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THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER II OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, DISTRICTS OF SIBAGAT, AGUSAN DEL SUR

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the opportunities and challenges experienced by Administrative Officer II personnel assigned to Non-Implementing Unit (Non-IU) schools in the Sibagat District of Agusan del Sur. The study aims to understand their lived experiences in managing administrative responsibilities across both central and remote school locations. Nineteen Administrative Officer II participants were purposively selected and engaged in semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Thematic analysis revealed key challenges, including limited resources, transportation difficulties, and heavy workloads. Despite these obstacles, participants reported positive experiences such as skills development, meaningful community involvement, and job fulfillment. The findings underscore the need for enhanced support systems from the Department of Education to empower Administrative Officer II personnel, particularly those serving geographically isolated areas. This study provides valuable insights for policymakers and education stakeholders seeking to improve administrative support in public schools.

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INTRODUCTION

In early 2024, the Department of Education released DepEd Order No. 2, s. 2024, which aims to ease the workload of public school teachers by removing administrative tasks from their responsibilities. The intention behind this directive is clear: to allow teachers to focus more on teaching and student engagement, thereby improving the quality of education. As a result, many of these administrative responsibilities have been reassigned to non-teaching staff, specifically, to Administrative Officers II. Administrative Officer II is a relatively new position in the Department of Education, created as part of the effort to support schools administratively. In many schools, the AO II is the only non-teaching personnel available, which means they are expected to take on almost all non-instructional duties. Because of this, AO IIs have become multitaskers or "jugglers," managing a wide array of responsibilities on their own.

Based on their Key Result Areas (KRA), AO IIs are tasked with four major functions: personnel administration, property custodianship, general administrative support, and finance management (Civil Service Commission [CSC], 2017). They are also assigned 13 ancillary tasks that were previously handled by teachers (Department of Education [DepEd], 2024). This heavy workload is often made more difficult by the nature of school assignments most AO IIs are assigned to two schools that are far apart, while others are sent to a single school that may be centrally located but still face logistical or resource-related challenges, especially in remote areas. Adding to this is the fact that the qualification standards for AO II, as stated in COA_AS_Memo10062016, require only a bachelor's degree and Civil Service Professional/Second Level Eligibility. Prior experience or specific training related to the job is not mandatory. As a result, many Administrative Officers II begin their roles without the

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training or background needed to manage the complex and demanding tasks expected of them.

While much attention and research has been given to the teaching workforce, the realities faced by non-teaching personnel, particularly those in AO II roles, are often overlooked. As Ewton (2019) notes, one of the persistent challenges in educational leadership is providing proper support and supervision for non-teaching staff. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring the lived experiences of Administrative Officers II in the districts of Sibagat, Agusan del Sur. It will delve into how these individuals cope with their responsibilities, the challenges they face, and the opportunities they encounter in their roles.

The findings of this study aim to benefit a wide range of stakeholders, AO IIs, teachers, school heads, students, and policy-makers by highlighting the realities on the ground and encouraging better support systems. Moreover, as non-teaching demands continue to grow in educational institutions around the world, this research may also offer insights into future studies focused on the evolving role of school-based administrative personnel.

Review of Literature and Studies

This part of the study presents the review of related literature and studies that are relevant to investigating the opportunities and challenges of Administrative Officer II of the Department of Education, District of Sibagat, Agusan del Sur. Non-teaching personnel are considered the support group in attaining the mission and vision of the school in providing quality education for its students. The non-teaching personnel are indeed partners of teachers and school administrators in administrative office management (Francisco, 2020). The government employed a considerable number of non-teaching personnel this past year. With the high expectations of the teachers and the administration, the performance of the non-teaching personnel is often neglected. The non-teaching personnel also are employees, and they need to be happy and satisfied with their work so that they can perform well.

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Research shows that administrative officers in educational institutions often face a significant workload due to the need to manage various tasks, such as financial management, procurement, personnel matters, and logistical support. This is especially challenging in schools with limited administrative staff, where one officer may have to handle responsibilities typically distributed among multiple staff in larger institutions (Maca, 2023). According to the literature, administrative officers often juggle numerous roles, including human resources, finance, and logistics. This multitasking requirement can lead to burnout, as there is usually a lack of specialized training or support (Clay,2024). Administrative Officers in rural or geographically isolated schools face barriers in procurement processes, delivering supplies, and addressing urgent needs. Inadequate access to transportation and the physical distance from district offices add to the complexity of their roles (Sadorf, 2024).

In the absence of clearly established procedures in the workplace, employees will experience a negative affective state. This situation influences their well-being and their intention to behave in ways that benefit the organization beyond their job demands. This impact is more relevant to teamwork, where members share the perception of ambiguity through emotional contagion (role ambiguity climate). Employees will be more focused on their jobs after their role expectations have been clarified (Chillakuri, 2020). In addition, role ambiguity occurs when employees have insufficient information to perform their jobs adequately or when performance evaluation methods are unclear, Charoensukmongkol & Puyod (2021).

Studies, research, and publications support the idea that there is a need for non-teaching personnel to conduct thorough research and understand the demands of workload that will affect their performance. Mind Tools by Emerald Works Limited cited that, according to Yerkes and Dodson (1908), peak performance is achieved when the level of pressure we experience is appropriate for the work we are doing. When we are under too much or too little pressure, performance declines, sometimes severely. According to the results of the survey by Lyimo & Joachim (2022), time pressure generally impairs performance because it

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places constraints on the capacity for thought and action that limit exploration and increase reliance on well-learned or heuristic strategies. Thus, time pressure increases speed at the expense of quality. However, performance is different from productivity. Giving people more time is not always better for productivity because time spent on a task yields decreasing marginal returns to performance. Setting deadlines wisely can help maximize productivity.

Proper employee training, development, and education at the right time provide big payoffs for the organization in terms of increasing productivity, knowledge, loyalty, and contribution. Ozkeser (2019) states that training and development is a process that attempts to provide employees with information, skills, and an understanding of the organization and its goals. Additionally, training and development aid an employee in continuing to make the necessary positive contribution to the success of the employing organization in terms of their good performance on the job. To start this whole process is the orientation and socialization of employees into the organization. New hires often undergo orientation programs to familiarize themselves with organizational policies, procedures, and culture (Brown & Smith, 2020).

Pairing new administrative officers with experienced mentors can facilitate knowledge transfer and professional development (Johnson & Lee, 2019). Training in office software suites (e.g., Microsoft Office, Google Workspace) and specialized software (e.g., ERP systems) is essential (Miller, 2021). Skills in managing databases, using data analysis tools, and understanding data privacy regulations are increasingly important (Turner, 2020). Workshops and courses in effective communication, both written and verbal, are crucial (Jones, 2019). Training in leadership, team management, and conflict resolution helps prepare administrative officers for supervisory roles.

Stoffberg (2023) highlight that administrative staff in schools often do not receive adequate training in management, accounting, and other specialized skills needed for effective job performance. The lack of training contributes to inefficiencies and increased stress levels among Administrative Officers. Training is essential for equipping employees with the

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necessary skills, knowledge, and competencies required to perform their jobs effectively. Nguyen (2020) states that training enhances job performance, improves employee motivation, and increases job satisfaction. It prepares employees to handle complex tasks and adapt to changes in the work environment. Organizations that do not invest in employee training tend to experience higher turnover rates. A report by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) (2016) suggests that employees are more likely to leave an organization if they perceive a lack of development opportunities. High turnover can be costly for organizations, as it involves recruiting, hiring, and training new employees. Lack of training can contribute to increased stress and job burnout. When employees are not adequately prepared for their roles, they may struggle to meet performance expectations, leading to job-related stress. A study by Gabriel & Aguinis (2022) highlights that job burnout is often associated with insufficient training and support, leading to emotional exhaustion and reduced job performance.

Numerous studies underscore the critical role that superiors play in an employee's career progression. Those employees who had strong, positive relationships with their superiors were more likely to receive promotions and career development opportunities. These relationships often lead to superiors acting as advocates for their subordinates, thereby facilitating their professional growth (Ragins & Kram, 2020). Finally, job security is significantly influenced by the quality of superior-subordinate relationships. Employees who have positive relationships with their superiors experience greater job security. Superiors who value their subordinates' contributions are more likely to advocate for them during organizational changes or restructuring.

Jäger (2023), newcomers in organizations face various challenges as they transition into their new roles. The typical difficulties encountered by newcomers include social integration, role clarity, performance pressure, organizational culture adaptation, and support systems. Social integration is a significant challenge for newcomers in any organization. Newcomers often struggle with establishing relationships and integrating into existing social

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networks. The lack of established social ties can lead to feelings of isolation and hinder the adjustment process. The quality of initial interactions with colleagues and supervisors is crucial for successful social integration and long-term job satisfaction.

Dufour et al. (2021). Adapting to the organizational culture is a significant hurdle for many newcomers. Understanding and aligning with the organization's values, norms, and practices can be challenging. The availability and effectiveness of support systems play a crucial role in newcomer adjustment. Formal support systems such as mentorship programs, orientation sessions, and training workshops are vital for helping newcomers navigate their new roles. Additionally, peer support and informal networks provide emotional and practical assistance.

Theoretical / Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007), a framework that helps explain how the pressures and supports in a work environment shape an employee's well-being and performance. The model sees job demands like heavy workload, time pressure, and emotional strain as potential sources of stress, especially when job resources like support from colleagues, access to training, or a manageable work environment are lacking.

In the case of Administrative Officer II in the Sibagat District, this model helps make sense of their daily realities. Many are assigned to multiple Non-Implementing Unit schools, some of which are located in remote, hard-to-reach areas. Traveling long distances often by habal-habal or on foot while managing multiple tasks adds both physical and mental strain. On top of that, limited staffing, lack of tools, and scarce professional development opportunities make the work even more demanding.

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By using the JD-R model, this study examines both the opportunities and challenges that shape the lived experiences of AO II. The research involved one-on-one interviews and a focus group discussion with selected AO II, all of whom generously shared their stories. Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the process, and their voices were transcribed and analyzed using MAXQDA, following Colaizzi's method to ensure a faithful and rigorous interpretation of their experiences.

The insights gathered will not only inform the final research report but will also be shared in various venues such as school and district meetings, Learning Action Cell sessions, and community assemblies as a way of giving back to the participants and making their voices heard. The goal is to raise awareness, support informed decision-making, and help improve working conditions for Administrative Officers in the field

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Administrative Officer II personnel within the Sibagat District, Agusan del Sur. The research aimed to identify the opportunities and challenges encountered by Administrative Officers in their day-to-day responsibilities, particularly considering the unique context of schools located in both remote and accessible areas. By understanding these experiences, the study sought to provide recommendations for enhancing support systems and professional development for Administrative Officers, thereby contributing to the overall effectiveness of administrative functions in the Department of Education.

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METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research design, specifically adopting a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of Administrative Officers II in the Department of Education, Sibagat Districts, Agusan del Sur. The phenomenological method was chosen because it aims to understand how individuals make sense of their personal experiences in this case, the opportunities and challenges AO IIs face in their day-to-day roles without adding outside interpretation or judgment (Lim, 2024).

A total of 19 Administrative Officers II participated in the study. They were purposively selected based on their direct and ongoing experience in the role. To ensure a diverse and well-rounded perspective, participants were chosen from various school types, including Central Schools, Single Schools, and Indigenous Peoples' (IP) Schools.

To gather in-depth and meaningful data, the researcher developed a semi-structured interview guide. This tool was specifically designed to align with the study's research questions and to explore the real-life experiences of Administrative Officer IIs. The questions were concise but open-ended, allowing participants to share freely while respecting their busy schedules.

For data consistency, a structured format was used during interviews. The responses were transcribed and analyzed using MAXQDA software, following Colaizzi's method a widely respected approach in qualitative research that helps ensure the trustworthiness and depth of the findings. Participants were also asked to review and sign their individual transcripts to confirm the accuracy of their responses.

To further minimize bias and promote objectivity, the preliminary findings were shared with a group of teachers who served as a review committee. Their feedback helped refine the results before final validation by the research adviser. The final findings were then prepared for inclusion in the study

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the professional landscape of AO II in the District of Sibagat, providing insights that can inform decision-making and strategic improvements in administrative management, skills development, professional growth, and community engagement.

Skills Development. Participants described significant growth in technical, managerial, and interpersonal skills through their roles as Administrative Officer II. Exposure to diverse tasks such as personnel management, budgeting, and policy implementation enhanced their administrative competencies. For example, P05_M2 shared that managing custodianship and finances strengthened their accountability and budgeting skills. These experiences align with findings that administrative roles foster multi-tasking, resource allocation, and problem-solving abilities (Tulane University, 2024; Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2024).

Professional Growth. Many participants emphasized the value of trainings, mentorship, and hands-on experience. P08_M5 highlighted the role's potential as a stepping stone toward higher positions. Despite challenges like limited training access, participants reported improved time management, critical thinking, and digital proficiency. Collaboration with school heads and colleagues played a key role in developing confidence and broadening professional networks. Research affirms that experiential learning and collaboration enhance motivation, adaptability, and readiness for leadership roles (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2024; Tulane University, 2024).

Community Engagement. Participants, particularly those in Indigenous Peoples' (IP) schools, noted the importance of building relationships with stakeholders. P03_IP1 shared how partnerships with local agencies and IP communities improved their communication and linkaging skills. Engaging in programs like Brigada Eskwela also fostered cultural understanding and trust. These findings support literature highlighting the role of community interaction in developing inclusive and responsive school systems (Tulane University, 2024).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that, despite limited resources and remote settings, AO II in Sibagat Districts exhibit resilience, adaptability, and a strong commitment to their

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roles. Their lived experiences reflect a continuous process of personal and professional development, driven by real-world challenges and community engagement.

From the shared experiences of Administrative Officer II, four key themes surfaced in relation to the challenges they face in their roles: limited opportunities for professional development, difficulties in communication, struggles with accessibility and logistical concerns, especially in remote areas and constraints brought about by financial limitations. A major concern was the lack of proper onboarding and training. Many AO-IIs were placed in their roles without preparation, especially those transitioning from teaching to administrative work (Frögéli et al., 2023). Some, like P12_S3 and P07_M4, expressed difficulty in adjusting due to limited training in financial and operational tasks.

Participants also reported being assigned duties beyond their official responsibilities, leading to role ambiguity and stress (Purnomo et al., 2021; Maslach et al., 2022). P01_CES1 and P08_M5, for example, shared challenges with unfamiliar tasks unrelated to their background. Sudden policy changes and unclear communication made tasks more difficult, particularly in financial management (Alkhudhayr & Aljabr, 2024). Skill mismatches further complicated their duties, reflecting findings by Shevchuk et al. (2019).

Heavy workloads and task-shifting, especially for those serving multiple schools, led to role overload, burnout, and health issues (Olaniyan, 2020; Pindek et al., 2022). P18_S5 and P11_IP2 mentioned working overtime and sacrificing personal time and well-being. Conflicting expectations from multiple supervisors added pressure (Wang, 2022), while interpersonal conflicts with school heads created a hostile work environment (Khanal & Ghimire, 2024).

Health concerns due to overwork and poor work-life balance were common (Venus, 2021; Boamah et al., 2022). Participants like P06_M3 recounted emotional distress after accidents during commutes to remote schools, where infrastructure and safety remain significant concerns (Wang et al., 2020). Lack of internet, power supply, and support staff affected task completion and report submissions (Talib et al., 2020). Financial strain was also a pressing issue. Several AO-IIs used personal funds or loans to purchase essential office

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equipment due to budget constraints (Yean et al., 2022). Travel reimbursements were often insufficient, impacting those assigned to multiple locations (Thompson, 2020).

Despite these challenges, the dedication of AO-IIs remained evident. Their experiences highlight the urgent need for structured training, clearer roles, better communication, improved infrastructure, and financial support to ensure their well-being and effectiveness.

Administrative Officers II demonstrated a diverse set of coping strategies to navigate the challenges of their roles in the Department of Education, District of Sibagat. Their responses reflect a combination of time management techniques, organizational skills, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional regulation. One of the most prominent themes was effective time management, with several participants using tools like ranked task lists, daily schedules, and Gantt charts to stay organized and meet deadlines. These practices not only helped them remain productive but also reduced workplace stress, aligning with existing theories on time and task management. Open communication with school heads and colleagues also emerged as a vital approach to avoid misunderstandings and ensure smooth coordination of tasks.

Another key finding was the emphasis on emotional regulation, adaptability, and collaborative learning. Participants shared experiences of managing difficult relationships, staying positive in challenging work environments, and maintaining professionalism under pressure. Many sought guidance from experienced Administrative Officers, highlighting the role of mentorship and peer support in building competence and confidence. These practices reflect Vygotsky's social learning theory, showing how collaborative learning and informal mentorships contribute to professional growth and resilience.

Innovation and resourcefulness also played a critical role in overcoming infrastructure, logistical, and financial limitations. Officers adapted to technological challenges by working offline and shifting to more connected locations when necessary. They also optimized available resources, delegated tasks strategically, and collaborated with local stakeholders, including the LGU and community, to fill resource gaps. These strategies illustrate the officers' ability

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to lead creatively under pressure, adapt to their context, and ensure continuous service delivery in spite of systemic limitations.

The insights shared by Administrative Officer II participants revealed six major themes that underscore the need for professional growth, better operational systems, and a more supportive working environment. One of the most frequently mentioned concerns was the lack of relevant and inclusive training. Participants expressed a strong desire for capacity-building programs tailored specifically to their roles especially in personnel management, financial procedures, and property custodianship. For example, P01_CES1 and P10_S2 stressed the importance of focused training to reduce administrative errors and boost efficiency. Others, like P07_M4, pointed out the absence of onboarding for new hires, which leaves many confused about their responsibilities. These observations reflect the findings of Castillo and Rodriguez (2021) and Williams and Brown (2022), who emphasized that role-specific training and onboarding programs significantly improve staff competence and clarity.

In addition to training, participants spoke about the strain caused by heavy workloads, unclear job descriptions, and limited resources. Several noted that a single AO often handles administrative tasks for two or more schools, which becomes overwhelming, particularly in remote areas. P03_IP1 and P15_M6 called for a 1:1 staffing ratio, while others suggested hiring additional support staff through the Special Education Fund or local government initiatives. There were also calls for updated ICT equipment and transportation support, especially for those serving far-flung schools. Participants like P10_S2 recommended defining clear Key Result Areas (KRAs) to avoid overlapping tasks with school heads and other staff. These concerns are echoed in studies such as those by Al-Akash et al. (2024) and Pace et al. (2021), which highlight that fair task distribution and access to resources are essential to staff effectiveness and well-being.

Another key theme that emerged was the need for strong support systems and better communication. Participants appreciated the idea of peer mentoring and regular collaboration within the district to help navigate challenges. They emphasized the importance of emotional

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support, knowledge sharing, and having a reliable network to lean on during high-pressure periods. Suggestions included implementing flexible work hours, offering remote work options, and conducting regular check-ins between AOs and school heads to strengthen teamwork. Concerns about vague job expectations also brought up terms like "assist" were seen as problematic because they often led to overextension of duties, as noted by P06_M3. These findings align with research by Brown and Treviño (2019), who advocated for accountability through regular evaluations, and who found that strong collaboration and communication lead to better performance and greater job satisfaction.

The results of the study highlight that Administrative Officer II hold an essential place in the day-to-day operations of schools. Beyond their technical work, they develop leadership skills and build strong ties with their school communities. These experiences open doors for career growth, both within the Department of Education and in other public or private organizations. To help AO II grow professionally, it is recommended to offer structured mentorship for new officers, regular training on leadership and administrative skills, and provide recognition and opportunities for career advancement. These efforts can inspire them to stay motivated and perform at their best.

However, the study also reveals that AO II face several difficulties in their roles, such as handling too much workload, working with limited resources, and unclear job responsibilities. Many also deal with financial constraints and tough working conditions, especially those assigned to far-flung areas. To help ease these burdens, the Department of Education may consider hiring additional non-teaching staff, improving office facilities and digital tools, and making sure each AO II has a clear understanding of their tasks. It's also important to include AO II needs like travel funds and possible eligibility for Special Hardship Allowance in school budgeting processes.

Finally, the study suggests building stronger support systems around AO II so they can thrive in their work. This includes forming peer support groups, offering stress management activities, and encouraging teamwork between AO II, teachers, and school

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heads. Policy changes at the division and district levels, along with support from local governments, can ensure that AO II are not only trained and well-equipped, but also fairly treated. With these improvements, AO II will be better able to serve their schools, and in turn, contribute to a more effective and caring educational system.

Conclusions

Administrative Officer II in the Department of Education, Sibagat District, Agusan del Sur, holds essential roles in school operations but faces significant challenges that shall be addressed. By implementing strategic reforms, including resource allocation, capacity-building initiatives, mentorship programs, and policy improvements, the effectiveness and well-being of Administrative Officer II can be enhanced. A collaborative approach among Administrative Officer II, teachers, school heads, DepEd management, and local government units is crucial in ensuring a sustainable and efficient administrative workforce within the education sector. Through these measures, Administrative Officer II will be empowered to perform their roles effectively, fostering a more resilient and professional administrative system that benefits the entire educational community.

Recommendations

To strengthen the role of Administrative Officer II in schools, several actionable steps are recommended. Division-level management may ensure that new AO II receive proper onboarding through mentorship by experienced officers, along with continuous professional training. Work assignments and deadlines must take into account the challenges faced by those stationed in remote or hazardous areas, including limited internet access and safety risks. Establishing clear Key Result Areas (KRAs) for both AO II and school heads can help avoid role confusion, while increasing the number of non-teaching staff can reduce work

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overload, especially for those managing multiple schools. District supervisors are also encouraged to allocate part of the Special Education Fund (SEF) to address AO II operational needs, and to distribute responsibilities more equitably among school personnel during district-wide tasks.

At the school level, heads may clearly define roles and responsibilities based on DepEd guidelines and supervise AO II to ensure accountability, while also allocating adequate MOOE funds for their operational needs, such as travel support and office supplies. Teachers must be made aware of AO II duties to set realistic expectations, especially as tasks shift under DepEd Order No. 2, s. 2024. AO II themselves may embrace continuous learning, participate in mentorship programs, and form peer networks for mutual support. Lastly, stakeholders including local government units, parents, and barangay officials maybe informed about the role of AO II to promote stronger community involvement and secure local funding support for their essential work.

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