

Flawless Illusion: Idealistic Traits of School Heads

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Abstract — This study aimed to explore the experiences of elementary school teachers working with idealistic school heads. Specifically, this sought to identify the experiences they encounter, the coping mechanism they use to manage these experiences, and the insights they generate from their experiences. The study utilized a qualitative research design employing a phenomenological approach to capture the teachers' live experiences. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with purposively selected teachers. Thematic analysis was used to identify and interpret emerging themes from the participants' narratives. Findings revealed five key challenges faced by teachers: met unrealistic expectations, feared of criticism and mistake, micromanagement and lacked of autonomy, increased workload and extended work hours, and strained relationships and reduced collaborations. Teachers coped by sought peer support and validation, setting personal boundaries, employed selective compliance and prioritization, maintained professional distance, and engaged in stress-relief activities. Insights generated included manage idealistic traits, adapt leadership style to increased teachers' motivation, promote emotional resilience, value collaboration and peer support, and advocate balanced leadership. The results suggest that idealistic leadership creates both personal and professional challenges for teachers, affecting their motivation, collaboration, and well-being. The study highlights the need for leadership practices that balanced high expectations with empathy, support, and professional school environment.

Keywords — *Idealistic leadership; teacher; experiences; coping mechanism; insights; Qualitative research.*

I. Introduction

An idealistic trait is characterized by a tendency to believe in and strive for high standards of behavior and honesty, often with a focus on perfection or a grand vision of the future, it is a trait that has significant implications in various professional settings, including education. Among school leaders, an idealistic can manifest in ways that impact both their own well-being and the functioning of the schools they manage. School heads who exhibit idealistic tendencies may inadvertently place enormous pressure on themselves and their staff, potentially affecting the overall school climate and teachers' job satisfaction.

This study entitled “Flawless Illusion: Idealistic Traits of School Heads” purposively explore the experiences of elementary school teachers working with idealistic school heads. This trait among school heads is a complex issue that can have significant implications for teachers, students, and the overall educational environment. The research is grounded in qualitative

research, specifically utilizing phenomenology. This design emphasizes capturing the essence of participants' experiences and uncovering the meanings they attach to those experiences (Van Manen, 2016).

A study by Flett and Hewitt (2020) highlights that leaders may foster a culture of fear and anxiety, where mistakes are not tolerated, and there is little room for creativity or professional growth. This high-pressure environment can diminish teachers' morale and negatively impact student outcomes, as educators may become more focused on meeting unrealistic expectations than on fostering a supportive learning environment. A study conducted in Canada by Montgomery and Rupp (2005) found that teachers who work in schools led by idealistic principals are more likely to leave the profession due to the constant pressure and lack of autonomy. This turnover can have detrimental effects on the stability of the school environment, as it disrupts the continuity of instruction and weakens the relationships between teachers, students, and the community.

In the Philippines, this issue among school heads presents unique challenges, particularly in the education system. Elementary school teachers often face heavy workloads and are expected to meet high standards set by their school leaders. According to a study by David and Alampay (2022), school heads in the Philippines may impose unrealistic expectations on their teachers, demanding flawless performance in lesson planning, classroom management, and student outcomes. This can result in teachers feeling overwhelmed and stressed, as they struggle to meet the stringent demands placed upon them.

Moreover, in the Philippines, and particularly in Davao City, these challenges are exacerbated by the specific context of the education system, where resources are often limited, and workloads are high. Hence, both internationally and locally, the experiences of teachers working under these school leaders reveal common challenges, including increased stress, limited professional growth, and a negative impact on school culture.

In conclusion, addressing the issue in school leadership requires a comprehensive approach that includes promoting a more supportive and collaborative school culture, providing professional development opportunities for school heads, and fostering an environment where teachers feel valued and empowered to succeed.

II. Methodology

The qualitative assumption of my study refers to the belief that understanding complex social phenomena requires exploring and interpreting participants' subjective experiences and meanings. This assumption is grounded in the idea that reality is constructed through human interaction and is best understood through detailed, contextualized insights rather than through numerical data alone. The qualitative assumption aligns with the study's focus on exploring how idealistic leadership influences teachers' work environments and well-being.

By employing in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the study seeks to uncover the rich, detailed accounts of teachers' experiences, acknowledging that their perspectives on leadership are shaped by individual and collective interactions within their schools.

The participants will be selected through purposive sampling, only five (5) school teachers working with idealistic school heads. Ensuring they have relevant experience working in environments where idealistic leadership is evident. Inclusion criteria for the in-depth interviews include: (1) current employment as an elementary school teacher, (2) experience working with a school head identified as by colleagues or self-report, and (3) willingness to participate in a detailed interview process.

Moreover, the primary research instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide, designed to gather in-depth insights from elementary school teachers working under idealistic school heads. The key ethical principles observed in the conduct of the study are: *Social Value; Informed Consent; Risks, Benefits, and Safety; Privacy and Confidentiality of Information; Justice; Transparency; Qualification of Researcher; Adequacy of Facilities; Community Involvement.*

Gathering data through in-depth interviews utilizing a structured interview guide to ensure comprehensive data collection. In-Depth Interviews (IDI) involve one-on-one interactions between the researcher and participants, providing an opportunity for detailed exploration of individual experiences.

To analyze the data, it follows a systematic and iterative process to ensure comprehensive and accurate interpretation of the qualitative data collected from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The analysis will begin with data transcription, Once transcribed, it immerses themselves in the data by reading through the transcripts multiple times to gain a thorough understanding of the content and context.

The next step is axial coding, where reassemble the data by linking codes to form broader categories or themes. This phase involves examining relationships between codes and identifying patterns that reflect the central themes of the study.

Finally, this engage in thematic analysis, where the refined themes are further analyzed to construct a coherent narrative that addresses the research questions. This analysis will involve interpreting the themes in relation to the study's objectives and theoretical framework, ensuring that the findings are supported by the data and provide meaningful insights into the impact of idealistic leadership on teachers (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Throughout the process, maintain a reflexive stance, continually considering how their own perspectives and biases may influence the analysis (Finlay, 2008).

III. Results and Discussion

The first theme presented specific experiences of elementary school teachers when working with idealistic school heads. The results of the study revealed that elementary school teachers working with idealistic school heads face several challenges, including the constant met unrealistic expectations in their daily tasks and performance. Teachers also experience a strong feared of criticism and mistake, leading to anxiety and hesitation in decision-making. Another major challenge is micromanagement and lacked of autonomy, where teachers felt closely monitored and restricted in their teaching practices. Additionally, teachers reported an increased workload and extended work hours as they struggled to meet high standards, often sacrificing personal time. Finally, the study found that this leadership style contributes to strained relationships and reduced collaboration among teachers, as competition and rigid control discourage teamwork and open communication.

The second theme presented the coping mechanisms do teachers use in working with idealistic leadership. The study found that elementary school teachers employed various coping mechanisms to manage the pressures of working under idealistic school heads. One key strategy was seeking peer support and validation, where teachers turned to trusted colleagues for encouragement and emotional relief. Teachers also practiced setting personal boundaries to protect their well-being by limiting the amount of work brought home. Some employed selective compliance and prioritization, choosing to focus on the most urgent tasks while letting go of less critical demands. Others coped by maintaining professional distance from their school heads to avoid unnecessary stress and conflict. Finally, many teachers engaged in stress-relief activities, such as hobbies, prayer, or quiet time, to manage emotional exhaustion and maintain balance.

The third theme focused on what insights can be generated from the experiences of teachers working with idealistic school heads. The study revealed several insights generate by elementary school teachers from their experiences working with idealistic school heads. Teachers recognized that perfection does not guarantee success, realizing that excessive focus on perfection often overlooks practical classroom needs. They also learned that leadership style affects teacher motivation, acknowledging how idealistic leadership can lower morale and enthusiasm. The teachers emphasized the importance of emotional resilience in navigating the pressures of their work environment. Additionally, they highlighted the value of collaboration and peer support in helping them cope with challenges. Lastly, the teachers expressed a call for balanced leadership, hoping for leaders who can uphold high standards while being supportive, flexible, and compassionate.

The experiences identified in the study imply the need for school leaders to reflect on the impact of their leadership style on teachers' well-being and performance. The met unrealistic expectations, feared of criticism, and micromanagement contribute to a work environment that may lower teacher morale and hinder creativity. Addressing these challenges requires leadership

practices that balance high standards with professional trust, autonomy, and emotional support to sustain teacher motivation and effectiveness in elementary schools.

The coping mechanisms employed by teachers imply their resilience and resourcefulness in managing the pressures of idealistic leadership. However, the reliance on self-developed coping strategies such as setting boundaries, selective compliance, and distancing indicates gaps in institutional support. This suggests the need for professional development, mentoring, and wellness programs that empower teachers with healthier, systemic ways to handle leadership demands without compromising their well-being or work quality.

The insights gained by teachers highlight the importance of leadership approaches that prioritize both accountability and care. Their call for balanced leadership implies that school heads must cultivate an environment where high standards coexist with empathy, flexibility, and recognition. Educational leaders and policymakers should consider these insights to guide leadership training, emphasizing relational leadership skills, emotional intelligence, and inclusive decision-making to foster a more supportive and motivating school culture.

In conclusion, the recommendations from this study emphasize the need efforts by the Department of Education should focus on developing leadership training programs that emphasize balanced leadership, promoting both high standards and supportive practices. Policies must be created to ensure school heads are equipped with skills in emotional intelligence, teacher empowerment, and well-being support to foster healthier school environments.

School heads are encouraged to reflect on their leadership style and adopt practices that balance accountability with empathy. They should foster open communication, trust, and collaboration among teachers while maintaining high standards, ensuring that professional growth and teacher well-being are equally prioritized. Teachers are encouraged to continue building strong peer support systems and to advocate for professional development opportunities that enhance their coping strategies. They should actively seek platforms to voice their challenges and insights, contributing to leadership improvement and fostering a more collaborative school culture.

Students will benefit from learning environments where teachers feel supported and motivated. Therefore, future initiatives should focus on nurturing classroom conditions that allow teachers to innovate, adapt, and address diverse student needs without being hindered by idealistic leadership pressures.

Lastly, future researchers are encouraged to explore similar studies across different school contexts, including private schools and secondary education, to compare experiences. Longitudinal studies may also be conducted to examine the long-term effects of idealistic leadership on teacher retention, student outcomes, and school climate.