource distribution, and reporting. Inquiries also investigated difficulties and approaches associated with handling financial limitations, aligning with earlier research on educational financial leadership (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020; Arar & Abu-Romi, 2021).

Interviews were carried out in person as well as through secure video conferencing tools to guarantee accessibility (Janghorban et al., 2014). Every session was documented with permission and transcribed word for word. Data were examined through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), facilitating the emergence of patterns and significant themes. The study maintained the standards of credibility and trust as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

F. Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical guidelines for educational research. Approval was obtained from the school authorities. All participants gave their informed consent after being made aware of their freedom to withdraw at any moment. Throughout the study procedure, all names and identities were removed from records and the transcribed report in order to maintain confidentiality and privacy.

3. Results and Discussion

This section summarizes the study's main conclusions, which are grouped into six main themes that arose from the data: (1) Understanding Roles in Financial Management, (2) Levels of Responsibility and Financial Involvement, (3) Key Financial Management Skills, (4) Challenges in Managing School Finances, (5) Strategies for Addressing Financial Challenges, and (6) Reflections on Financial Management. The different and related personal experiences of Teachers I–III, Master Teachers, and principals in making financial decisions in public schools are reflected in these topics.

A. Understanding Roles in Financial Management

The results indicate that perceptions of financial management in schools vary based on individual job titles. Teachers I–III usually view their responsibilities as custodial—centered on managing resources within the classroom. They participate in fundraising at the school level and guarantee the appropriate usage of instructional resources, although they stay on the outskirts of official budgeting processes. This result supports Flores and Derrington (2017), who highlighted that frontline educator, although not central to budgeting, impact it through their daily practices and choices.

In contrast, Master Teachers view financial involvement as fundamental to their leadership positions. They participate in budget conversations, serve as guides in financial education, and assist in aligning expenditures with educational goals. This remark corresponds to Danielson's (2006) teacher leadership model, which emphasizes the increasing role of seasoned teachers in influencing organizational direction. Likewise, results from Ingersoll and Strong (2011) indicate that teacher leaders are essential in bridging policy expectations and the realities of the classroom.

School leaders, on the other hand, take on the widest range of financial duties. They are responsible for budget planning, distributing funds, adhering to Department of Education (DepEd) guidelines, and frequently seeking external funding. Bush and Glover (2012) state that school leaders should strategically oversee resources while maintaining financial responsibility. Similarly, Pont, Nusche, and Moorman (2008) claim that efficient school leadership progressively requires managing intricate financial landscapes.

B. Levels of Responsibility and Financial Involvement

A noticeable variation in financial participation is evident among the examined roles. Teachers I–III play an informal role in financial planning by participating in needs assessments and fundraising activities, but their impact on formal decision-making is still restricted. However, their contributions are crucial for recognizing on-the-ground resource needs which, as Odden and Picus (2014) state, ought to guide larger budgetary choices to guarantee equity and effectiveness.

Master Teachers serve as a bridge between the administration and the realities of the classroom. They promote educational requirements and frequently aid in communication between school leaders and educators. According to Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009), these educators are distinctly situated to guarantee that financial choices align with both educational goals and operational limitations.

School leaders hold the utmost responsibility for financial accountability. They monitor budget implementation, handle maintenance funds for schools (MOOE), and connect with internal stakeholders and local government agencies. Caldwell and Spinks (2013) highlight that successful school leaders must efficiently distribute resources and also guarantee that spending corresponds with long-term educational objectives.

C. Key Financial Management Skills

The research discovered that specific financial skills are anticipated throughout the educational structure. Teachers I–III exhibit fundamental financial literacy, creativity, and problem-solving abilities that are essential for meeting classroom requirements with limited budgets. According to Levine (2001), educators frequently develop new teaching methods when confronted with inadequate material resources.

Master Teachers need an advanced level of financial knowledge, encompassing budget development, mentoring peers on financial issues, and negotiating instructional materials. Their role showcases increasing demands for improved financial education among teacher leaders. Ensuring teacher-driven creativity and transparency inside schools requires financial awareness development, as stated by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2016).

High levels of proficiency in financial planning, regulatory compliance, participation of stakeholders, and strategic planning are required of school leaders. Bush and Glover (2012) contend that these competencies are crucial for steering the financial health of the entire school. Additionally, Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd (2009) identified a significant link between effective leadership and student achievements, indicating that financial management is tied to larger educational objectives.

D. Challenges in Managing School Finances

Every participant reported difficulties, though with differences based on their role and responsibilities. Teachers I–III frequently mentioned insufficient transparency in fund distribution, recurring shortages of materials, and the need to utilize personal resources to meet classroom requirements. These findings align with previous research by Levine (2001), which emphasized that grassroots-level financial shortages are ongoing obstacles to quality teaching.

Master Teachers voiced worries regarding the inconsistent financial literacy among peers and systemic obstacles that hinder their capacity to adopt instructional innovations. Flores and Derrington (2017) highlight that in the absence of institutional backing, teacher leaders frequently find it difficult to convert strategic intentions into concrete actions.

School leaders recognized strict regulations, budget deficits, and unforeseen costs as major challenges. As noted by Odden and Picus (2014), these issues frequently arise in decentralized educational systems where local administrators must navigate complicated financial structures within strict limitations. In the same vein, Malen, Rice, and Guthrie (2010) contend that transferring financial responsibilities should be paired with sufficient training and structural assistance.

E. Strategies for Addressing Financial Challenges

Instructors I–III utilize community-based approaches like resource sharing, participating in fundraising, and forming partnerships within the community. A few individuals have taken the lead to seek informal education on budgeting and financial management for schools. This backs up Danielson's (2006) claim that empowering educators via professional development can improve overall school effectiveness.

Master Teachers highlight strategic advocacy, openness, and mentorship as ways to close financial knowledge gaps. Muijs and Harris (2007) state that these educators have a transformative function in converting institutional objectives into practical implementation, especially in environments with limited resources.

School leaders depend on official processes like organized budgeting, fiscal audits, and community involvement. They frequently pursue outside assistance via local school boards and government funding. These initiatives support Bush and Glover's (2012) assertion that collaboration across multiple levels is essential for schools' financial sustainability. Similarly, Fullan (2014) proposes that schools thrive when leadership is shared and backed by consistent systemic coordination.

F. Reflections on Financial Management

Even with varying financial obligations, every participant emphasized the significance of teamwork, openness, and ongoing professional development. Teachers I–III indicated a wish for greater involvement in financial decision-making processes. Master Teachers urged the establishment of formal financial education programs, while School Heads promoted better coordination between school planning and governmental policies.

Together, the results indicate a necessity for a more cohesive financial management system in schools—seeing fiscal responsibility as a collective responsibility rather than an imposed directive. According to the OECD (2016), effective school funding systems need to acknowledge the interrelated roles of teachers at every level. In the same vein, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) contend that collaborative leadership approaches enhance organizational resilience and result in better student outcomes.

4. Conclusion

This research explored the financial management duties of Teachers I–III, Master Teachers, and School Heads in public schools, uncovering a complex yet linked framework of responsibilities. While Teachers I–III mainly serve as resource coordinators and participants in fundraising, Master Teachers take a more hands-on role in financial planning and mentorship. School leaders have the most extensive responsibilities, managing budgeting, compliance, and strategic distribution of resources. Collectively, these roles create a cooperative framework vital for sustaining financial efficiency and educational effectiveness.

A key conclusion of the study is that financial stewardship in schools ought not to be seen as the sole responsibility of administrators. Rather, inclusive and cooperative financial approaches—backed by effective communication and joint decision-making—improve resource allocation and long-term strategizing. All positions recognized the significance of financial literacy and the necessity for continuous training to manage the intricacies of school budgeting and expenditures.

In spite of diverse challenges like constrained resources and insufficient transparency, individuals in various positions recognized approaches that promote better financial management. These encompass career growth, clear documentation, and involvement of stakeholders. The research advocates for moving away from hierarchical financial management to a shared leadership approach that fosters accountability, equity, and sustainability in finance for public education.

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