

Strengthening Adaptive Coping Mechanisms Among School Administrators: A Basis for an Action Plan in Maguindanao Del Sur, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of school administrators in strengthening adaptive coping mechanisms among teachers and learners in selected schools in Maguindanao del Sur, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Specifically, it described the demographic profile of the respondents, assessed the extent of administrative practices in enhancing coping strategies, identified the challenges encountered by administrators, determined the relationship between respondents' profiles and their roles in strengthening coping mechanisms, and proposed an action plan based on the findings. The study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design involving thirty (30) school administrators from selected public schools in the districts of Datu Anggal, Talayan, and

South Upi. Data were gathered using a validated researcher-made questionnaire and analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, standard deviation, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, and qualitative thematic analysis of open-ended responses. Findings revealed that most respondents were within the 31-40 age bracket, were equally represented in terms of sex, were predominantly married, and were mostly pursuing or holding graduate-level education. School administrators demonstrated effective roles in strengthening coping mechanisms through provision of resources and facilities, mental health and well-being support, policy implementation and governance, professional development and capacity building, and community and stakeholder partnerships. Policy implementation and governance obtained the highest mean, while professional development and capacity building obtained the lowest mean. The major challenges encountered included limited community or parental support, security and conflict-related concerns, limited resources and facilities, lack of mental health training, and heavy workload. The correlation results showed no significant relationship between demographic profile and administrative roles, indicating that leadership effectiveness in strengthening coping mechanisms was not dependent on personal characteristics. The study concluded that school administrators play a vital role in fostering resilience, emotional well-being, and adaptive coping in conflict-affected and resource-limited educational settings. It recommends strengthening mental health programs, enhancing professional development opportunities, improving stakeholder collaboration, and increasing institutional support to sustain effective school leadership and resilience in BARMM schools.

Keywords: *adaptive coping mechanisms, BARMM, educational leadership, mental health support, professional development, school administrators*

INTRODUCTION

Schools in conflict-affected and resource-limited communities require administrators who can sustain instruction, protect learner welfare, and support teachers despite continuing uncertainty. In Maguindanao del Sur, BARMM, educational leaders work within contexts marked by inadequate infrastructure, intermittent conflict, poverty, security concerns, and psychosocial stress. These conditions affect the capacity of teachers and learners to participate meaningfully in schooling and make adaptive coping mechanisms essential to the continuity and quality of education.

School administrators occupy a critical position in creating a stable and supportive school environment. Their work extends beyond routine supervision and management because they are expected to mobilize resources, respond to crises, promote mental health and well-being, implement policies fairly, support professional growth, and build partnerships with communities and stakeholders. In contexts where conflict and resource constraints shape the daily experiences of schools, administrative leadership becomes a practical source of resilience for teachers and learners.

The literature consistently shows that supportive and adaptive leadership contributes to teacher motivation, school climate, stakeholder trust, and organizational stability. However, local evidence on how school administrators in Maguindanao del Sur strengthen coping mechanisms remains limited. The study addressed this gap by examining the administrative practices, challenges, coping strategies, and perspectives of school administrators in selected public schools across Datu Anggal, Talayan, and South Upi districts.

The study was guided by the need to generate evidence that can support policy makers, education leaders, local government units, school administrators, teachers, learners, parents, and future researchers. By identifying the areas where administrators are effective and the challenges that limit their work, the study provides a basis for a context-responsive action plan aimed at strengthening adaptive coping mechanisms and administrative well-being in BARMM schools.

Literature Review

Leadership and School Effectiveness

Effective leadership is central to school success, especially in difficult educational environments. Sali and Musa (2021) observed that teachers in BARMM experience stress linked to lack of facilities, safety concerns, and socio-political problems; however, responsive school leaders can help teachers cope more effectively and sustain motivation. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020) likewise emphasized that effective leadership creates conditions for learning and emotional well-being, while Bush and Glover (2014) explained that adaptive leadership is particularly important when leaders must respond flexibly to uncertainty and crisis.

Local and culturally responsive leadership also matters in Muslim and underserved communities. Magsino (2019) found that participative school leadership can reduce teacher stress and improve morale in Philippine schools, while Abdullah and Omar (2022) emphasized that culturally sensitive leadership promotes trust and cooperation among school stakeholders. These findings support the present study's focus on the role of administrators in promoting coping mechanisms and sustaining school effectiveness in Maguindanao del Sur.

Provision of Resources and Facilities

The availability of resources and facilities influences how teachers and learners cope with academic demands. Abdul and Usman (2020) noted that many BARMM schools experience shortages in instructional materials, computers, classrooms, and other resources, which can increase stress and reduce morale. Earthman (2015) and Schneider (2017) similarly emphasized that safe, well-maintained, and resource-rich learning environments contribute to student comfort, concentration, and academic outcomes.

Administrative initiative is essential when schools operate with limited resources. Cruz and Reyes (2021) reported that proactive school heads in the Philippines are more successful in securing needed resources despite limited budgets. UNICEF (2019) also emphasized that administrators in rural and conflict-affected settings help sustain learning through alternative delivery modes and resource-sharing strategies. These studies provide the basis for examining how administrators in Maguindanao del Sur mobilize resources to reduce stress and support coping.

Mental Health and Well-Being Support

Mental health and psychosocial support have become essential components of educational leadership. Department of Education (2020) recognized the importance of mental health support for teachers and learners, particularly through counseling, wellness activities, team building, and stress-reduction programs. Goleman (2018) argued that supportive environments improve people's capacity to respond to stress and remain productive.

Studies in conflict and crisis contexts further show the importance of school-based psychosocial interventions. Tol, Jordans, Reis, and de Jong (2016) highlighted resilience-building support for children affected by armed conflict, while Datu and Valdez (2020) emphasized the role of administrative support and psychosocial services for Filipino teachers experiencing chronic stress. These findings reinforce the need to examine how administrators in Maguindanao del Sur support the mental health and emotional well-being of teachers and learners.

Policy Implementation and School Governance

Policy implementation and governance provide order, fairness, and stability in schools. Bush (2019) explained that fair governance reduces conflict, strengthens accountability, and improves organizational stability. OECD (2020) also emphasized that effective governance systems are vital in times of uncertainty, including emergencies and crisis situations.

In BARMM schools, policy implementation must be responsive to local realities. Hasan and Ali (2021) found that clear policies on security, attendance, and discipline help teachers and learners adapt to instability, while Department of Education BARMM (2022) emphasized the role of school leaders in contextualizing policies to reduce confusion and stress. Thus, governance is directly connected to the creation of coping-supportive school environments.

Professional Development and Capacity Building

Professional development strengthens the competence, confidence, and adaptability of teachers and school leaders. Darling-Hammond, Hyster, and Gardner (2017) emphasized that effective professional development improves teaching practices, while Guskey (2016) explained that training and continuous learning can influence teacher motivation and change. In rural Philippine schools, Aquino and De Guzman (2019) found that administrative support for training increases teachers' self-efficacy.

In BARMM, professional development also requires cultural and contextual relevance. Madale and Salic (2021) found that culturally responsive training supports teachers in managing diverse classroom and community realities. Such evidence justifies the present study's attention to how administrators promote professional development and capacity building as part of strengthening adaptive coping mechanisms.

Community and Stakeholder Partnerships

Community support is an important source of resilience for schools. Epstein (2018) emphasized that strong school-family-community partnerships are associated with positive school outcomes, while UNESCO (2021) underscored school-community partnerships as essential in peace-building, well-being, and education in emergencies. In Maguindanao, Karim and Pendatun (2020) found that partnerships with local leaders and parents improved school safety and reduced stress.

Partnerships with non-government organizations, religious groups, parents, and local leaders help address psychosocial and material needs. Bautista, Santos, and Cruz (2022) reported that such partnerships in marginalized communities can provide learning resources and psychosocial support. Therefore, administrators act as mobilizers of community participation and stakeholder collaboration in strengthening the coping capacity of teachers and learners.

Theoretical and Conceptual Underpinnings

The study was anchored on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). The model explains that stress is shaped not only by external events but also by the individual's appraisal of the situation and available resources. In the school setting, administrators face stressors such as resource limitations, security concerns, workload demands, and stakeholder expectations. Their ability to evaluate these stressors and apply problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategies influences school resilience and support systems.

Conceptually, the study used an independent variable-dependent variable framework. The roles of school administrators, including leadership, resource provision, governance, supervision, professional support, and community partnership, were treated as the independent variable. The coping mechanisms of teachers and learners were treated as the dependent variable because these may be strengthened or weakened by administrative practices. The framework

assumes that effective school administration contributes to stronger coping skills, better emotional well-being, resilience, and improved school performance.

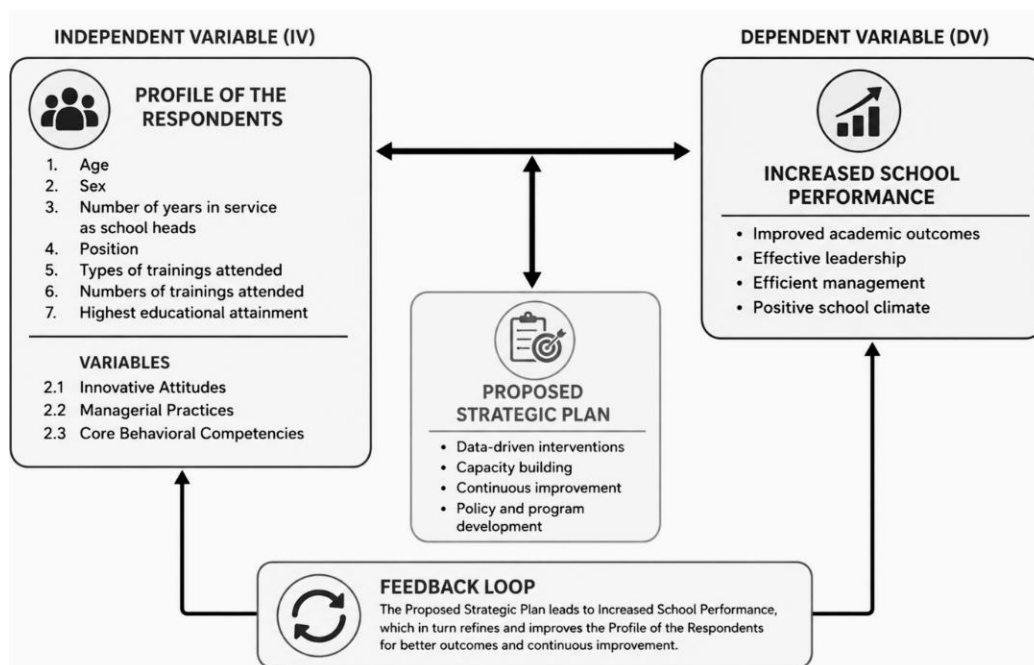


Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework of the Study*

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design. The first phase used quantitative procedures to describe the respondents' profile and assess the administrative roles in strengthening coping mechanisms. The second phase used qualitative procedures to gather experiences and perspectives that explained and enriched the quantitative findings. This design was appropriate because it allowed the study to combine numerical results with narrative insights from administrators working in conflict-affected and resource-limited schools.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in selected public schools in Maguindanao del Sur, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. The setting was appropriate because schools in this area experience challenges associated with limited educational infrastructure, conflict-related disturbances, security concerns, and resource constraints. The selected schools came from the districts of Datu Anggal, Talayan, and South Upi, allowing the study to capture administrative experiences from different school contexts within the province.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The respondents consisted of thirty (30) school administrators from selected public schools in Maguindanao del Sur. They included principals, head teachers, and designated coordinators who were directly involved in school management, policy implementation, resource provision, mental health support, professional development, and community collaboration. Convenience sampling was used because of accessibility, availability, logistical limitations, and willingness of participants to participate in the study. The selected administrators were actively serving in the study area and were therefore able to provide relevant information on the administrative practices and challenges under investigation.

Research Instrument

Data were gathered using a validated researcher-made questionnaire. The instrument contained items on the demographic profile of the respondents, the roles of school administrators in strengthening coping mechanisms, and the challenges encountered in enhancing coping strategies. The administrative role indicators were organized into five areas: provision of resources and facilities, mental health and well-being support, policy implementation and governance, professional development and capacity building, and community and stakeholder partnerships. Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was pilot-tested, and its internal consistency was established through Cronbach's alpha, which obtained a reliability coefficient of 0.831.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher sought permission from the appropriate school authorities before the conduct of the study. After approval was secured, the survey questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and assured the respondents that their responses would remain confidential. After completion, the questionnaires were retrieved, checked, coded, tallied, and prepared for statistical analysis. Open-ended responses were also gathered to obtain deeper insights into the experiences and perspectives of school administrators.

Data Analysis

Frequency and percentage distributions were used to describe the respondents' demographic profile. Weighted mean and standard deviation were used to determine the extent of administrative roles and the severity of challenges encountered by school administrators. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to examine the relationship between respondents' demographic profile and their roles in strengthening coping mechanisms. Qualitative responses were analyzed thematically by identifying recurring statements, grouping similar ideas, and generating themes that explained the administrators' experiences and coping practices.

Ethical Consideration

The study observed ethical standards for research involving human participants. Permission was obtained from the concerned authorities, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that they could decline or withdraw from the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the process, and the data collected were used solely for academic purposes. The study also underwent review by the Research Ethics Committee to ensure that the procedures met ethical requirements and did not expose participants to unnecessary risks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the School Administrator-Respondents

The demographic findings showed that the respondents were professionally prepared and represented a range of personal and career backgrounds. Most respondents were 31-40 years old (33.3%), followed by those aged 51-60 (30.0%), 41-50 (20.0%), and 21-30 (16.7%). The respondents were equally represented by sex, with 15 males and 15 females. Most were married (70.0%), and many were pursuing or holding graduate-level education, as shown by the 46.7% with master's units and 30.0% with a master's degree. Length of service was also distributed across the groups, with 30.0% each in the 1-5 and 6-10 years categories and 20.0% each in the 11-15 and 16-20 years categories.

Table 1. Summary of the Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Profile Variable	Key Result
Age	31-40 years: 10 (33.3%); 51-60 years: 9 (30.0%); 41-50 years: 6 (20.0%); 21-30 years: 5 (16.7%)
Sex	Male: 15 (50.0%); Female: 15 (50.0%)
Civil Status	Married: 21 (70.0%); Single: 9 (30.0%)
Highest Educational Attainment	Master's units: 14 (46.7%); Master's degree: 9 (30.0%); Bachelor's degree: 7 (23.3%)
Length of Service	1-5 years: 9 (30.0%); 6-10 years: 9 (30.0%); 11-15 years: 6 (20.0%); 16-20 years: 6 (20.0%)

Administrative Roles in Strengthening Coping Mechanisms

The results showed that administrators generally agreed that they performed roles that strengthened coping mechanisms among teachers and learners. Policy implementation and governance obtained the highest overall weighted mean ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 0.83$), indicating that administrators were strongest in enforcing school rules, ensuring compliance with DepEd and BARMM regulations, and promoting transparent decision-making. Mental health and well-being support followed ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 0.80$), suggesting that administrators implemented wellness activities, maintained openness to concerns, and communicated mental health policies.

Community and stakeholder partnerships ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 0.80$) and provision of resources and facilities ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 0.89$) were also rated as Agree, reflecting administrators' efforts to collaborate with LGUs, NGOs, parents, and community organizations and to secure resources needed for teaching and learning. Professional development and capacity building obtained the lowest mean ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 0.82$), although it was still interpreted as Agree. This indicates that training, mentoring, coaching, and LAC-related support were present but remained the most important area for further strengthening.

Table 2. Summary of Administrative Roles in Strengthening Coping Mechanisms

Area	Mean	SD	Description
Policy Implementation and Governance	3.05	0.83	Agree
Mental Health and Well-being Support	2.96	0.80	Agree
Community and Stakeholder Partnerships	2.95	0.80	Agree
Provision of Resources and Facilities	2.91	0.89	Agree
Professional Development and Capacity Building	2.79	0.82	Agree
Overall	2.93	0.83	Agree

Challenges Encountered by School Administrators

The study identified several challenges that affected the administrators' ability to strengthen coping mechanisms. The highest-rated challenge was limited community or parental support ($M = 3.27$), interpreted as Strongly Agree. This shows that the effectiveness of coping-related programs depends not only on school leadership but also on the cooperation and participation of families and community stakeholders. Security or conflict-related issues ranked next ($M = 3.20$), reflecting the reality that administrators in Maguindanao del Sur manage schools under conditions of uncertainty and instability.

Limited resources and facilities ($M = 3.13$), lack of mental health training ($M = 3.10$), and heavy workload among teachers and staff ($M = 2.80$) were also interpreted as Agree. These challenges indicate that administrative efforts are constrained by material shortages, limited psychosocial preparation, and competing work demands. Despite these difficulties, the overall weighted mean of 3.10 suggests that administrators recognize the challenges and continue to implement coping-related initiatives within available capacities.

Table 3. Challenges in Enhancing Coping Strategies

Challenges	Mean	Description	Rank
Limited community or parental support challenges the development of coping programs.	3.27	Strongly Agree	1
Security or conflict-related issues affect school operations and coping strategies.	3.20	Agree	2
Limited resources and facilities hinder the enhancement of coping strategies.	3.13	Agree	3
Lack of training on mental health support limits administrators' capacity to assist staff and learners.	3.10	Agree	4
Heavy workload of teachers and staff affects the implementation of coping initiatives.	2.80	Agree	5
Overall Weighted Mean	3.10	Agree	

Relationship Between Profile and Administrative Roles

The correlation analysis showed that the demographic profile of the respondents was not significantly related to their roles in strengthening coping mechanisms. All p-values across age, sex, civil status, highest educational attainment, and length of service were greater than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. This indicates that the effectiveness of administrators in strengthening coping mechanisms was not dependent on demographic

characteristics but was more likely shaped by leadership practices, contextual understanding, decision-making, available support systems, and the strategies used in school management.

Table 4. Summary of Correlation Between Profile and Administrative Roles

Profile Variable	Range of r Values	Range of p-values	Decision
Age	-0.131 to 0.240	0.201 to 0.941	Not significant
Sex	-0.032 to 0.265	0.156 to 0.922	Not significant
Civil Status	-0.113 to 0.229	0.224 to 0.653	Not significant
Highest Educational Attainment	-0.194 to 0.199	0.293 to 0.700	Not significant
Length of Service	-0.049 to 0.326	0.078 to 0.796	Not significant

Qualitative Themes and Action Plan Basis

The open-ended responses provided deeper insights into how school administrators managed the demands of their roles. Several themes emerged, including the importance of patience, resilience, adaptability, communication, collaboration, self-care, peer support, empathy, and shared leadership. Administrators reported that they coped by prioritizing tasks, distributing workload, seeking emotional, spiritual, and social support, collaborating with teachers and stakeholders, and making flexible and evidence-informed decisions. These responses showed that administrative coping in BARMM schools is both personal and collective.

The qualitative findings also supported the development of the proposed action plan. The plan focused on strengthening mental health and psychosocial support programs, improving resource mobilization, expanding professional development opportunities, increasing community and parental involvement, and reinforcing consistent policy implementation and governance. These areas correspond to the quantitative findings, particularly the lower rating of professional development and the high impact of limited community support and conflict-related challenges.

Table 5. Themes Derived from Open-Ended Responses

Theme	Meaning
Patience, resilience, and adaptability	Administrators emphasized personal endurance and flexibility in difficult and unstable school situations.
Communication and collaboration	Administrators relied on teamwork with teachers, peers, parents, LGUs, and community partners to manage school demands.
Self-care and emotional-spiritual support	Respondents identified faith, peer support, and personal wellness as important ways to prevent burnout.
Empathy and understanding	Administrators stressed the need to understand the emotional and professional needs of teachers and learners.
Professional learning and shared experience	Respondents valued training opportunities and sharing of practices with other school leaders.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that school administrators in Maguindanao del Sur play a vital role in strengthening adaptive coping mechanisms among teachers and learners. The respondents were generally well-prepared for administrative work, with most belonging to the productive age group, having balanced sex representation, being predominantly married, and possessing graduate-level educational preparation. Their roles were evident across resource provision, mental health and well-being support, policy implementation and governance, professional development and capacity building, and community and stakeholder partnerships.

Among the administrative roles, policy implementation and governance emerged as the strongest area, suggesting that administrators provide stability, clarity, and order in school operations. Professional development and capacity building obtained the lowest mean, indicating a need for stronger and more accessible training opportunities. The administrators also faced notable challenges, particularly limited community or parental support, security and conflict-related issues, limited resources and facilities, lack of mental health training, and heavy workload. The absence of significant relationships between profile variables and administrative roles indicates that leadership effectiveness in

strengthening coping mechanisms is not determined by personal background alone but by the strategies, support systems, and contextual leadership practices applied by administrators.

Overall, the study contributes to educational leadership by showing that adaptive coping in conflict-affected and resource-limited schools depends heavily on responsive school administration. Administrators who mobilize resources, promote well-being, enforce policies fairly, encourage professional growth, and collaborate with stakeholders help transform schools into safer, more supportive, and more resilient learning communities.

Recommendation

1. The Ministry of Basic, Higher and Technical Education may prioritize additional resource allocation for schools in conflict-prone and resource-limited areas. Support may include instructional materials, facilities improvement, and resources for coping-mechanism and school well-being programs.
2. School administrators and school heads may strengthen mental health and wellness initiatives by establishing regular counseling support, stress management activities, psychosocial first-aid sessions, and school-based wellness programs for teachers and learners.
3. Professional development officers, supervisors, and training specialists may expand training opportunities on adaptive coping, mental health support, conflict-sensitive leadership, stress management, crisis response, and resilience-based school leadership.
4. School administrators may strengthen partnerships with Parent-Teacher Associations, LGUs, NGOs, religious and community leaders, and other stakeholders to improve school support systems, increase parental engagement, and sustain coping-related interventions.
5. Policy implementers and school leaders may ensure that policies are clearly communicated, consistently implemented, and responsive to the well-being of teachers and learners, especially in conflict-affected and resource-limited settings.
6. Future researchers may conduct similar studies in other geographic areas, include larger samples, or examine the long-term effectiveness of action plans designed to strengthen coping mechanisms among administrators, teachers, and learners.

Table 6. Proposed Action Plan for Strengthening Adaptive Coping Mechanisms

Priority Area	Key Activity	Expected Output
Mental health and psychosocial support	Conduct regular stress management, counseling referral, and wellness activities.	Teachers and learners receive stronger emotional support.
Professional development and capacity building	Implement leadership, coping skills, and conflict-sensitive school management training.	Administrators and teachers improve coping-related competencies.
Resource mobilization	Strengthen linkages with MBHTE, LGUs, NGOs, and community partners for school resources.	Schools gain improved material support for coping programs.
Community and parental engagement	Organize consultation meetings and school-community partnership activities.	Stakeholder participation in school programs is increased.
Policy implementation and governance	Review, communicate, and monitor school policies related to safety, well-being, and resilience.	Policies are applied consistently and aligned with school needs.

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