

Lived Experiences of School Heads in Financial Resource Management

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Abstract. This study explored the lived experiences of public school principals in financial resource management in the Panabo City Division. It examined their experiences in managing school funds, coping mechanisms in addressing financial challenges, and educational management insights drawn from their practices. A qualitative phenomenological research design was used to capture the realities of principals in budgeting, allocation, utilization, monitoring, documentation, and accountability. The informants were 10 public school principals, male and female, actively handling elementary or secondary schools and had served as principals for five or more years. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews (IDI) with five elementary school principals - coded IDI-I1 to IDI-I5 - and a focus group discussion (FGD) with five secondary school principals - coded FGD-P1 to FGD-P5. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and emerging themes from the participants' narratives. Findings revealed that principals' lived experiences were shaped by resource insufficiency and budgeting constraints, delays and procedural limitations in fund utilization, balancing diverse stakeholder needs, transparency, accountability, careful decision-making, and leadership growth. Principals reported challenges such as limited funds, delayed releases, urgent school needs, competing requests, and strict documentation requirements. To cope, they practiced strategic prioritization, flexible financial planning, stakeholder collaboration, consultative decision-making, and careful monitoring of resources. The study further emphasized the need to strengthen transparent financial planning, participatory leadership, accountability through documentation and monitoring, learner-centered financial decisions, and systematic resource management. It is suggested that schools and education authorities provide financial management training, strengthen stakeholder participation, enhance monitoring systems, and promote transparent, accountable, and learner-centered use of school funds.

KEY WORDS

1. financial resource management
2. public school principals
3. accountability

Date Received: April 18, 2026 — Date Reviewed: April 21, 2026 — Date Published: May 19, 2026

1. Introduction

Financial resource management is a vital responsibility of school heads, as it directly influences the quality of teaching and learning, the continuity of school operations, and the delivery of learner support services. In public schools, school heads are expected not only to provide instructional leadership but also to manage financial and material resources with fairness, transparency, accountability, and sound judgment. Their role requires them to plan, al-

locate, utilize, monitor, and safeguard available resources to ensure that school programs, instructional needs, facility improvements, learner support services, and stakeholder expectations are properly addressed. Because financial decisions affect the daily functioning of schools, the way school heads manage resources becomes an important concern in educational management.

Globally, financial resource management remains a continuing challenge in many public education systems. In several countries, school leaders face problems related to unequal distribution of funds, limited financial autonomy, inadequate resources, and lack of formal training in budgeting and financial planning. Some schools in disadvantaged areas receive fewer resources compared with schools in more developed communities, resulting in gaps in infrastructure, learning materials, technology, and support services. In addition, many school leaders are promoted because of their instructional competence but may not have sufficient preparation in financial management, procurement, accounting procedures, and resource mobilization. This global gap shows that school heads need stronger capacity-building and support systems to help them manage school resources effectively and equitably.

In the Philippines, public school heads also encounter financial management challenges within the Department of Education. These challenges include limited and delayed funds, strict procurement procedures, documentary requirements, auditing regulations, and growing demands for school operations. Financial resources are not limited to Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE), but may also include school-based funds, local government support, Special Education Fund assistance, donations, stakeholder support, special program funds, and other external resources. Despite these possible sources, many school heads still struggle to match available resources with actual school needs, especially when pri-

orities include classroom repairs, instructional materials, learner activities, technology needs, staff development, emergency concerns, and the implementation of DepEd programs.

The national gap becomes more evident when school heads are required to balance compliance with responsiveness. They must follow government accounting and auditing rules, procurement processes, liquidation requirements, and transparency mechanisms while also responding to urgent needs within the school. Delays in fund release, limited flexibility in fund utilization, and complex financial procedures may affect the timely implementation of school improvement projects, repair works, instructional support programs, and learner-centered activities. In resource-constrained schools, this situation may push school heads to seek assistance from local government units, parents, alumni, private partners, and community stakeholders to sustain school operations and address gaps that regular funding cannot fully cover.

In the local context, public school heads in the Division of Panabo City also experience difficulties in financial resource management. They are tasked to distribute limited financial and material resources across competing school priorities, such as infrastructure improvement, procurement of instructional materials, support for teacher development, learner welfare programs, and other operational needs. These conditions require school heads to make difficult decisions, prioritize urgent concerns, and ensure that every available resource is used properly and responsibly. The situation highlights the need to understand how school heads manage financial resources, what challenges they experience, how they cope with these challenges, and what educational management insights may be drawn from their experiences.

Thus, this study titled "Lived Experiences of School Heads in Financial Resource Management" seeks to explore the actual experiences of school heads in managing financial resources

within public schools. Specifically, it aims to understand the challenges they encounter, the coping mechanisms they employ, and the educational management insights that may contribute to improving financial resource management practices. By examining their lived experiences, this study may provide meaningful inputs for school leaders, DepEd officials, policymakers, and stakeholders in strengthening financial planning, resource allocation, accountability, transparency, and capacity-building programs for school heads.

Purpose of the Study This study aimed to explore the challenges faced by public school principals in financial resource management within the Division of Panabo City, particularly in Panabo Central District. It seeks to examine how school heads navigate financial constraints, bureaucratic processes, and limited resources while striving to meet the needs of their respective schools. By investigating their experiences, strategies, and coping mechanisms, this study endeavors to uncover the systemic and operational barriers that affect efficient budget utilization and resource distribution. Ultimately, the study aims to provide insights that can inform more responsive financial policies and support structures to enhance school leadership and educational service delivery.

Research Questions The primary research questions of this study were the following: What are the lived experiences of the Public-School Principal in Financial Resource Management? What are the coping mechanisms of the Public-School Principal in Financial Management? What educational management insights can be drawn from the experiences of the Public-School Principal in Financial Resource Management? **Objectives of the Study** The study explored the lived experiences of public-school principals in financial resource management. Specifically, it sought to: describe the lived experiences of public-school principals in managing financial resources.

identify the coping mechanisms employed by public school principals in addressing challenges related to financial management. determine the educational management insights that can be drawn from the experiences of public-school principals in financial resource management. Furthermore, the study sought to understand how public-school principals manage financial resources, respond to financial management challenges, and generate insights that may contribute to improved educational supervision, leadership, and school management practices.

Significance of the Study This study is significant as it sheds light on the real-world challenges faced by public school principals in the Division of Panabo City concerning budget allocation and resource management. By examining their experiences, this research aims to uncover not only the difficulties they encounter but also the strategies they employ to navigate financial limitations in the pursuit of quality education. The insights generated can serve as a valuable reference for educational leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders in designing targeted interventions to support school heads in their managerial functions.

Students The study may contribute to better learning conditions by encouraging more effective use of school resources, which can support improved classroom facilities, instructional materials, and school programs that directly benefit their academic growth and overall school experiences. **School Administrators** The study provides a clearer understanding of common issues in financial management, which may help them improve their budgeting practices and resource allocation decisions.

Division and Regional Education Officials The findings can guide the development of training programs, policy adjustments, and support mechanisms that respond directly to the needs of school leaders. **Stakeholders** Such as parents, community members, and partner organizations, the findings provide a clearer understanding

of the financial realities faced by school leaders and may encourage stronger collaboration, support, and shared responsibility in helping schools address resource needs and improve educational outcomes.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework of the Study This study is anchored on budget Theory by Rubin 2007. Budget theory refers to the framework and principles that guide the planning, allocation, management, and evaluation of financial resources within organizations, including public institutions like schools. It explores how budgets are created, who makes decisions about spending, and how those decisions align with institutional goals. Budget theory also examines the political, economic, and social factors that influence budgeting processes, and how different approaches such as incremental budgeting, performance-based budgeting, or zero-based budgeting can be used to manage resources effectively. In essence, budget theory provides a structured way to understand the rationale behind budget decisions and the mechanisms used to control and monitor public spending. In the context of educational institutions, especially public schools, budget theory plays a vital role in ensuring that limited resources are allocated efficiently and equitably. By applying budget theory, school administrators can make informed decisions about where to direct funds, prioritize programs that have the greatest impact on student outcomes, and ensure accountability in the use of public resources. It helps school leaders link their financial decisions to their strategic plans and educational goals. This connection is crucial, as proper budgeting directly affects classroom conditions, teacher support, infrastructure development, and overall student performance. For school principals, understanding and applying budget theory is essential to effective school leadership. It empowers them to go beyond mere compliance with financial rules and become strategic managers of their school's resources. With a sound grasp of

budgeting principles, principals can advocate for their schools' needs, engage stakeholders in financial planning, and justify expenditures based on evidence and impact. Budget theory also enhances transparency and trust within the school community, as it encourages data-driven decision-making and accountability in resource utilization. On a broader scale, budget theory is significant because it informs educational policy and public financial management. It guides decision-makers at the division, regional, and national levels in crafting budget policies that are responsive to the actual needs of schools. When budget theories are properly applied, they can help reduce inefficiencies, minimize corruption, and promote equity in the distribution of educational resources. In developing countries like the Philippines, where many public schools operate with limited funds, applying budget theory can lead to more effective governance and improved educational outcomes. Another theory is the theory of financial control was advanced by (Ostman, 2009). The theory considers the personal functions of humans, both present and future, as its fundamental reference point. This theory holds that existing and possible functions of financial tools for organizations are most essential. It further states that, payments, financial instruments, accounting, control models, economic calculations, and related considerations, both within and outside of the organization, ought to be discussed in regard to inner characteristics but also possible effects. It is noted that establishing the relationships between various activities and financial processes, from a financial control point of view, is a general and basic issue (Ostman, 2020). The financial control theory is very pertinent to the present study in that it enables the understanding of financial controls that are an aspect of financial management in public secondary schools in Bahirdar city administration (Munge, Kimani & Ngugi, 2020).

2. Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology employed in the study titled "Lived Experiences of School Heads in Financial Resource Management." It discusses the research design and approach that guided how the study was conducted, emphasizing the qualitative nature of the inquiry to capture the lived experiences of school principals in managing limited educational resources. The chapter identifies the research Informants, who are public school heads responsible for financial management, and describes the research environment, which includes the schools where budgeting and resource allocation processes take place.

Furthermore, the role of the researcher is explained in detail, outlining the multiple responsibilities undertaken, such as interviewer, moderator, transcriber, and data analyst, to ensure accuracy, credibility, and depth in understanding the phenomenon. The data gathering procedures are also elaborated, covering the data sources, instruments used (interview guide and focus group discussion protocol), and the step-by-step process of collecting and organizing qualitative data.

Finally, this chapter discusses the data analysis techniques applied to interpret Informants' narratives, as well as the measures taken to ensure trustworthiness including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Ethical considerations are also highlighted, ensuring that participants' rights, confidentiality, and informed consent were upheld throughout the study to maintain integrity and establish a respectful researcher-participant relationship.

Research Design This study employed a descriptive qualitative phenomenological research design. A descriptive qualitative design was appropriate because the study aimed to present a clear and detailed description of the experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights of school heads in financial resource manage-

ment. It allowed the researcher to describe the participants' actual experiences based on their narratives, without manipulating any variables or imposing predetermined assumptions.

The phenomenological approach was also suited for this study because it focused on understanding the lived experiences of school heads as they managed school funds and resources. Through this approach, the researcher was able to explore how school heads experienced, interpreted, and gave meaning to their roles and responsibilities in budgeting, allocation, utilization, monitoring, documentation, liquidation, and accountability.

In this study, the descriptive phenomenological design provided a way to capture the realities encountered by school heads in managing financial resources. These included dealing with limited funds, delayed fund releases, competing school needs, procurement requirements, documentation processes, liquidation concerns, and stakeholder expectations. By using this design, the researcher was able to gather rich and meaningful descriptions that reflected the participants' experiences, coping strategies, and educational management insights in the context of school financial resource management.

Sources of Data The sources of data in this study were the responses and narratives of public-school heads in the Panabo City Division. The data were gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussion. The Informants shared their actual experiences, challenges, strategies, and insights in managing financial resources in their respective schools. The study also used relevant documents and field notes as supporting sources of information. These helped the researcher understand the context of the Informants' responses and provided additional support in analyzing their lived experiences in financial resource management.

Research Informants This study was conducted in the Panabo City Division. The Informants were public school principals, either

male or female, from different districts of the division, namely Panabo Central, Panabo South I, Panabo South II, and Panabo North. The Informants were school heads actively handling either elementary or secondary schools. They must have served as principals for five or more years. For the in-depth interviews, five elementary school principals were selected, as suggested by Polkinghorne (2020). For the focus group discussion, five secondary school principals were included in one group discussion as suggested by Krueger and Casey (2020). The Informants came from different districts to ensure that varied experiences and school contexts were represented.

Sampling Data The study used purposive sampling in selecting the Informants. This sampling technique was appropriate because the study required Informants who had direct experience in financial resource management as school heads. The Informants were chosen based on established criteria. The criteria for selection were the following: the participant must be an officially designated public school principal, must be actively handling an elementary or secondary school, must have at least five years of experience as principal, and must be willing to participate in the study. These criteria ensured that the Informants had sufficient experience and knowledge in managing school financial resources.

Research Instrument The primary research instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide contained open-ended questions designed to gather in-depth responses from the Informants regarding their lived experiences in financial resource management. The questions focused on the Informants' experiences in budgeting, allocating, utilizing, monitoring, documenting, and accounting for school resources.

The guide also included questions about the challenges they encountered, the coping mechanisms they used, and the educational manage-

ment insights they gained from their experiences. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to ask follow-up and probing questions to obtain richer and clearer responses. The interview guide was validated by experts to ensure that the questions were aligned with the research questions and appropriate for the purpose of the study.

Data Gathering Procedure Before data collection, the researcher first sought permission from the Dean of Rizal Memorial College to conduct the study. After this, the researcher requested approval from the Schools Division Superintendent of Panabo City Division. A formal letter was submitted together with the required documents, including the research chapters, interview guide, and selection criteria for Informants.

After securing permission, the researcher communicated with the concerned school heads and explained the purpose and procedures of the study. The Informants were given informed consent forms that stated the purpose of the study, their role as Informants, their right to withdraw, and the confidentiality of their responses. Once consent was obtained, the researcher scheduled the in-depth interviews and focus group discussion at a time convenient for the Informants. During the interviews and discussion, the researcher used the validated interview guide. With the permission of the Informants, conversations were recorded using an audio recorder to ensure accuracy in transcription. Notes were also taken during the data gathering process.

After the interviews and focus group discussion, the recorded responses were transcribed verbatim. Since some Informants used local or vernacular expressions, the researcher translated their responses into English while preserving the original meaning of their statements. The transcribed data were then prepared for coding and thematic analysis. **Data Analysis** The data gathered from the in-depth interviews and

focus group discussion were analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological data analysis method. This method was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to identify significant statements, formulate meanings, and develop themes from the Informants' lived experiences.

The first step involved reading and rereading the transcribed interviews to become familiar with the data. The researcher listened again to the audio recordings and reviewed the transcripts to gain a full understanding of the Informants' responses. This helped the researcher identify important ideas and recurring patterns. The second step involved extracting significant statements from the transcripts. These were statements directly related to the Informants' experiences in financial resource management. The third step involved formulating meanings from the significant statements. The researcher interpreted the statements carefully to understand their deeper meaning.

The fourth step involved organizing the formulated meanings into themes. Similar ideas were grouped together to form major themes and core ideas. The fifth step involved developing an exhaustive description of the Informants' experiences based on the themes. The sixth step involved identifying the fundamental structure of the phenomenon. Figure 1. Colaizzi's Analysis Framework as cited by (Finlayson et al. 2018) Finally, the researcher validated the findings through expert review and member checking to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected the Informants' experiences. Through this process, the researcher was able to identify the major themes related to the lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and educational management insights of school heads in financial resource management.

Ethical Considerations Ethical considerations were central to this study to ensure that the dignity, rights, privacy, and welfare of all Informants were protected throughout the research process. The study involved public school heads

in the Panabo City Division who shared their lived experiences in financial resource management, particularly in budgeting, allocation, utilization, monitoring, documentation, liquidation, accountability, and resource limitations.

Since the topic involved sensitive matters such as school funds, financial constraints, compliance requirements, and stakeholder expectations, ethical sensitivity, respect, and confidentiality were observed at every stage of the study. Ethical standards guided participant selection, data gathering, data analysis, and presentation of findings to uphold integrity, transparency, and participant trust (Kaiser, 2022; Nowell & Albrecht, 2023).

Coordination with appropriate school and division authorities was also secured before the conduct of the study to ensure that all procedures were properly approved and aligned with institutional expectations. The same ethical structure was patterned from the required format on ethical considerations, which emphasized participant dignity, confidentiality, informed consent, safety, community involvement, and academic integrity.

Qualification of the Researcher The researcher ensured that he or she possessed the necessary qualifications to conduct the study. The researcher had completed the required academic coursework and had passed the comprehensive examination prior to thesis writing, which served as the final requirement toward the completion of the master's degree. These academic preparations provided the researcher with the foundational knowledge, research skills, and scholarly discipline needed to carry out the study effectively.

Furthermore, the researcher was deemed capable of conducting the study physically, mentally, emotionally, and financially. These qualifications enabled the researcher to manage the demands of the research process, including data gathering, analysis, interpretation, and documentation. The researcher also demonstrated

commitment, responsibility, and readiness to complete the study in accordance with academic and ethical standards.

In addition, the advisee-adviser tandem played an important role in ensuring the successful completion of the study. Through the guidance, supervision, and support of the adviser, the researcher was able to refine the research process, address challenges, and maintain the quality and direction of the study until its completion. **Social Value** The social value of this research lies in its potential to improve financial resource management practices among public school heads. By documenting the experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and educational management insights of school heads, the study may provide useful inputs for strengthening financial planning, transparent resource allocation, accountability, stakeholder participation, and capacity-building programs.

The findings may benefit school leaders, DepEd officials, policymakers, teachers, learners, parents, and other stakeholders by offering a deeper understanding of how financial resources are managed in public schools. Research with social value should contribute meaningful knowledge that can improve practice, policy, or community welfare (Aslam, 2021; Fernandez, 2022). In the context of Panabo City Division, this study may help identify practical ways to support school heads in handling limited resources, delayed fund releases, competing school needs, and documentation requirements.

Informed Consent Prior to data collection, informed consent was secured from all Informants. The consent form clearly explained the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, the expected time commitment, confidentiality measures, possible risks and benefits, and the voluntary nature of participation. The Informants were informed that they had the right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

They were also given the opportunity to ask

questions before signing the consent form. This ensured that their participation was based on full understanding, voluntariness, and personal willingness. Informed consent is an essential ethical requirement in qualitative research because it protects Informants' autonomy and ensures that participation is voluntary and properly understood (Gentles et al., 2021; Tracy, 2022).

Vulnerability of Research Informants The researcher recognized that the Informants may be considered vulnerable because they were discussing matters related to financial management, accountability, school resource limitations, and administrative responsibilities. Some Informants might feel uncomfortable sharing experiences involving budget constraints, delayed funds, documentation requirements, or stakeholder expectations.

To address this, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in a respectful, supportive, and non-threatening environment. Informants were reminded that they could refuse to answer any question, request clarification, pause the interview, or withdraw from the study whenever they felt uncomfortable. Ethical sensitivity is necessary when Informants discuss professional or sensitive experiences because it protects emotional safety and preserves dignity during data collection (Alharbi & Smith, 2023; Mohajan, 2022).

Risks, Benefits, and Safety The study posed minimal risk to the Informants. The possible risks were limited to the time required for participation and possible discomfort in discussing sensitive financial concerns. To minimize these risks, the researcher ensured that the interviews and discussions were conducted respectfully and privately. No participant was pressured to answer questions that caused discomfort.

The benefits of the study included giving Informants the opportunity to reflect on their financial management practices and share insights that may help improve school-based financial systems. The findings may also support future

training, policy enhancement, and resource management initiatives for public school heads. Ethical research requires that risks be minimized and that potential benefits to Informants, institutions, and communities be clearly considered (Kaur & Singh, 2023; Resnik, 2022).

Privacy and Confidentiality Privacy and confidentiality were strictly observed throughout the study. Informants were assigned codes or pseudonyms to protect their identities, and no real names or identifying details were disclosed in the final report. Any information that could reveal the identity of the Informants or their schools was removed or generalized. Audio recordings, transcripts, consent forms, field notes, and other research materials were stored securely in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher. The study also adhered to the principles of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 to protect personal and professional information from unauthorized access, use, or disclosure. Maintaining privacy and confidentiality is essential in qualitative inquiry because it builds trust and allows Informants to share honest and authentic narratives (Morse, 2023; Njeri & Wambua, 2023).

Community Involvement The researcher coordinated with the concerned school and division authorities to promote transparency, cooperation, and proper implementation of the study. Communication with Informants and school officials was maintained to ensure that the research process was clearly understood and respectfully conducted. The involvement of school heads from different districts of Panabo City Division helped ensure that the study reflected varied school contexts and experiences.

This engagement also promoted shared ownership of the knowledge generated from the study, particularly in improving financial resource management, accountability, and stakeholder collaboration in public schools. Community involvement in research strengthens transparency, relevance, and collective responsibility

in the use of findings (Cruz, 2021; Kaur & Singh, 2023). **Plagiarism and Fabrication** The researcher strictly observed academic honesty and integrity in conducting the study. All sources used in the research were properly acknowledged and cited. The researcher ensured that no data were fabricated, altered, or misrepresented. The Informants' responses were transcribed and interpreted as accurately as possible while maintaining the meaning and context of their narratives. Any translated responses were carefully checked to preserve the original intent of the Informants. This ethical practice ensured that the study remained credible, authentic, and faithful to the lived experiences of school heads in financial resource management. Academic integrity requires that researchers avoid plagiarism, fabrication, falsification, and misrepresentation of data to protect the credibility of the research process (Cope, 2022; Pecorari, 2021).

Trustworthiness of the Study Ensuring the trustworthiness of this qualitative study was vital in establishing the credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of its findings. Since the study explored the lived experiences of school heads in financial resource management, methodological rigor was necessary to ensure that the results accurately reflected the Informants' realities, challenges, coping mechanisms, and educational management insights. Guided by Lincoln and Guba's trustworthiness criteria, the researcher employed strategies such as triangulation, member checking, persistent observation, audit trail, and reflexive documentation. These processes helped strengthen the authenticity of the findings and reduce possible researcher bias (Nowell & Albrecht, 2023; Roberts et al., 2022).

Credibility Credibility was achieved through in-depth interviews, focus group discussion, triangulation, persistent observation, and member checking. The researcher established rapport with the school head-Informants to encourage honest and meaningful sharing

of their experiences in managing school financial resources. The Informants' narratives were compared with field notes and emerging themes to ensure consistency and accuracy of interpretation. Member checking was also conducted by sharing the transcribed responses and preliminary findings with the Informants for verification. This process helped ensure that the findings truly represented their experiences in budgeting, allocation, utilization, monitoring, documentation, and accountability. Member checking and triangulation strengthen credibility by allowing Informants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations and by validating findings through multiple sources of evidence (Sundler et al., 2021; Finlay, 2021).

Dependability Dependability focused on the consistency and stability of the research process. To ensure dependability, the researcher carefully documented the procedures followed in participant selection, data gathering, transcription, coding, theme development, and data analysis. A clear record of the research process was maintained so that the study could be reviewed and examined by other researchers or academic evaluators. The researcher also used an audit trail to document methodological decisions, interview procedures, and analytical steps. Peer review and consultation with the research adviser helped ensure that the research process was systematic, transparent, and aligned with qualitative research standards. Maintaining an audit trail and documenting research decisions are important practices in strengthening dependability in qualitative inquiry (Roberts et al., 2022; Castleberry & Nolen, 2022).

Transferability Transferability was achieved by providing rich and detailed descriptions of the research setting, Informants, selection criteria, and research procedures. The study described the context of school heads in the Panabo City Division, including their role in managing financial resources, addressing budget limitations, complying with documentation

requirements, and responding to stakeholder expectations. Although the findings were not intended for broad statistical generalization, the detailed presentation allows readers, school leaders, and future researchers to determine whether the findings may apply to similar public school contexts. Thick description helps readers understand the research context and assess the relevance of findings to other settings (Alharbi & Smith, 2023). In this study, the contextualized description of school heads' financial management experiences enhanced the practical value of the findings for educational management and school leadership.

Confirmability Confirmability was established by ensuring that the findings were grounded in the actual responses of the Informants rather than the personal assumptions of the researcher. The researcher-maintained reflexivity throughout the research process by being aware of possible biases and by carefully distinguishing personal interpretations from participant narratives. An audit trail was kept, including raw data, transcripts, coding notes, theme clusters, field notes, and analysis outputs. Triangulation of interview responses, focus group discussion data, and field notes also helped verify the findings from different sources. Reflexive journaling and audit trails support confirmability by showing that interpretations are based on evidence and not on researcher preference (Byrne, 2022; Nicolas, 2024). Through these measures, the study ensured that the conclusions faithfully reflected the lived experiences of school heads in financial resource management.

Through these trustworthiness measures, the study maintained the credibility, accuracy, and integrity of its findings. The use of member checking, triangulation, thick description, audit trail, and reflexivity strengthened the overall quality of the qualitative inquiry and ensured that the Informants' voices were represented with fairness, clarity, and authenticity.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the qualitative findings drawn from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussion with public-school principals. The discussion is organized around the three research questions: lived experiences in financial resource management, coping mechanisms used in addressing financial challenges, and educational management insights derived from these experiences.

The first set of findings shows that financial resource management is experienced by principals as a demanding leadership responsibility. Their narratives consistently point to limited funds, delayed releases, strict documentation requirements, and competing school needs. These conditions require school heads to prioritize instructional and learner-centered concerns while still complying with procurement, liquidation, and accountability procedures.

Table 1

Lived Experiences of Public-School Principals in Financial Resource Management

Emergent Themes	Core Ideas	Significant Narratives
Resource insufficiency and budgeting constraints	Limited funds; many competing school needs; difficulty prioritizing programs; inadequate budget for instructional materials, facilities, and supplies.	"One of the biggest challenges is making limited funds fit the many needs of the school." (IDI-1) "Budgeting is really difficult at times because not all needs can be addressed immediately due to limited resources." (IDI-2)
Delays and procedural limitations in fund utilization	Delayed fund release; strict policy and documentation compliance; procurement and approval processes slow implementation; urgent needs are not immediately addressed.	"Even if the need is urgent, we cannot purchase immediately because proper documents and approval are required." (IDI-4) "When funds are delayed, the school's plans are affected, especially repairs, supplies, and learning materials." (FGD-1)
Balancing diverse stakeholder needs	Teachers, learners, and facilities require support; stakeholder expectations vary; requests cannot always be granted immediately; decisions must be fair and need-based.	"One challenge I encounter is balancing the needs of teachers, learners, and school facilities." (IDI-3) "There are many expectations from teachers, parents, and learners." (IDI-5)
Transparency, accountability, and careful decision-making	Fairness in fund allocation; transparency in decisions; accountability in every transaction; careful leadership in using public funds.	"This experience taught me that I need to be transparent in my decisions so that everyone understands the situation." (IDI-3) "Financial management in a public school requires great patience and carefulness." (FGD-3)
Leadership growth through financial management experiences	Financial management strengthens leadership skills; principals become more strategic and resourceful; planning, problem-solving, and collaboration become necessary.	"Because of this, I became more strategic in planning and identifying what is truly important." (IDI-2) "This experience strengthened my leadership because I learned to decide based on need, not pressure." (FGD-2)

As shown in Table 1, the lived experiences of school principals were clustered into five major themes. Resource insufficiency and budgeting constraints emerged as a central concern because principals often needed to make limited funds respond to many urgent needs. Delays and procedural limitations also affected implementation because even urgent concerns could not be acted upon without proper documentation and approval. Despite these constraints, principals emphasized transparency, accountability, careful judgment, and leadership growth as essential responses to financial management pressures. These findings indicate that financial management is not merely a clerical task but a core part of school leadership.

The second set of findings focuses on how principals cope with limited funds and procedural constraints. Rather than treating financial scarcity as a purely administrative problem, principals relied on prioritization, flexibility, consultation, stakeholder support, and continuous monitoring. These coping mechanisms allowed them to sustain school operations while minimizing conflict and promoting trust among teachers, parents, and other stakeholders.

Table 2
Coping Mechanisms of Public-School Principals in Financial Resource Management

Emergent Themes	Core Ideas	Significant Narratives
Strategic prioritization of urgent needs	Prioritizing urgent needs; focusing on essential programs and services; giving importance to learner-centered expenses; using limited funds wisely.	"When funds are limited or delayed, I prioritize the most urgent needs of the school." (IDI-1) "I prioritize needs that directly affect the learning of the children." (IDI-4)
Adjustment and flexibility in financial planning	Revising school plans based on available resources; finding low-cost solutions; using temporary available materials; adapting to delayed fund releases.	"I adjust the plan so that available resources can be used in the best possible way." (IDI-2) "When funds are insufficient, I choose practical and low-cost solutions to the problem." (FGD-3)
Stakeholder collaboration and community support	Seeking help from PTA, LGU, and partners; strengthening bayanihan; involving parents and stakeholders; building partnerships to support school needs.	"When the budget is insufficient, I seek support from stakeholders such as the PTA, LGU, and community partners." (IDI-3) "When there is a lack of funds, I strengthen bayanihan and partnership within the community." (FGD-5)
Consultative and participatory decision-making	Consulting teachers before decisions; listening to parents and stakeholders; encouraging teachers to join planning; making financial decisions inclusive.	"I consult the teachers to know what is truly most important to spend on." (FGD-2) "I encourage teachers to be part of planning and prioritizing school expenses." (FGD-1)
Transparency and careful monitoring of resources	Explaining school financial needs; giving stakeholder updates; monitoring expenses closely; maintaining trust through openness and accountability.	"I carefully monitor expenses to ensure that every peso is used properly." (FGD-4) "I give stakeholders updates about the use of resources to maintain trust." (FGD-4)

Table 2 shows that strategic prioritization was the most direct coping mechanism. Principals first addressed needs that affected learners, instruction, and basic school operations. When funds were delayed or insufficient, they adjusted plans, used temporary resources, and sought support from the PTA, LGU, and community partners. Consultation also played a major role because involving teachers and stakeholders helped ensure that decisions were viewed as fair, transparent, and responsive to actual school needs.

The third set of findings presents the educational management insights drawn from the experiences of the principals. The informants emphasized that sound financial management requires transparency, participatory leadership, documentation, learner-centered decision-making, and systematic capacity-building. These insights suggest that financial management should be treated not only as compliance with rules but also as a service-oriented leadership practice.

Table 3

Educational Management Insights Drawn from the Experiences of Public-School Principals in Financial Resource Management

Emergent Themes	Core Ideas	Significant Narratives
Strengthening transparent financial planning	Transparent planning; clear communication of financial plans; stakeholder understanding of fund use; trust-building through openness.	"Transparent planning should be strengthened so everyone understands where the school funds are going." (IDI-1) "Open communication about financial concerns should be strengthened to avoid misunderstanding." (FGD-4)
Promoting participatory and consultative leadership	Consulting teachers and stakeholders; avoiding isolated decisions; shared planning; stakeholder involvement to improve acceptance of plans.	"Do not decide alone; consult teachers and stakeholders so the plan becomes stronger." (IDI-3) "Stakeholder involvement in financial planning should continue to strengthen trust in school leadership." (FGD-2)
Ensuring accountability through documentation and monitoring	Strong documentation; regular expense monitoring; accountability to prevent misuse; complete records for responsible financial management.	"Monitoring of expenses should be strengthened to ensure that every spending is proper and responsible." (IDI-3) "Proper documentation should be strengthened to avoid confusion and show accountability." (IDI-4)
Prioritizing learner-centered financial decisions	Funds should support learner needs; instructional quality should be prioritized; spending should be based on real school needs; resources must directly benefit teaching and learning.	"Fund prioritization should really be based on the learning needs of the children." (FGD-3) "Prioritize things that directly help learners and the quality of teaching." (IDI-5)
Building capacity and systematic resource management	Principals need training in budgeting and procurement; financial planning should be organized; planning calendars help preparation; financial management should be service-oriented.	"Training for principals on budgeting, liquidation, and procurement processes should be strengthened." (FGD-1) "Planning and use of resources should be more systematic so school operations become more effective." (FGD-5)

Table 3 highlights that principals viewed transparency and consultation as necessary for sustaining trust. Proper documentation and monitoring were also emphasized as safeguards for accountability. Most importantly, the informants stressed that financial decisions should prioritize learners and instructional quality. The findings suggest that school heads need continuing training in budgeting, procurement, liquidation, and monitoring so that financial decisions remain organized, ethical, and aligned with school improvement goals.

Overall, the results show that public-school principals manage financial resources under conditions of scarcity, procedural complexity, and stakeholder pressure. Their effectiveness depends on the ability to prioritize urgent learner-centered needs, communicate limitations openly, document transactions carefully, and mobilize support from the school community. These practices strengthen trust, improve decision-making, and support more accountable financial governance in public schools.

4. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary of Findings, Implications, and Recommendations This chapter presents the summary of the study's major findings, the implications derived from the results, and the recommendations based on the analysis of the lived experiences of public-school principals in financial resource management. It highlights how principals experienced financial resource management in relation to budget limitations, delayed fund releases, stakeholder ex-

pectations, accountability requirements, and leadership growth. The chapter also discusses the implications for educational management in strengthening transparent financial planning, participatory decision-making, responsible fund utilization, and capacity-building for school leaders. Finally, it provides recommendations to improve financial management practices, stakeholder collaboration, and systematic resource planning in public schools.

Summary of Findings This study explored the lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and educational management insights of public-school principals in financial resource management. The findings were drawn from the narratives of the Informants and organized according to the three research questions of the study. The results revealed that financial resource management is not only a technical or administrative function but also a leadership responsibility that requires fairness, transparency, accountability, resourcefulness, and sound judgment. The data showed three major areas of findings: lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and educational management insights.

The study found that the lived experiences of public-school principals in financial resource management are characterized by resource insufficiency and budgeting constraints, delays and procedural limitations in fund utilization, balancing diverse stakeholder needs, transparency, accountability, and careful decision-making, and leadership growth through financial management experiences. Principals experienced difficulty in making limited funds respond to many school needs such as instructional materials, classroom repairs, school supplies, school activities, and maintenance needs. They also encountered delays in fund releases and strict documentation requirements, which sometimes affected the timely implementation of school programs. Despite these challenges, principals learned to make fair, need-based, and transparent decisions while protecting the proper use of public funds.

The study revealed that public school principals cope with financial management challenges through strategic prioritization, adjustment and flexibility in planning, stakeholder collaboration and community support, consultative and participatory decision-making, and transparency and careful monitoring of resources. When funds were limited or delayed, principals prioritized urgent and learner-centered needs, ad-

justed plans based on available resources, used temporary materials, and selected practical and low-cost solutions. They also sought support from teachers, parents, PTA, LGU, and community partners. These coping mechanisms showed that principals relied not only on technical budgeting skills but also on collaboration, resourcefulness, and shared responsibility.

The study further found that educational management insights emphasized the need to strengthen transparent financial planning, promote participatory and consultative leadership, ensure accountability through documentation and monitoring, prioritize learner-centered financial decisions, and build capacity and systematic resource management. The Informants emphasized that financial plans must be clearly communicated, stakeholders must be involved, expenses must be properly documented and monitored, and funds must directly support the needs of learners and the quality of teaching. They also highlighted the need for training in budgeting, procurement, liquidation, and financial planning so that school leaders can manage resources more systematically and effectively.

Implications This study provides important implications for school principals, teachers, stakeholders, education leaders, and policymakers in strengthening financial resource management in public schools. The findings emphasized that financial management is not only a matter of compliance but also a form of educational leadership that affects school operations, teaching and learning, stakeholder trust, and learner support.

The findings imply that public school principals need stronger support in managing limited financial resources. Since principals face insufficient funds and many competing school needs, financial planning must be guided by clear priorities, learner-centered decision-making, and realistic assessment of school needs. This implies that school heads must be equipped with skills in budgeting, prioritization, and resource

allocation to ensure that limited funds are used for the most urgent and meaningful purposes.

The challenges related to delayed fund releases and procedural limitations imply the need for clearer and more efficient financial systems. While documentation, procurement, approval, and liquidation processes are necessary for accountability, these procedures may also delay urgent school needs. This implies that education offices and school leaders must strengthen systems that balance compliance with timely response, especially for repairs, learning materials, and essential school operations.

The findings imply that stakeholder participation is necessary in improving school financial management. Since principals must respond to the expectations of teachers, learners, parents, and the community, consultation and shared planning can help reduce misunderstanding and strengthen trust. This suggests that schools may maintain open communication with stakeholders and involve them in identifying priorities, supporting school needs, and monitoring resource utilization.

The coping mechanisms of principals imply the importance of resourcefulness, collaboration, and transparency in sustaining school operations. Principals cope with financial constraints by adjusting plans, seeking community support, and monitoring expenses carefully. This indicates that school leadership should promote a culture of bayanihan, shared responsibility, and openness, where financial concerns are understood as a collective responsibility rather than the burden of the principal alone.

The educational management insights imply that capacity-building is essential for effective and responsible financial leadership. Principals need continuous training in budgeting, procurement, liquidation, documentation, monitoring, and resource planning. Strengthening these competencies can help school leaders become more confident, systematic, and accountable in managing school funds. It also supports the idea

that financial management should be viewed as service-oriented leadership, not merely compliance with procedures.

Recommendations Based on the findings and implications of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen financial resource management practices among public school principals: School principals are encouraged to strengthen transparent and systematic financial planning. They may prepare clear financial plans, priority lists, and school-based financial calendars to guide the allocation and utilization of resources. These plans should be communicated to teachers and stakeholders to promote understanding, trust, and shared responsibility.

Public school principals should practice learner-centered prioritization in financial decision-making. Since school funds are intended to support education, principals should prioritize expenses that directly benefit learners, improve teaching quality, provide instructional materials, and address essential school needs. Decisions should be based on actual needs rather than pressure from individuals or groups.

Schools should strengthen consultative and participatory financial management practices. Teachers, parents, PTA officers, LGU representatives, and other stakeholders should be involved in identifying financial priorities and discussing school needs. Regular meetings, consultations, and updates may help improve transparency and reduce misunderstanding regarding budget limitations and fund utilization.

The Department of Education and school division offices are encouraged to provide continuous capacity-building programs for school principals. Training should focus on budgeting, procurement, liquidation, auditing requirements, documentation, financial reporting, and monitoring. These programs can help principals manage resources more effectively and avoid accountability issues. School leaders should

strengthen monitoring, documentation, and reporting systems. Every financial transaction should be properly recorded, supported by complete documents, and monitored regularly. This will help ensure that school funds are used legally, responsibly, and transparently.

Schools should build stronger partnerships with parents, LGUs, NGOs, private partners, and community stakeholders. Since school funds may not always be enough, stakeholder support can help address needs that cannot be immediately covered by available resources. However, these partnerships should remain transparent, properly documented, and aligned with school priorities. Further research is recommended to explore financial resource management practices in other school contexts. Future studies may focus on the experiences of school heads in remote schools, large schools, small schools, or schools with different funding

conditions. Comparative studies may also be conducted to examine how financial management practices vary across districts, divisions, or regions.

Overall, the findings of the study affirm that financial resource management in public schools is both a technical and leadership responsibility. Public school principals must be transparent, accountable, consultative, strategic, and learner-centered in handling school funds. Strengthening financial management systems, stakeholder participation, and principal capacity-building can help ensure that limited resources are used effectively for school improvement and learner development.

Future Researchers May also benefit from the study as it contributes to the growing body of literature on educational leadership and financial governance at the school level, particularly within the Philippine public school context.

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