

# A Qualitative Inquiry on the Initiatives of School Leaders in Addressing Bullying

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore and understand the initiatives of public junior high school leaders in addressing bullying in their schools. The study was seen through the lens of Contingency Theory of Leadership of Fiedler which states that the importance of school leaders being adaptable in their leadership style when dealing with challenges in addressing the problem of bullying. This also supported by the Ecological Systems Theory of Bronfenbrenner which posits that individuals are shaped by various interconnected systems, encompassing individual characteristics to larger societal elements. This study was conducted at Division of Tagum City involving 10 public junior high school leaders who were selected through purposive sampling. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Results show that with regards to the initiatives of school leaders in addressing bullying, these major themes emerged: utilizing school welfare, raising awareness through information dissemination and gaining assistance from stakeholders. To support such initiatives, the participants coped through the following themes: promoting healthy relationship and environment, fostering accountability and utilization of classroom strategies and implementing leadership involvements. Furthermore, the insights of the participants were summarized into the following themes: posses good leadership attributes, seek for continuous learning and instill values, uphold inclusivity and equality. Result of this study can help to all public junior high school leaders to provide a wide range of approaches, interventions and practical strategies that can address bullying within school, can create a safer and more inclusive school environment for all students by fostering a culture of empathy and respect and implementing a clear policies with consistent enforcement.

**Keywords:** education, school leadership, Public Junior High School Leaders, qualitative-phenomenological inquiry, purposive sampling, thematic analysis, Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

Bullying was a challenge for school leaders worldwide and a constant concern for schools. School leaders played a vital role in creating a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for students. Addressing bullying was one key initiative undertaken by school leaders to ensure the well-being of students. However, conflicts could not be avoided, which require school leaders to make decisions, take actions and implement clear interventions to address the problem of bullying. School leaders experienced challenges in addressing bullying because of the numerous demands on their time, along with the various roles and tasks, which often prevented them from giving the necessary focus, commitment, and responsibility to address the concerns of the students in bullying (Bradshaw et al. 2013, as cited in Tan, 2022).

In Indonesia, school leaders faced challenges in terms of engagement within the school, lack of awareness and understanding of various forms of bullying, unreported incidents due to lack of trust in the reporting mechanism as well as inadequate resources to support bullying intervention within school (Devi et al., 2023). In addition, another study in the United States that school leaders faced challenges due to inadequate resources for addressing bullying, insufficient staff support, a lack of safety programs, and the struggle to sustain a culture of safety as an integral component of the school climate, which was absent in many secondary schools (Kim et al., 2020). Meanwhile, in England, school leaders faced challenges in addressing this issue, including a lack of support resources from the government, a lack of confidence in school leaders to respond to this kind of problem, and a lack of clarity in implementing a policy in schools, (Busby, 2019).

In the Philippines, school leaders faced numerous challenges and problems in addressing bullying cases in the school because most students did not report bullying to the school leaders but rather to their parents or friends. Their reluctance to report bullying to school leaders likely stemmed from negative messages and a lack of confidence in school leaders' responses (Kowalski et al., 2012, as cited in Tan, 2022).

Meanwhile, in Tagum City Division, public junior high school leaders also encountered challenges in addressing the problem of bullying. School leaders found it difficult to quickly identify the problem promptly due to the unreported incident of bullying in the school. Similar to other schools, students preferred to share their experiences with friends rather than reporting to authorities. This made it challenging for school leaders to accurately assess the extent of the bullying problem.

Although there was an increasing amount of research on how school leaders dealt with the issue of bullying within their schools, there were a limited number of qualitative studies that specifically focusing on the initiatives of public junior high school leaders in addressing bullying. However, the study of Gizir and Saaldiraner (2021) titled "School Bullying from Perspectives of Middle School Principals" and the study of Arundel (2022), titled "How 3 School Leaders are Preventing and Responding to Bullying" were relatively associated with this study. However, I did not read any research studies that focuses exclusively on the initiatives of public junior high school leaders in addressing bullying in the schools, particularly in the Division of Tagum City, Davao del Norte.

Thus, this urged me to conduct this study because public junior high school leaders faced challenges in addressing bullying cases in the schools. I believed that if we understood what they're going through while addressing this problem, they can come up with new strategies to address the problem and they can respond as well as handle the bullying situation within the school. This study was also relevant to the education sector, especially those who make programs and training for school leaders. Moreover, it was significant for school leaders to learn from others' experiences and identify effective methods for addressing this problem.

Additionally, the results of this study were presented to public junior high school leaders for wide dissemination of the results by conducting workshops, research forums, and LAC sessions. Further, the result of this study will also benefit to the teachers, students, and the Department of Education officials. I also aimed to publish my research study in an international journal publication to assist future researcher, ensuring that my study reached its intended audience and contributed to meaningful discussions, policy changes, and practical solutions in the field of education.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to explore and understand the initiatives of public junior high

school leaders in addressing bullying in the Division of Tagum City, Davao del Norte, for the school year 2023-2024.

At this stage in research, initiatives of school leaders in addressing bullying were the main focus of this study generally defined as the initiative of public junior high school leader in creating a positive and inclusive atmosphere as well as to foster a safe space for students. Further, this study aimed to uncover the various initiatives of school leaders in handling the challenges of bullying within school.

### Research Questions

1. What initiatives do leaders in public junior high schools take to address bullying?
2. How do these initiatives support public junior high school leaders in addressing and mitigating bullying within the school environment?
3. What insights do public junior high school leaders have regarding the implemented initiatives to address bullying in school that can be shared with others?

### Theoretical Lens

This study was seen through the lens of Contingency Theory of Leadership of Fiedler (1967). In this theory, Fiedler proposed that the situation determined a leader's performance and that there is no single optimum leadership style. Individual leadership styles are the outcome of a person's life background and experiences, and hence immensely difficult to change; instead of changing one's leadership style, the organization should fit a certain leadership style to a specific situation. Further, the leadership theory of Fiedler is based on two factors: leadership style and situational favorableness (Campdesuñer et al., 2017). In the context of this study, this theory highlighted the importance of school leaders being adaptable in their leadership style when dealing with challenges in addressing the problem of bullying. School leaders needed to carefully assess the situation and take the right action to address the problem. Hence, in this problem, effective leadership depended on how well leaders chose the right strategy and style that fits the circumstances.

In the same vein, another relevant theory that supported this study was the Ecological Systems Theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979), which emphasized that school leaders needed to understand how the development of the students was influenced by a series of interconnected environmental systems. It highlighted the reciprocal connections between individuals and the environment that molded individual behavior. This theory attempted to view human interaction in systems or subsystems like the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macro system, and the chronosystem (Analisah & Indartono, 2019).

In the context of this study, this theory suggested that individuals were shaped by various interconnected systems, encompassing individual characteristics to larger societal elements. When dealing with bullying, initiatives based on Ecological Systems Theory considered the various levels of influence, such as individual, interpersonal, institutional, and community factors. School leaders implemented interventions that address these different levels, including promoting positive relationships, establishing clear school policies, and collaborating with parents and the community to create a comprehensive anti-bullying environment.

Furthermore, another relevant theory that supported this study was the Transformational Leadership Theory of Burn (1978). In this theory, Burns emphasized the importance for school leaders to motivate, inspire, and encourage their teachers and staff to enact actions that brought about significant change. It involved a staff that feels empowered to innovate and contribute to a success of the school in the future.

It could help school leaders find solutions to any situation within their educational organizations (Mccoy, 2019).

In the context of this study, this theory suggests that effective leaders motivated, inspired, and encouraged followers to reach their full potential. In the context of addressing bullying, school leaders employing transformational leadership implemented initiatives that empowered students and staff to take an active role in creating a positive and inclusive school culture. This leadership style involves fostering a shared vision, encouraging innovation, and promoting a sense of collective responsibility for addressing bullying issues. Initiatives may include leadership development programs, mentoring, and collaborative problem-solving approaches.

In this study, the abovementioned theories were deliberately selected and examined to provide more information on the foundation of this study. They served as the foundational pillars for the research question, offering a clear understanding of the study's focus. School leaders needed to take the right action by choosing the right strategies, interventions, and leadership styles that would fit to address bullying in schools.

### Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study was limited to 10 junior high school leaders who were currently working in public schools in the Division of Tagum City, as the participants of the study.

This study focused on the initiatives of public junior high school leaders addressing bullying in their schools, their coping strategies, and insights that they could share with their colleagues and the academic community in general. Thus, the data that I gathered was not generalizable to all. Moreover, this research study conducted in the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024, specifically in the months of March to July 2024.

Furthermore, this study was subject to an In-Depth Interview or IDI with full observance of safety and health protocols. Also, the absence of triangulation might have limited the validity of the findings, as the study relied solely on in-depth interview.

### Importance of the Study

The study's usefulness was found in the truth it offered. The results were highly significant and beneficial to the following:

This study benefited **school leaders**, including school principals, assistant principals, head teachers, or those in charge of the school, as they can share their experiences. It provided school leaders with innovative ideas for effectively addressing bullying issues in their schools and served as inspiration for future and aspiring school leaders as it tackled the initiatives of school leaders in addressing this problem. In addition, this was beneficial for **teachers**, as they benefited from the ideas of how and why decisions were made by their school leaders in addressing the problem of bullying in their schools. Furthermore, it made teachers stronger in dealing with these challenges while providing a good education.

Subsequently, the **students** were the direct benefactors of the services provided by the school leaders and teachers who were motivated and fully geared knowledge through their hard work and dedication. It made them feel safe, respected, and protected while they were learning as well as help them to do better in school.

The study holds significance for **Department of Education (DepEd) officials** as it provided valuable insights into the challenges faced by school leaders. It served as a guide and foundation for them in form-

ulating solutions to address bullying issues within schools.

Furthermore, the **future researchers**, the outcome of the study served as reference information to improve the findings they have regarding the challenges and experiences of the initiatives of school leaders in addressing bullying, and the coping strategies that helped them surpass the difficulties they encounter. This motivated them to conduct studies that helped in addressing bullying in the school.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms were defined conceptually and operationally to ensure clarity and enhance understanding within the context of this study.

**Initiatives of School leaders.** This were defined as a leader that played a key role in helping to create a safe environment that free from bullying (Downes et al., 2018b). In this study, the school leaders demonstrated a strong commitment to the well-being of the students and took action to address the bullying in the school.

**Addressing Bullying.** This were defined as identifying, intervening in, and preventing harmful behaviors like bullying to foster a safe and inclusive environment (Nickerson & Waseem, 2024). In this study, this was defined as implementing anti-bullying policies, prevention programs, and support systems at reducing bullying in schools, enhancing awareness, and fostering a safe and inclusive school climate for all.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study presented various concepts in a structured manner to ensure comprehensive understanding. Each chapter contained supporting perspectives to be explored, and details were carefully arranged to promote reader comprehension. This study was organized into five (5) chapters.

Chapter 1 provided the introduction that presented the global, national, and local settings of the issue at hand. Furthermore, this also presented the theoretical perspectives that served as the general framework for the study. The purpose of the research was outlined through formulated of research questions aimed at achieving the study's objectives. Thus, the importance of the study, the definition of terms, scope, and limitation, and the organization of the study were also included in this chapter.

Chapter 2 presented the review of the related literature of the study and the concepts that were studied by various academic researchers on the said topic to support the theory in conducting this study, obtained through internet-published articles and research.

Chapter 3 presented the methods and procedures employed in the study, including the research design, research participants, role of the researchers, data sources, data collection procedure, data analysis, trustworthiness of the study, and ethical consideration.

Chapter 4 presented the findings from the in-depth interviews conducted for the study, showcasing detailed responses from participants were based on the three research questions. The results were presented in tabular forms, highlighting the major themes and core ideas derived from participants' responses.

Chapter 5 encompassed the discussion and conclusion of this qualitative study. It discussed the themes that were identified from the results with supporting relevant statements. The chapter also examined the practical implications and suggestions for future researchers, in addition to providing concluding remarks.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **Overview of School-Based Anti-Bullying Initiatives**

Throughout the year, there has been big increase in efforts to stop bullying. School plays a crucial role in



creating a safe and supportive learning environment for students (Mercado-Crespo, 2022). In fact, the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013, also known as Republic Act No. 10627, mandates that all elementary and secondary schools implement policies to prevent and address bullying. These laws are to enforced according to guidance and circular memos from Department of Education. Schools are required to comply with the Anti-Bullying Act by adopting relevant policies and establishing intervention programs. These programs, include counseling, life skills training, and other activities, aim to improve the psychological, emotional, and psycho-social well-being of both victims and bullies in public and private kindergarten, primary, and secondary schools (Abagao et al., 2021).

Further, getting support from school leaders and teachers should be the first step in a successful intervention. Empowering students to advocate for victims is key element of many anti-bullying initiatives. Numerous factors influence whether a student will intervene in bullying situation (Brown et al., 2018). Such as empathy, close relationships, and shared anti-bullying attitudes among friends play a role in determining whether a student will intervene in bullying incidents. Individuals who have directly observed bullying are more inclined to intervene when other students are being bullied within the classroom (Ding et al., 2020).

Moreover, Ren et al., (2020), states that educating school leaders and teachers about the consequences of bullying and effective prevention methods is a highly successful strategy for reducing bullying. With greater support from school leaders and teachers, bullying can be minimized in schools. Additionally, better supervision on the playground and enhanced classroom management could help reduced bullying incidents. Utilizing a comprehensive approach within schools is effective in optimizing positive outcomes and preventing bullying incidents. Despite employing various strategies to prevent bullying, there remains a lack of awareness among school leaders and teachers regarding bullying incidents and how to respond to them (Boge & Larsson, 2018).

### **Leadership Role**

School leaders have a vital role in dealing with bullying by establishing a positive school environment, implementing effective policies, addressing bullying cases, collaborating with stakeholders, and continuing adjusting strategies to suit the changing needs of the school community. Through their proactive involvement, school leaders can significantly contribute to creating a secure and nurturing learning environment for all students (Miles, 2022). Moreover, school leaders adapted to their initiative strategies based on the specific needs of the school community, continuously learning and refining their approach to address the complexities of bullying, being willing to try different approaches and adjust strategies (Raei, 2018).

Furthermore, school should develop thorough training programs that not only educate school leaders about the complexities of bullying but also provide them the essential abilities to cultivate a secure and inclusive school atmosphere. Encouraging collaboration among teachers, students, and parents enhances the effectiveness of anti-bullying efforts and fosters a positive school climate (Bilz & Fischer, 2019). Apart from this, school counselors are play key roles in implementing solutions to address bullying. Interventions aimed at enhancing students' empathy levels can help counteract bullying behavior. Collaborative efforts among school stakeholders foster a positive school culture (Ceccolini et al., 2021). Moreover, school leaders who are innovative and motivating tend to display more characteristics of transformational leadership. A visionary leader, who adopts a change-oriented leadership approach, is seen as a dependable and respected social architect who maintains constant communication with their followers

(Gan et al., 2019). Hence, it can even help school leaders find solutions to any situation within their educational organizations. School leaders can engage in educational initiatives to promote empathy and kindness, creating a positive atmosphere that discourages bullying and encourages respectful behavior among students (Mccoy, 2019).

In addition, Tan (2020) point out that school leaders in the Philippines specifically in Leyte need to establish a clear policy on anti-bullying intervention programs and activities for students, parents, and teachers. School leaders must adopt a structured, multi-tiered approach to managing bullying, addressing issues at different administrative levels as needed. The process should start with the class adviser and escalate through the hierarchy only when necessary, ensuring a thorough and inclusive conflict resolution method. Maintaining detailed narrative reports ensures transparency and accountability, fostering a collaborative effort to effectively resolve bullying incidents. Meanwhile, as highlighted by Arundel (2022) from her findings that school leaders take action thoroughly, listening to both sides of any conflict. School leaders needs to implement measures to prevent unwanted behaviors and strive for resolutions that contribute to a sense of safety for the high school students involved. Hence, the support and initiative from school leaders are essential consideration when developing anti-bullying measures within the school setting.

### **Specific Initiatives Implemented by Public School Leaders**

School leaders' initiatives focus on creating a positive school climate, assessing bullying incidents to raise awareness, garnering support from faculty and community, coordinating prevention efforts, responding promptly to bullying, engaging with high school students to address their concerns, establishing clear rules, increasing adult supervision, sustaining long-term efforts, and providing training in bullying prevention and response (Bradshaw et al., 2007, as cited in Tan, 2022). Further, school leaders can take initiatives to reduce bullying by actively gathering information about incidents that occur within their school premises. Establishing partnerships with community members who can serve as positive role models or sources of support for high school students is another effective approach (Loveless, 2023).

Moreover, in Judge Feliciano Belmonte Sr. High School (JFBSHS) in Quezon City implemented "Bully No More". This initiative for prevention and intervention aims to establish a positive and safe learning environment that is "inclusive and accepting, regardless of ethnicity, religion, social status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender experience, age, or disability." School leaders believe that students can achieve their maximum capabilities in an inclusive, accepting educational setting where their rights are ensured. JFBSHS introduced "Magulang Kabalikat sa Bantay Seguridad" in short MAKABASE, empowering the participants of parents to prevent physical bullying at school. Since the implementation of MAKABASE, school leaders have observed a notable reduction in instances of various physical abuse and bullying within school (Department of Education, 2018).

Apart from this, Españo and Hidalgo (2021) pointed out that each school is required to establish an Anti-Bullying Committee to ensure the protection of children from bullying and to implement intervention and counseling programs for both bullies and victims. This includes conducting orientation activities for students and parents or guardians regarding the school's Anti-Bullying Policy. Further, getting support from school leaders and teachers should be the first step in a successful intervention. Empowering students to advocate for victims is key element of many anti-bullying initiatives (Brown et al., 2018).

Along with, Lester (2018) found that the transition to secondary school is a critical period for bullying prevention. School leaders have initiated the "Friendly School Project", designed to reduced bullying and

aggressive behavior among 3,000 students entering secondary education. Further, this project includes customized training and resources for participating schools, employing a comprehensive, multi-level strategy. The approach covers classroom curriculum, school policies and procedures, the social and physical environment, pastoral care strategies, and the connections between school, home, and community (Barnes et al., 2018).

Additionally, through fostering collaboration with these stakeholders, schools can develop comprehensive strategies that address bullying at different levels (Freedman, 2018). Further, implementing policies and consequences, promoting reporting, fostering a positive environment, providing support for victims, teaching about bullying, and engaging parents and community, can collaborate to establish a safe and supportive school atmosphere for all students (Williams, 2023).

### **Effectiveness of Anti-Bullying Programs**

Bullying laws like Department of Education policies may require specific measures, such as clear definitions in handbooks, to address bullying. Implementing prevention programs and strict disciplinary measures fosters awareness and accountability, creating a safer and inclusive school environment for all (Manzella, 2018). Further, Cervancia et al. (2019) emphasized that all educators must be knowledgeable about the DepEd Child Protection Policy due to their parental responsibilities in caring for, teaching, and overseeing their students. Furthermore, the authors noted that reporting incidents is important for the effective implementation of the DepEd Child Protection Policy, as it facilitates the prevention and early detection of child abuse and bullying.

Moreover, to create schools where both students and teachers can experience well-being, the primary step is to identify methods to prevent, reduce, and combat bullying. This is essential because the safety and security of everyone in the school can only be ensured in the absence of violence, aggression, or bullying. The initial step towards this goal is raising awareness of bullying and understanding its personal and social impacts (Draghicescu, 2019). In line with this, teachers and school staff need to be vigilant in monitoring for bullying, especially after implementing anti-bullying programs. They should have built strong ties with families, community members, and organizations for help during tough times. There should be ways to get written or spoken feedback from everyone involved, and counseling services should be available for students, teachers, and staff (Learning for Justice, 2017).

Additionally, Shattnawi (2022) stated that effective bullying prevention necessitates a clear definition of bullying communicated to the entire community, including school leaders, school personnel, students, parents and other stakeholders. To ensure a safe learning environment for students to thrive and develop, students need to acquire skills in effective communication, conflict resolution, and empathy towards others. Further, encouraging collaboration among teachers, students, and parents enhances the effectiveness of anti-bullying efforts and fosters a positive school climate (Bilz & Fischer, 2019).

Also, the most effective strategies for preventing bullying within the school environment involves a comprehensive approach that employs various activities aimed at reducing occurrence of bullying (Dake et al., 2003, as cited in Cuervo et al., 2021b). Apart from this, activities promoting empathy, such as role-playing scenarios, aid in empathy development. Early empathy training, starting as young as five years old, helps prevent bullying behaviors. School counselors and psychologists can implement empathy training to teach respect and dignity (Ricks et al., 2019).

Essentially, it is crucial to involve families in intervention and prevention programs. Educating parents about the nature and dangers of bullying allows them to positively influence their children's attitudes and



behaviors. By teaching them proper social conduct, parents can help their children develop healthy peer relationships (Abocejo & Mingoa, 2021). Significantly, the involvement of families in these prevention efforts is crucial, as their contributions can assist students in adhering to prevention activities and guidance within the school environment. Hence, family members often play crucial roles in fostering students' development of healthy behavioral patterns (Leff et al., 2001, as cited in Turhan, 2020).

In connection to that, Marvin (2024) revealed that supporting stakeholders and the community play a vital role in school bullying prevention. By providing a supportive network for students who have been affected by bullying. Further, through early intervention, proactive measures, and the provision of resources and support, these stakeholders and community contribute to creating a safe and inclusive school environment where students can thrive. Furthermore, Mayorga-Casanova (2020) supported the idea that when stakeholders were actively engaged, students were more likely to enjoy and value learning. These stakeholders also showed greater concern for implementing policies and resolving conflicts, resulting in fewer issues among students. Likewise, school leaders must create a positive environment where every student feels safe, respected, treated fairly, and valued. It is important for schools to communicate to students that they matter and have the potential to improve their lives. Also, students and teachers have good relationships built on love and care for each other (Konko, 2018).

### **Impact of Leadership Involvement in Bullying Prevention**

Bullying in high schools' level is one of the serious concerns for school leaders, teachers as well as the parents. The relationship between bullying and the atmosphere of the school has been recognized, various strategies aim to improve this environment. Leadership involvement in initiating change is crucial, as it leads to behavioral changes reported by students and conveys a clear message that bullying is unacceptable and will not be tolerated (Bosworth et al., 2018).

In connection to that, Das et al. (2019) found that school leaders can actively involve themselves in preventing and resolving bullying incidents by implementing effective anti-bullying policies and interventions, promoting awareness, and ensuring that students and staff feel supported in reporting and addressing bullying behaviors. Moreover, Daguasi (2020) emphasized that when bullying happens at school, one of the intervention strategies done by the school leaders is to have a meeting with the bully, the victim, and sometimes a few witnesses. In this way, both the bully and the victim are given counselling and aims to resolve the issue promptly. Further, a letter reporting the incident and seeking assistance in advising the involved students will then be forwarded to the parents of the students.

In the meantime, school leaders and teachers bear the responsibility for both preventing and addressing bullying behaviors, as they typically oversee student conduct in the daily school and respond to bullying incidents. They also engage with various stakeholders, including parents, in managing this phenomenon (De Luca et al., 2019). Therefore, it's crucial for them to possess a clear understanding of bullying behavior's characteristics, distinguishing it from other forms of aggression like arguments or conflicts, and to be equipped with evidence-based solutions for prevention and intervention. This understanding enables them to effectively and promptly intervene in bullying situations while recognizing the issue's significance (Hossieni, 2023).

### **Case Studies on Successful Initiative Implementation**

Bullying is happening more often now, not just because victims are more willing to speak up, but also because the number of cases keeps increasing every year (Cascales & Prieto, 2019b). Further, according

to Martin-Moya and Sainz (2023b), experts have developed various programs for schools to prevent bullying and address it when it happens in the classroom. School leaders and program experts provided insights into various prevention programs. The study revealed high ratings for the KiVa, TEI, and Mediation Teams programs, indicating they effectively meet school needs and prevent aggression and bullying. These findings underscore the programs' success in eliminating bullying and aggression in schools, which is their primary goal.

Moreover, these findings support the study of Perkins (2022), which stated that schools can effectively combat bullying by implementing and enforcing a comprehensive policy that clearly defines bullying, instructs teachers and staff on addressing incidents, outlines procedures for handling bullying cases, and specifies disciplinary actions as consequences. All students need to be aware of the consequences of bullying. The school policy must clearly define all forms of bullying behavior. Additionally, school leaders should carefully gather information about the incident without rushing to a decision due to the crisis itself. They should approach each situation with an open mind, ask questions to determine if a student was acting out of ignorance rather than intent to harm, understanding the motivation will help frame the response to the incident (Learning for Justice, 2017).

Further, supporting individuals who have experienced bullying helps them restore their confidence, assertiveness and self-worth. This can be accomplished through various methods, such as offering counseling, support groups, and mentoring programs that emphasize building resilience, self-esteem and coping skills (Jansen, 2024). Also, Smith-Adcock et al. (2018) stated that anti-bullying legislation mandates school staff-including school leaders, teachers, school psychologists, and school counselors-develop and enforce related policies and procedures. In addition, school resource officers play a larger role in preventing violence and bullying.

### **Leaders' Perspectives on Anti-Bullying Initiatives**

School leaders face obstacles such as resource constraints and the need for enhanced training when implementing effective strategies against bullying. They emphasized the importance of adopting a school-wide approach and the need for increased support to promote a safer environment (Hasibuan & Rizana, 2023b). Moreover, educating about anti-bullying might also encourage positive behaviors like responsibility and accountability (Kazmierczak, 2018).

Furthermore, it is essential for ensuring the safety and well-being of the entire school community. To prevent and address student bullying effectively, it is crucial to consistently implement policies and procedures and to communicate anti-bullying strategies and practices widely. This includes having a clearly defined process for parents and students to report bullying confidentially and a clear plan of action for staff to follow when bullying is observed or reported (New South Wales Department of Education, 2023). Also, the findings align with Millacci (2024), emphasizing the need for school leaders to clearly define bullying for students. Clear definitions help students recognize and report bullying effectively, while consistent intervention by school leaders and stakeholders promotes moral engagement, improves peer relationships, reduces moral disengagement, and prevents bullying.

Moreover, collaboration and trust among school leaders and teachers, along with positive perceptions of school effectiveness, promotes positive student behavior. When school leaders prioritize bullying prevention, it reflects in the school's ability to address bullying effectively (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018). Also, this involvement may include implementing policies and initiatives to reduce bullying, such as monitoring

routines, meeting involving parents, students, and teachers, and ensuring that all school staff are committed to anti-bullying interventions (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017).

Apart from this, the study's result conducted by Mileo (2023), school leaders should establish guidelines that emphasize respect, inclusivity, and kindness. For example, implementing rules that promote positive language can create an environment of mutual respect. They should also reinforce positive behavior by acknowledging and rewarding it, thereby fostering a culture where students understand and value the importance of treating others kindly. School leaders should encourage students to embrace their uniqueness by celebrating diverse qualities. In addition, Sheehan (2023) emphasized that school and even the classroom should exemplify positive and inclusive conduct, fostering a culture that values diversity and reject any form of bullying behaviors, school leaders effectively role-model appropriate responses to bullying for both students and staff.

### **Lessons Learned from Implementation on Anti-Bullying Initiatives**

School leaders have reported an improvement in the school setting and improved relationships among students and teachers since implementing anti-bullying programs. This underscores the positive impact of such efforts on the school atmosphere. Governments and public authorities play a crucial role in addressing this pervasive issue. Public schools should allocate sufficient funding to support the establishment of safe learning environments (Cantera et al., 2021). Further, Bilz and Fischer (2019), emphasized the importance of educating school leaders about bullying and working to improve their confidence and efficacy when addressing bullying incidents

Certainly, conducting orientations, lectures, seminars, team-building activities, and counseling sessions aims to increase students' awareness of their responsibilities under the "Anti-Bullying Policy" in secondary schools in the Northeastern Cagayan. Educating students about the whole group's role in preventing bullying is essential for maintaining a positive environment, and fostering anti-bullying norms. It is vital for school leaders and teachers to clearly communicate their anti-bullying attitudes to students (Pinera et al., 2022). Moreover, according to Allen et al. (2018), school leaders learned that Learning Together (LT) intervention, which incorporates restorative practices, social and emotional skills education, and student participation in decision-making, effectively reduces bullying and aggression while enhancing student health and wellbeing.

In addition, school leaders learned the importance of continuing and enhancing training programs for administrators, teachers, students, and parents to develop knowledge and policies that strengthen anti-bullying efforts. They emphasized the need for a dedicated Anti-Bullying Center within schools to support victims and address bullying incidents. Integrating anti-bullying programs into the curriculum ensures these principles are part of everyday lessons. It is vital for stakeholders to address bullying cases proactively and ensure effective intervention for both victims and perpetrators to overcome implementation challenges (Mercado et al., 2019). Also, creating supportive environments in classrooms and school-wide models like positive behavior support systems are crucial in preventing bullying (Benlarbi et al., 2021).

### **Recommendations and Best Practices for Addressing Bullying**

Every school must form an Anti-Bullying Committee to safeguard children from bullying and implement intervention and counseling programs for both bullies and victims. More so, educating school leaders and teachers about the consequences of bullying and effective prevention methods is a highly successful

strategy for reducing bullying. With greater support from school leaders and teachers, bullying can be minimized in schools (Ren et al., 2020). Further, effective intervention measures to combat bullying involve collaboration between school leaders, counselors, and psychologists. Through fostering collaboration with these specialists, schools can develop comprehensive strategies that address bullying at different levels, thereby cultivating a more supportive and secure learning atmosphere (Freedman, 2018).

In like manner, introducing mandatory lessons on non-violence and human rights education into the curriculum could potentially reduce bullying and play a strategic role in cultivating values among students (Abagao et al., 2021). For instance, physical education and sports classes contribute positively to reducing bullying among middle school students. It helps students improve their physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and emotional abilities while alleviating daily stressors (Belkheir et al., 2021).

Apart from this, activities promoting empathy, such as role-playing scenarios, aid in empathy development that helps prevent bullying behaviors. School counselors and psychologists can implement empathy training to teach respect and dignity (Ricks et al., 2019). Indeed, school leaders emphasized the importance of respecting and embracing student diversity, demonstrating inclusive behavior, promoting a culture of diversity, and condemning any acts of bullying. By embodying these positive attitudes and actions, they serve as effective role models for both students and staff in addressing and preventing bullying incidents (Wilshaw, 2015, as cited in Putra, 2023).

The aforementioned review of related literature and related studies underscored the emergence of the challenges, coping strategies, and insights of school leaders in addressing bullying initiatives. The discussion highlighted the importance of leadership practices in dealing with bullying issues. The related literature presented in the study was interconnected as they collectively addressed and focused on the challenges, coping strategies, and insights of school leaders in the context of bullying. Given all the theories presented in my study, they are all interrelated since they discussed and focused on the challenges, coping strategies, and insights of school leaders. Further, this study aimed to address the gap by focusing exclusively on the initiatives of public junior high school leaders in addressing bullying in the school, particularly in the Division of Tagum City, Davao del Norte because of the limited number of qualitative studies that specifically focused on the initiatives of school leaders in addressing bullying within school.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter presents the methods used in conducting this qualitative inquiry. It covers the research design, research participants, role of the researcher, data sources, data collection procedure, data analysis, trustworthiness of the study, and ethical considerations.

#### **Research Design**

This research study utilized the qualitative research design employing a phenomenological approach that seeks to determine the lived experiences, coping strategies, and insights of initiatives of public junior high school leaders in addressing bullying in the school. According to Bhandari (2020), qualitative research as a comprehensive method involving the collection and evaluate of non-numerical data, such as text, video or audio, to comprehend concepts, thoughts or experiences. It can also be used to learn more about a problem or to develop new research ideas.

In this study, the qualitative research design employed interviews, particularly the in-depth interview, as

well as processes for acquiring data to answer the research questions in line with the qualitative research approach. By employing qualitative methods, the study aimed to delve deeply into the nuances and perspectives of the participants, allowing for a rich and comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

Furthermore, according to Cresswell (2013), phenomenological research described the shared meaning of a topic or phenomenon for a group of people. The main purpose of this method was to obtain a description of the nature of the specific phenomena. In addition, this approach aimed to explain the sense of an experience and what was observed and how it was experienced (Martimianakis et al., 2020).

In this study, phenomenology was employed to examine on the commonality of the participants' experiences in terms of their initiatives in addressing bullying in the schools in the Division of Tagum City, Davao del Norte. Thus, using the qualitative-phenomenological method, I was able to unveil and understand the challenges of school leaders in addressing bullying initiatives.

Since the focus of this study was on the commonality of the actual experiences of school leaders and understanding their initiatives in addressing bullying, where first-person perspectives were gathered through in-depth interviews, a qualitative-phenomenological approach was applied. The data gathered were summarized, transcribed, translated, and analyzed through the process of thematic analysis. Also, I followed the trustworthiness of the study to evaluate its worth and adhered to ethical considerations to comply with the research ethics.

### **Research Participants**

The participants of this study were 10 school leaders from public junior high schools in the Division of Tagum City, Davao del Norte. The determination of the number of participants in this study followed Cresswell (1998) who disclosed that in a phenomenological study, there should be at least five (5) to twenty-five (25) participants. It was also believed that even a sample of ten (10) could represent a fair size since the most relevant and important thing in qualitative research is the quality, not the quantity (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Additionally, the aforementioned inclusion criteria adhered to the purposive sample technique (Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling involved the deliberate selection of participants based on their characteristics (Bernard, 2006). This comprises locating and selecting individuals or groups of people who were highly educated or skilled in a certain area of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Therefore, I used the purposive sampling method considering the limited availability of participants and ensured that selected participants provided the necessary information for this study.

Thus, in this study, I had sufficient knowledge about the purpose of the study that enabled me to properly choose and approach those qualified participants based on the following inclusion criteria: (a) had to be assigned as a school leader to a public school in the Division of Tagum City; (b) had to have at least three (3) years in service as a public junior high school leader; (c) had to be school leaders from public junior high schools. I ensured that participants were selected thoroughly based on these selection criteria with different genders and varying years in service to ensure maximum variation in the study. Further, the exclusion criteria for participants in this study were as follows: (a) school leaders from private schools in the Tagum City; (b) school leaders with less than three (3) years of service as a public junior high school leaders; (c) school leaders from public senior high schools.



### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher's role in qualitative research was to understand and access the feelings and thoughts of the participants. It was not a simple process because it involved asking questions to the participants about things that may seem very personal to them. Also, as a qualitative researcher, I ensured the safety of the participants and their data. Thus, it was the primary responsibility of the researcher to ensure the direction and progress of the study (Austin & Sutton, 2015). In particular, the roles of the researcher in this study in a logical manner as follows:

First, I ensured that ethical considerations and measures were implemented throughout this research work. I adhered to guidelines such as social value, informed consent, the vulnerability of the research participants, risk, benefits, and safety; privacy and confidentiality, justice, transparency, qualification of the researchers, adequacy of facilities, and community involvement. These ethical considerations helped me in making the research possible and ensuring accurate as well as reliable results.

Second, I served as an interviewer. As an interviewer, I prepared and constructed the interview guide, which underwent validation by experts. The interviews and discussions were conducted face-to-face. I ensured that I scheduled dates and times with my participants for the in-depth interviews, in agreement with each participant's availability. This way of ensuring that every single detail of the participant's responses was documented and recorded using an audio recorder, camera, and other necessary materials.

Third, I served as a transcriber. I transcribed everything that took place during the conduct of in-depth interviews by using the required format of the qualitative research transcription to analyze and study the data in detail. Also, part of my responsibility was to verify that the transcript accurately reflected the participants' account by providing them with the opportunity to review and check it and the recorded data was carefully transcribed into written text.

Fourth, as someone who ensured the entire interview was properly documented and recorded. I utilized different devices such as cell phones to record the participants' responses. I ensured the verbatim recording of the shared experiences, coping mechanisms, and thoughts of the initiatives of public junior high school leaders in addressing bullying, as it was essential for the realization of this research work.

Fifth, I ensured to translate participants' responses into standard English format. Before the interview, I informed the participants that they could answer in their preferred language or dialect, and I transformed the recorded data into written texts by carefully listening to the recordings multiple times to guarantee accuracy and correctness. Then, I translated their responses during the preparation of the data for the presentation of results.

Lastly, as a primary data analyst, it was part of my role and responsibility to analyze all gathered data and information from the interviews after transcribing it. I ensured that the text from the recorded data was well-analyzed to identify the themes of the participants' responses. Afterward, I collaborated with my data analyst to review the analysis that I formulated, ensuring that ethical standards were observed throughout the process.

### **Data Sources**

Most qualitative studies collected data through conducting interviews with the participants. Thus, interviews were most transparent and easiest way to collect detailed data about a phenomenon (Barret & Twycross, 2018). Likewise, other common data sources of qualitative approach include in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and document reviews (Sargeant, 2012).

Thus, in this study, I utilized the responses obtained from in-depth interviews (IDI) of my participants. They were asked to provide answers and share their experiences based on the open-ended questions found in the interview guide. Additionally, data collection took place in the public junior high schools within the Division of Tagum City, Davao del Norte.

Likewise, an in-depth interview was a qualitative research technique enabling face-to-face discussions that unveiled deeper insights into people's thoughts, emotions, and actions concerning significant issues. Since this style of interview was frequently unstructured, the interviewer might urge an informant to speak in depth about the issue of interest (Shaiekh, 2015). It was recognized as an efficient approach for gathering data with the purpose of obtaining deep insights into the perspectives and experiences of interviewees regarding a particular topic (Parveen & Showkat, 2017). In this study, it is also attempted to unravel the meaning of people's experiences and unveil the lived world. The audiotape recorder, notebook, and cell phones were prepared to record the participants' responses.

Lastly, secondary sources such as reliable publications, websites, books, journal articles, and references mentioned in the related review of literature of this study were used to support the findings. According to Streefkerk (2021), secondary sources provided second-hand information and commentary from other researchers typically describing, interpreting, or synthesizing primary sources.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Data collection involved a systematic approach to gathering information or measures, providing researchers with firsthand knowledge and varied insights into the research problem (Bhandari, 2021). Data was collected in a non-structured and flexible manner in qualitative research. Additionally, in qualitative research, data collection occurred in a non-structured and adaptable manner. Further, qualitative researchers served as major research tools that will be used to collect and analyze data as they were closely connected in the natural settings of the participants (Clark & Veale, 2018). Therefore, in this study, I utilized the essential steps required for the data collection process, as follows:

First, this research underwent an ethics review in the St. Mary's College, Tagum Inc. (SMCTI)- Research Ethics Committee (REC) to secure a certificate of approval to conduct this study and an endorsement letter from the Dean of Graduate Education after submitting the necessary documents related to the study.

Second, I sent a communication letter asking permission to conduct the study to the Office of the School Division Superintendent of Tagum City with an endorsement letter from the Dean of Graduate Education Program. Once the letter was approved, another letter was sent to the public junior high school leaders who had the potential to be participants in this study.

Third, prior to the interviews, I oriented them through in-person interaction or in a virtual platform, asked for permission to conduct my study, and scheduled a convenient time for face-to-face interviews using the interview guide questionnaire that I constructed and prepared, which was validated by the experts. During the interviews, I provided participants with an Informed Consent Form face to face, which served as proof and verification of their voluntary participation by affixing their signatures. I allowed them to use their dialect and declined any questions they were not comfortable to answering. I also asked for permission to record their responses during the entire interview duration. Each participant was interviewed individually at their preferred time and venue.

Finally, I ensured the security of participants' answers by storing recorded files on a separate drive with a password and they were discarded after 3 years. Only the researcher, my adviser, and the data analyst had access to the gathered data. Participants' responses were transcribed verbatim, and thematic analysis was

applied to organize and present the collected data for analysis in the study.

### **Data Analysis**

After conducting the data collection procedures and completing the interviews, the gathered data were systematically organized, reviewed, transcribed, translated, and analyzed. According to Wong (2008), qualitative data analysis involved the act of exploring and organizing non-textual resources like interview transcripts, observation notes, or other non-textual materials, to gain a deeper insight into the phenomenon study. The most common method involved reading numerous transcripts to identify similarities and differences, subsequently determining themes and categories.

In this study, I engaged in data coding and thematic analysis. I classified the data to form comprehensive themes. I began by reviewing the initial responses from my participants to construct a coding scheme. This involved identifying the essence or content of these responses to apply appropriate labels. After that, I proceeded to categorize and group the information into codes, then into categories, and ultimately into major themes. To achieve this, I utilized five (5) specific steps: first, I thoroughly read through the data multiple times; second, I divided the text into segments of information; third, I labeled the segments of information with codes; fourth, I reduced the overlap or any redundancy codes and categorized those remaining codes; and fifth, I collapsed the codes into major themes.

Furthermore, after following the aforementioned steps, I collaborated with my research adviser and data analyst to ensure the accuracy of the core ideas and major themes that I formulated.

### **Trustworthiness of the Study**

In a qualitative study, achieving trustworthiness was crucial. It involved ensuring readers' confidence in the researcher's interpretations and reported findings. Assessing the trustworthiness of a study was essential for evaluating its worth (Stahi & King, 2020). Furthermore, this study adhered to Shenton's (2004) four strategies for ensuring trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

**Credibility** in qualitative research was vital, indicating the extent to which findings accurately reflected participants' experiences. Researchers established credibility through persistent engagement, extended periods, and triangulation. Extend involvement entailed dedicating ample time to the research, engaging closely with participants, and thoroughly observing their actions, leading to comprehensive insights. Persistent observation involved keeping an open-minded attitude, acknowledging personal bias, and engaging self-reflection throughout the study (Adler, 2022).

In order to obtain credibility, I accomplished establishing credibility measures such as the following prompts or rephrased the questions to organized answers to formulate relevant data.

Further, Dizon and Shenton (2003), described iterative questioning as the practice to help ensure participant honesty; iterative questioning during in-depth interview, member checking, detailed description of the phenomenon under investigation, triangulation, and a review of previous research finding to establish credibility measures. An essential measure in implementing the study was a well-established method to incorporate accurate operational phases.

In the context of the study, I utilized the experts' reviewed and validated interview guide. To solicit rich information among participants, I asked follow-up questions during the interviews to gather rich and valuable data. Also, I gave the interviewees additional of revisiting previously mentioned points with participants by rephrasing questions to analyze the consistency of the data that the individual provided at

various points during the discussion. Moreover, it referred to the systematic, repetitive, and recursive processes in qualitative data analysis. It enabled researchers to accurately comprehend details and gain a profound understanding of the data presented by participants.

In the context of this study, employing iterative questioning during the in-depth interviews helped me uncover intentional lies and verify the accuracy of the participants' statements by asking the same question but rephrasing it. Moreover, it enabled participants to rationalize and organize their responses, resulting in more visible and meaningful data that being generated.

Furthermore, member checking was another method to ensure credibility. According to Shenton (2004), member checking involved asking the participants to review transcripts of their dialogues. This method allowed participants to read and review the contents of the document. Participants were permitted to set, validate, assess, disapprove, or countercheck the transcripts and records the summarized findings to enhance credibility in my study.

In this study, participants had an opportunity to check to ensure that the written content accurately reflected what they expressed during the interview. Additionally, the analyzed and interpreted data were shared with participants for them to review, ensuring alignment with their intentions and allowing correction if any misinterpretations of their responses occurred.

**Dependability** was achieved by carefully following the chosen process and methodology, while remaining adaptable to any changes during the study. This ensured stability in findings over time, contributing to the trustworthiness of the research by establishing consistency and repeatability in the results. The study's interpretation and recommendations were supported by the data received from the participants of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

To address dependability, I accomplished provisions to assess appropriate research practices on the maintenance of process logs, employment of overlapping methods of in-depth interviews (IDI) to reach data saturation, and the in-depth methodological descriptions to allow the study to be repeated. As a researcher, I updated on the process, schedules, and flow charts of conducting the study. These measures helped me on what to know, do, and accomplish in every key stage of the research process.

Moreover, triangulation involved using multiple methods, theories, and/ or investigators to investigate a research question. This approach aimed to enhance the validity and credibility of the research findings while reducing the impact of biases. It helped mitigate the limitations inherent in using a single method or data source, thereby increasing the overall rigor of the study (Bhandari, 2023b).

In this study, I used triangulation of data to support that my study was dependable. Also, the participants evaluated and validated if the data reordering was valid. Further, I ensured to comprehensively explain the methodology and methods, enabling future researchers to evaluate whether the appropriate research techniques and practices were followed.

Moreover, to ensure dependability, I established procedures to evaluate proper research practices, maintained process logs, use overlapping methods in in-depth interviews (IDI) to achieve data saturation, and provided in-depth methodological descriptions for study replication. As a researcher, I updated the process regularly, schedules, and deadlines based on the research matrix, diagrams, and flow charts for conducting the study. These measures helped me understand what to know, do, and accomplish at every stage of the research process. Likewise, seeking feedback and guidance from my research advisor helped me to provide valuable insights and assistance throughout the research endeavor.

**Confirmability** pertained to the extent to which findings could be independently verified or validated by others (Guba & Lincoln, 1983, as cited in Trochim, 2020). It was crucial for ensuring that research results

were not influenced by bias, whether conscious or unconscious, by enabling other researchers to replicate the findings (Devault, 2019). Likewise, to establish confirmability in this study, I openly acknowledged my research beliefs and assumptions, recognized the study's limitations, provided in-depth methodological descriptions to allow for integrity of research results to be scrutinized, and maintained an audit trail. As a researcher, I prioritized aligning the study's findings with the expectations and ideas of the research participants, rather than my own interests and desires.

In the context of this study, I ensured that the findings of my study were derived from the participants' narratives by thoroughly examining raw data, including recordings, written field notes, and other documents. Further, I transparently described the collection and analysis of data, which involved detailing the coding process present in the table, transitioning from individual codes to themes, and explaining the rationale behind clustering codes to form themes. This transparency aimed at providing clarity to readers regarding decision-making processes related to findings and recommendations, while also demonstrating that the analysis logically aligned with the narratives provided by my participants.

Audit trail was also included to ensure dependability. The audit trail was used to easily analyze the data of the study. Carcay (2020) mentioned that an audit trail allowed readers to trace through a researcher's reasoning and determine whether the study's results could be relied upon as a platform for further inquiry. In-depth methodological descriptions were used in this study to allow for its repetition.

**Transferability** in qualitative research denoted the extent to which findings could be applied to diverse contexts. It was primarily the responsibility of the one generalizing from a qualitative perspective. Researchers can improve transferability by offering detailed insights into the research context and underlying assumptions. Moreover, the decision to transfer findings to a different context lay with the individual seeking to do so (Trochim, 2020).

In addressing transferability, I made sure to provide background data to establish the study's context, offered a detailed description of the phenomenon for comparison, and a detailed description of the research process that was documented, ensuring it was traceable, and logical to achieved transferability. Moreover, the methods and procedures were explicitly documented in this study so other researchers with similar topics could replicate them. A thick informative description of the method employed in describing the focus of this study made it possible to equate the context of this study with other possible contexts in which the transition might be viewed.

Furthermore, I ensured complete anonymity and confidentiality of the collected data by using discrete codes. All research information was securely stored in locked files at all times, with the folder protected by a strict password. The participants were provided with specific information and a detailed description of the study's results, enabling them to apply relevant conclusions to their own situations.

### **Ethical Consideration**

In research, ethical considerations encompassed principles that guided research designs and practices. Adhering to a specific code of conduct was essential for researchers when gathering data from individuals. The choice of research topics and the methods employed in the research process inherently involved key ethical considerations (Bhandari, 2021). Moreover, to ensure that the study was conducted ethically, the study reviewed by the SMCTI-REC before conducting the study.

Thus, this study underwent the protocol of the SMCTI-REC. Further, participants' full consent was obtained before conducting the interview. Their privacy protection was ensured, and they were assured of the confidentiality of their answers. I adhere to guidelines set by the National Ethical Guidelines for Health



and Health-Related Research 2017 such as the following: social value; informed consent; vulnerability of research participants; risks, benefits, and safety; privacy and confidentiality; justice; transparency; qualification of researchers; adequacy of facilities and community involvement.

**Social Value.** One of the reasons why this study was conducted was its social value. It referred to the ethical concept that addressed the social problem and challenges as well as the positive impact of an action or decision on the well-being of society. It went beyond individual benefit and focused on the broader consequences of choices for the community, environment, and future generations (Wenner, 2018).

This study was conducted to contribute to research on school leaders' initiatives in addressing bullying in the school. It revealed the challenges and insights into how public junior high school leaders initiatively addressed this issue. Further, the results of this study provided policy recommendations, and practices, and the development of relevant leadership programs, and new interventions for the Department of Education (DepEd)-Tagum City. Additionally, the findings served as a reference for future research, helping teachers, and students and inspiring school leaders to enhance their leadership in addressing bullying in schools and classrooms.

**Informed Consent.** This was defined such that all potential participants received and comprehend the necessary information to decide their participation. This consent included details such as the researcher's identity and affiliation, an invitation to participate, reasons for selection, voluntary participation, research purpose, procedures, participant benefits, and foreseeable risks or discomfort, including the health or well-being of the individual's spouse or partner (Bhandari, 2023b).

Before beginning the study, consent was obtained from the participants. This involved an orientation that explained the purposes of the study and the different dimensions of the ethical considerations, ensuring their full understanding and willingness to participate. Written permission was obtained as proof of their consent. Participants were also be informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were rigorously maintained to protect participants' identities, allowing them to share information freely or withhold it as desired.

Also, informed consent was provided individually among research participants. These forms were translated into the local language and discussed the purpose of the study. It was be employed to ensure they fully understood what they would asked to do and thereby make an informed judgement about the effect of their interview. Moreover, participants were assured that they would not be exposed to harm in any manner and would not be pressured to answer questions they felt uncomfortable responding to. The place or venue for the conduct of the in-depth interview took into primary consideration of the confidentiality of information and of the participants.

Thus, I ensured that all files were keep highly confidential, whether hard copies or soft copies, in adherence to the Data Privacy Act. Only I had access to these files. They were also disposed of three (3) years upon completion of the study.

**Vulnerability of Research Participants.** This was defined as a fundamental aspect of ethical considerations in human subject research. It entailed minimizing risks to individuals and providing them with necessary protection. Each of the participants required additional protection (Gordon, 2020).

Furthermore, everyone who was involved in this study, including the researcher and participants, was considered vulnerable. Participants were recruited through in-person interactions or via messenger, prioritizing their well-being. Careful consideration was given to the physical, psychological, or social harm participants may experience, and steps were taken to mitigate these risks. This involved adapting study procedures or excluding certain groups from participation if the risks were deemed too high.

Confidentiality of participants' identities was ensured, with guarantees against any possibility of identification. The commitment was to provide necessary safeguarding to ensure their autonomy and to treat them with dignity and respect.

**Risks, Benefits, and Safety.** This is defined as that researcher's obligation to safeguard participants' autonomy while ensuring full disclosure of study factors, including potential risks, benefits, and safety concerns. Additionally, the beneficence principle entails respecting participants' right to freedom from harm and discomfort, such as physical harm, privacy loss, unforeseen side effects, emotional distress, monetary costs, physical discomfort, and time loss, as well as protection from exploitation. These potential risks and benefits were clearly specified in the written informed consent form used for the study (Barrow, 2022b).

Furthermore, regarding to risks, benefits, and safety, I secured the consent of the participants and ensured they were informed of the study's intention or purpose beforehand. Participants were not forced to participate and there was ensured protection as there are potential risk of being deceived or threaten to take part in the study. Furthermore, the conduct of In-depth interviews was scheduled at the most convenient time for the participants to minimize risks and ensure their safety.

Moreover, the experts checked the interview guide questions to ensure they did not cause harm. A thoroughly analysis of potential risks and benefits, implementing safety measures during both consent acquisition and the research process itself. Also, participants were informed of potential risks such as discomfort, inconvenience, shame, and mitigating measures were employed to minimize these risks. Additionally, the study's results and recommendations were shared with the Department of Education in Tagum City to help in the creation of programs, projects, activities, and interventions that may help address the bullying in school within the Division of Tagum City, Davao del Norte.

**Privacy and Confidentiality.** This is defined as the researchers maintained shared information in strict confidence. Protecting privacy typically required implementing measures such as anonymity or confidentiality procedures. Researchers ensured confidentiality by securely storing participants' identifying data and using code numbers instead of names, with a correlation key available only for emergency purposes (Cassell, 2000, as cited in Barrow, 2022b). In this study, I followed the principles of transparency, legitimate purpose, and proportionality outlined in the Data Privacy Act of 2012 when collecting, retaining, and processing personal information. I was ensure that my study and procedures align with these principles. These principles aligned with state policy, aiming to protect the human right of privacy and communication while promoting information flow for innovation and development.

Furthermore, since the study was conducted face to face, I ensured that my participant's right to privacy was protected. Recorded interviews were accessible to the researcher for transcription purposes and participants for verification. Further, the SMCTI-REC had direct access to information and data for verification and validation, as outlined in the Informed Consent Form. To uphold participant privacy, audio files containing interviews were destroyed. Similarly, codes assigned to participants in the informed consent were kept confidential. Moreover, I ensured the security of the research data and prevent any misrepresentation of the research's purpose and objectives. The flash drive containing the interviews was password-protected to restrict access solely to myself. Thus, obtained data was stored after the study was completed and destroyed it by burning the files and deleting all the electronic files or media containing personal data so that the information could not be read or reconstructed. Further, in this study, I maintained a high level of objectivity in data analysis and accurately cited the authors whose ideas were utilized.

**Justice.** This involved ensuring participants received fair and equal treatment. Selection criteria for rese-

arch participants aligned with research questions and aims to represent the target population as comprehensively as possible, without excluding any group. Fair treatment also extends to researchers treating those who declined participation impartially and without any prejudice (Cassell, 2000, as cited in Barrow, 2022b).

To ensure justice, I selected participants based on predetermined inclusion criteria directly related to the study, ensuring no discrimination occurred. Moreover, I ensured that participants did not bear any expenses during the interviews; instead, they received tokens to acknowledge their contributions. Beyond recognizing their input, participants validated the relevance of their testimonies as inspiration for school leaders facing bullying challenges in addressing bullying within school initiatives. Also, the results of my study were shared with participants to benefit their communities, particularly in addressing school bullying.

**Transparency.** By adhering to the principles of transparency, researchers can help ensure that their work is trustworthy, reliable, and of high quality. By upholding these standards, researchers can contribute to the betterment of society. Moreover, researchers must make their methods, data, and results openly available for scrutiny by the community (Colaiacomo, 2023b). In this study, transparency was considered an essential element. As the researcher, I ensured that my participants fully understood the main purpose of the study. I made sure that they were informed of their active involvement in the data-gathering phase through participation in the IDI, which required them to answer interview guide questions. Also, as a researcher, I shared the research results with my participants so they knew how the information they shared could improve programs, projects, and activities.

Moreover, I communicated the findings accurately. Also, as a researcher, I ensured that my participants were made aware that the expenses incurred in this research endeavor will be personally shouldered by the researcher. Proper communication was observed before the conduct of the study through written permission from the School Division Superintendent's Office in Tagum City and the office of the school leaders where the research took place.

**Qualification of the Researcher.** To be an excellent researcher necessitated a distinct combination of experiences, skills, and qualities. Ethical conduct was paramount, ensuring research was carried out with integrity, honesty, and respect for participants. Researchers adhered to rigorous ethical standards, conducting their work with transparency and integrity. In addition, they acknowledged any limitations, conflicts of interest, or biases that could influence the results (Thomas, 2023).

I possessed qualities like morals, honesty, transparency, preparedness for safety issues, vigilance, intellectual humility, cultural sensitivity, social awareness, scientific competence, and fortitude. I was capable of pursuing studies based on my credentials, proficiency, and training. Furthermore, I was guided by my research adviser who was more qualified in terms of research. I ensured that I pursued this study because I believed that I met the competence in conducting this study, making a careful design, and creating a worthwhile expected outcome and I also knew the limits of personal competence in research.

In connection, my thesis adviser was knowledgeable, equipped, and skillful in guiding me in my research work, particularly in qualitative-phenomenological research. He was involved in various research endeavors that include graduate and post graduate studies. He had also gained experience through several trainings relevant to research and had completed his Doctorate degree in Educational Leadership.

**Adequacy of Facilities.** The facilities were required to have the necessary equipment and resources to conduct the research properly. This included having access to specialized equipment, software, or other materials needed for data collection, analysis, and storage. Moreover, the adequacy of facilities was

essential for ensuring that research is conducted ethically and responsibly. By providing a safe, secure, and well-equipped environment, researchers can help protect the rights of participants and maintain the integrity of their research data (Office of Solution, 2023).

I ensured the availability and accessibility of necessary resources for this study. Utilizing books, online journals, and unpublished dissertations provided varied literature that supported my research study. Furthermore, as a researcher, I was equipped with audio recorders, cameras, and other necessary materials needed since the conduct of data collection was face-to-face. Moreover, I sought the approval of appropriate institutions and offices.

**Community Involvement.** Community involvement in research was endorsed by both researchers and communities to enhance participant's protection and improve research effectiveness. It had the capacity to enhance the dissemination, adoption and implementation of research results. This involved including stakeholders as partners in the research process, not just subjects or beneficiaries (Fregonese, 2018).

Prior to the conduct of this study, I sent a letter to the office of school leaders asking for permission to conduct a study in their schools and requesting endorsement to the office of the School Division Superintendent of Tagum City. Participants in this study provided the information needed for the research to proceed. Their involvement was crucial as the findings could contribute to the development of interventions aimed at addressing the issue of bullying within schools. Additionally, the results of this research study were disseminated to both internal and external stakeholders for awareness, and potential utilizations. This was achieved through proper communication with the office of School Division Superintendent in the Division of Tagum City, inclusion in school learning action cell (LAC) sessions, training programs, and other professional development initiatives.

Lastly, this chapter encompassed the research procedures and essential actions undertaken including discussions on the study's scope, focus, participants, involved offices, and authorities, and whose approval and consent were paramount before conducting research. In addition, it explained the systematic process of data collection, which is crucial in any research endeavor, followed by the analysis of data leading to the presentation of the results and findings. It underscored the importance of upholding the highest level of trustworthiness in research, achievable through rigorous steps and careful strategies. Also, it emphasized adherence to ethical considerations as a fundamental aspect of any research endeavor.

## DISCUSSIONS

### **Initiatives Taken by Leaders in Public Junior High School in Addressing Bullying**

School Leaders were chosen as participants, and they commonly shared initiatives taken by the leaders in Public Junior High School in addressing bullying. From the responses gathered, the following eight (8) major themes emerged: 1) utilizing school welfare, 2) raising awareness through information dissemination, 3) gaining assistance from stakeholders, 4) adhering to fundamental educational guidelines and policies, 5) following systematic guidelines and policies, 6) integrating concepts in the delivery of lessons and school activities, 7) establishing rapport and positive environment and 8) collaborative with others.

### **Utilizing School Welfare**

In line with this commitment, the Department of Education, along with its partners and stakeholders, acknowledged the necessity of a Child Protection Policy and was committed to ensuring that all schools provided an environment conducive to children's education. School leaders and stakeholders were

responsible for implementing preventive measures to address bullying. Furthermore, participants' responses clearly indicated that shared responsibilities among stakeholders involved engaging with students and utilizing specific resources to collaboratively achieve agreed-upon aims and goals for student well-being.

Moreover, each school is required to establish an Anti-Bullying Committee to ensure the protection of children from bullying and to implement intervention and counseling programs for both bullies and victims. This includes conducting orientation activities for students and parents or guardians regarding the school's Anti-Bullying Policy (Españo & Hidalgo, 2021). In addition to, getting support from school leaders and teachers should be the first step in a successful intervention. Empowering students to advocate for victims is key element of many anti-bullying initiatives (Brown et al., 2018).

Along with, the establishment of school safety teams tasked with cultivating a positive school environment. These teams typically comprise school leaders, teachers, a designated anti-bullying specialist, and a parent representative. They can intervene in situations creating a hostile environment and handle bullying incidents affecting the school atmosphere (Konko, 2018).

### **Raising Awareness through Information Dissemination**

Addressing bullying effectively required proactive measures through various strategies that included creating advocacy teams, conducting orientations or symposiums and launching a campaign for anti-bullying in the school by disseminating information about this matter. School leaders had to ensure that students were properly informed about the Anti-Bullying Policy with the help of the stakeholders. It was undeniable that having proactive measures would significantly enable them to get involved in the implementation, based on the participants' responses.

Certainly, conducting orientations, lectures, seminars, team-building activities, and counseling sessions aims to increase students' awareness of their responsibilities under the "Anti-Bullying Policy". Educating students about the whole group's role in preventing bullying is essential for maintaining a positive environment and fostering anti-bullying norms. It is vital for teachers to clearly communicate their anti-bullying attitudes to students (Pinera et al., 2022).

In addition, with this, every school must form an Anti-Bullying Committee to safeguard children from bullying and implement intervention and counseling programs for both bullies and victims. More so, educating school leaders and teachers about the consequences of bullying and effective prevention methods is a highly successful strategy for reducing bullying. With greater support from school leaders and teachers, bullying can be minimized in schools (Ren et al., 2020).

### **Gaining Assistance from Stakeholders**

Gaining assistance from stakeholders was crucial for effectively addressing and preventing bullying in educational environments. School leaders had to actively engage with stakeholders by consulting the Division Legal Officer for legal guidance, collaborating with community organizations, and showcasing the proactive measures of local government units (LGU's). By working closely with civic, religious, and Philippine National Police organizations, school leaders could create a strong support network. Moreover, they needed to interact with individuals outside the PTA to ensure efficient coordination and communication, fostering a comprehensive and united effort against bullying.

Furthermore, Marvin (2024) revealed that supporting stakeholders and the community play a vital role in school bullying prevention. By providing a supportive network for students who have been affected by



bullying. Further, through early intervention, proactive measures, and the provision of resources and support, these stakeholders and community contribute to creating a safe and inclusive school environment where students can thrive.

Moreover, Mayorga-Casanova (2020) emphasized that when stakeholders were actively engaged, students were more likely to enjoy and value learning. These stakeholders also showed greater concern for implementing policies and resolving conflicts, resulting in fewer issues among students. Apart from this, creating supportive environments in classrooms and school-wide models like positive behavior support systems are crucial in preventing bullying (Benlarbi et al., 2021).

### **Adhering to Fundamental Educational Guidelines and Policies**

Ensuring adherence to fundamental educational guidelines and policies, particularly the DepEd Child Protection Policy and Anti-Bullying Policies within schools, was crucial for creating a safe and supportive learning environment. The DepEd Child Protection Policy aimed to safeguard students from any form of abuse or violence, including bullying. Anti-bullying policies were designed to prevent and address bullying behaviors, fostering respect and empathy among students. Together, these policies promoted a nurturing atmosphere where students could thrive academically and socially, knowing they were protected and valued.

In line with this, the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013, also known as Republic Act No. 10627, mandates that all elementary and secondary schools implement policies to prevent and address bullying. These laws are to be enforced according to guidance and circular memos from DepEd. Schools are required to comply with these laws by adopting relevant policies and establishing intervention programs. These programs, which include counseling, life skills training, and other activities, aim to improve the psychological, emotional, and psychosocial well-being of both victims and bullies in public and private kindergarten, primary, and secondary schools (Abagao et al., 2021).

Furthermore, school leaders can actively contribute to the prevention and resolution of bullying incidents by implementing effective anti-bullying policies and interventions, promoting awareness, and ensuring that students and staff feel supported in reporting and addressing bullying behaviors. (Das et al., 2019).

### **Following Systematic Guidelines and Policies**

Following systematic guidelines and policies in addressing bullying was crucial for creating a safe and supportive environment. These guidelines ensured consistent, fair, and effective responses to bullying incidents, promoting a culture of respect and inclusivity. Participant responses confirmed that by adhering to established policies, schools could systematically prevent, identify, and address bullying, fostering well-being and safety for all individuals involved. This is not only helped in managing bullying effectively but also emphasized the importance of structured and strategic response to such critical issues.

In connection to this, school leaders act thoroughly, listening to both sides of any conflict. They implement measures to prevent unwanted behaviors and strive for resolutions that contribute to a sense of safety for the high school students involved. Hence, the support and initiative from school leaders are essential considerations when developing anti-bullying measures within the school setting (Arundel, 2022).

Moreover, School leaders must adopt a structured, multi-tiered approach to managing bullying, addressing issues at different administrative levels as needed. The process should start with the class adviser and escalate through the hierarchy only when necessary, ensuring a thorough and inclusive conflict resolution

method. Maintaining detailed narrative reports ensures transparency and accountability, fostering a collaborative effort to effectively resolve bullying incidents (Tan, 2020).

Additionally, when bullying happens at school, one of the intervention strategies done by the school leaders is to have a meeting with the bully, the victim, and sometimes a few witnesses. In this way, both the bully and the victim are given counselling and aims to resolve the issue promptly. Additionally, a letter reporting the incident and seeking assistance in advising the involved students will then be forwarded to the parents of the students (Daguasi, 2020).

### **Integrating Concepts in the Delivery of Lessons and School Activities**

To create a cohesive environment where students learned about empathy, respect, and conflict resolution alongside academic content, schools integrating these concepts into daily lessons and extracurricular activities. This approach fostered a culture of kindness and inclusion, ultimately helping to prevent and address bullying effectively. According to the participants, the integration of anti-bullying concepts into the delivery of lessons like Values Education and school activities was helpful in molding the students into better individuals.

In like manner, integrating anti-bullying programs into the curriculum ensures these principles are part of everyday lessons. It is vital for stakeholders to address bullying cases proactively and ensure effective intervention for both victims and perpetrators to overcome implementation challenges (Mercado et al., 2019). Further, introducing mandatory lessons on non-violence and human rights education into the curriculum could potentially reduce bullying and play a strategic role in cultivating values among students (Abagao et al., 2021). For instance, physical education and sports classes contribute positively to reducing bullying among middle school students. It helps students improve their physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and emotional abilities while alleviating daily stressors (Belkheir et al., 2021).

Apart from this, activities promoting empathy, such as role-playing scenarios, aid in empathy development that helps prevent bullying behaviors. School counselors and psychologists can implement empathy training to teach respect and dignity (Ricks et al., 2019). Indeed, school leaders emphasized the importance of respecting and embracing student diversity, demonstrating inclusive behavior, promoting a culture of diversity, and condemning any acts of bullying. By embodying these positive attitudes and actions, they serve as effective role models for both students and staff in addressing and preventing bullying incidents (Wilshaw, 2015, as cited in Putra, 2023).

### **Establishing Rapport and Positive Environment**

Establishing rapport and creating a positive environment were crucial themes in addressing bullying effectively. This approach focused on cultivating trust, respect, and open communication among individuals involved, whether they were victims, bullies, or bystanders. By fostering a supportive atmosphere, it became easier to identify and address bullying behaviors promptly. Encouraging empathy, active listening, and understanding helped to promote a sense of belonging and safety within the community, ultimately reducing incidents of bullying and creating a healthier social dynamic for everyone involved. Similarly, participants' responses indicated that this approach can effectively prevent bullying within the school, making students more aware of acceptable behaviors and leading to safer and more inclusive environment.

In connection to that, a positive school climate, where students feel safe, respected, and valued, can be cultivated through various strategies such as fostering respect and kindness, encouraging positive

relationships, and offering opportunities for student involvement in school activities. Creating such an environment makes students less likely to engage in bullying and more likely to report it when they witness it (Williams, 2023).

Furthermore, in Judge Feliciano Belmonte Sr. High School (JFBSHS) in Quezon City implemented “Bully No More”. This initiative for prevention and intervention aims to establish a positive and safe learning environment that is “inclusive and accepting, regardless of ethnicity, religion, social status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender experience, age, or disability.” School leaders believe that students can achieve their maximum capabilities in an inclusive, accepting educational setting where their rights are ensured. JFBSHS introduced “Magulang Kabalik sa Bantay Seguridad” in short MAKABASE, empowering the participants of parents to prevent physical bullying at school. Since the implementation of MAKABASE, school leaders have observed a notable reduction in instances of various physical abuse and bullying within school (Department of Education, 2018).

Thus, to create schools where both students and teachers can experience well-being, the primary step is to identify methods to prevent, reduce, and combat bullying. This is essential because the safety and security of everyone in the school can only be ensured in the absence of violence, aggression, or bullying. The initial step towards this goal is raising awareness of bullying and understanding its personal and social impacts (Draghicescu, 2019).

### **Collaborative with Others**

Two heads were better than one. When problems arose, help and support from others were sought, especially concerning the well-being of the students. Furthermore, it was the responsibility of school leaders to take the initiative to inform and orient the students about the school rules and policies. Participants in this study clearly stated that collaboration with others had a significant influence on the success of anti-bullying programs and initiatives.

Moreover, through fostering collaboration with these stakeholders, schools can develop comprehensive strategies that address bullying at different levels (Freedman, 2018). In addition to, implementing policies and consequences, promoting reporting, fostering a positive environment, providing support for victims, teaching about bullying, and engaging parents and community, can collaborate to establish a safe and supportive school atmosphere for all students (Williams, 2023).

Certainly, the study’s results align with Cervancia et al. (2019), which emphasized that all educators must be knowledgeable about the DepEd Child Protection Policy due to their parental responsibilities in caring for, teaching, and overseeing their students. Moreover, the authors noted that reporting incidents is important for the effective implementation of the DepEd Child Protection Policy, as it facilitates the prevention and early detection of child abuse and bullying.

### **Manner How Initiatives Support Public Junior High School Leaders in Addressing and Mitigating Bullying Within the School Environment**

School leaders were chosen as participants, and commonly shared on manner how initiatives support Public Junior High School Leaders in addressing and mitigating bullying within the school environment. From the responses gathered, the following five (5) major themes emerged: 1) promoting healthy relationship and environment, 2) fostering accountability and utilization of classroom strategies, 3) implementing leadership involvements, 4) following a structured approach and 5) considering psychological and behavioral aspects.

### **Promoting Healthy Relationship and Environment**

Promoting healthy relationships and environments focused on fostering positive interpersonal interactions and nurturing a supportive community. It aimed to create environments that encouraged well-being, mutual respect, and effective communication. Through education and proactive initiatives, it sought to reduce bullying and enhance the quality of relationships in various settings. Moreover, it was evident from the participants' responses that importance of consistent communication, empathy-building, fair leadership, adherence to policies, and creating a conducive learning atmosphere were almost certainly effective in preventing bullying within the school.

Furthermore, to ensure a safe learning environment for students to thrive and develop, students need to acquire skills in effective communication, conflict resolution, and empathy towards others (Shattnawi, 2022). Apart from this, encouraging collaboration among teachers, students, and parents enhances the effectiveness of anti-bullying efforts and fosters a positive school climate (Bilz & Fischer, 2019).

In addition, school plays a crucial role in creating a safe and supportive learning environment for students (Mercado-Crespo, 2022). Along with, school leaders' initiatives focus on assessing bullying incidents to raise awareness, garnering support from faculty and community, coordinating prevention efforts, responding promptly to bullying, engaging with high school students to address their concerns, establishing clear rules, increasing adult supervision, sustaining long-term efforts, and providing training in bullying prevention and response (Bradshaw et al., 2007, as cited in Tan, 2022).

### **Fostering Accountability and Utilization of Classroom Strategies**

Fostering accountability and utilizing classroom strategies aimed to decrease bullying cases and address the rising concern of bullying in educational environments. It focused on creating a culture of accountability among school leaders, students and teachers to ensure a safe and respectful learning atmosphere. By implementing effective classroom strategies, such as enhancing communication and establishing clear consequences for bullying behaviors, this theme sought to reduce incidents of bullying. It emphasized the importance of proactive measures to foster a supportive school community where every student felt valued and secure. Moreover, participants emphasized that promoting a culture of mutual respect and understanding allowed schools to create a classroom environment where bullying was less likely to occur, ultimately fostering educational experience for all students involved.

This finding supports the study of Perkins (2022), which stated that schools can effectively combat bullying by implementing and enforcing a comprehensive policy that clearly defines bullying, instructs teachers and staff on addressing incidents, outlines procedures for handling bullying cases, and specifies disciplinary actions as consequences. All students need to be aware of the consequences of bullying. The school policy must clearly define all forms of bullying behavior.

Furthermore, the findings align with Millacci (2024), emphasizing the need for school leaders to clearly define bullying for students. Clear definitions help students recognize and report bullying effectively, while consistent intervention by school leaders and stakeholders promotes moral engagement, improves peer relationships, reduces moral disengagement, and prevents bullying.

### **Implementing Leadership Involvements**

Leadership involvement in bullying prevention was essential for fostering a safe and inclusive environment. With this, the participants were able to implement policies and educational initiatives to raise awareness and prevent bullying behaviors. According to them, by modeling respect and collaboration,

they cultivated a culture that supported victims and holds offenders accountable.

Bullying in high schools' level is one of the serious concerns for school leaders, teachers as well as the parents. The relationship between bullying and the atmosphere of the school has been recognized, various strategies aim to improve this environment. Leadership involvement in initiating change is crucial, as it leads to behavioral changes reported by students and conveys a clear message that bullying is unacceptable and will not be tolerated (Bosworth et al., 2018). Furthermore, Das et al. (2019) found that school leaders can actively involve themselves in preventing and resolving bullying incidents by implementing effective anti-bullying policies and interventions, promoting awareness, and ensuring that students and staff feel supported in reporting and addressing bullying behaviors.

Additionally, school leaders have a vital role in dealing with bullying by establishing a positive school environment, implementing effective policies, addressing bullying cases, collaborating with stakeholders, and continuing adjusting strategies to suit the changing needs of the school community. Through their proactive involvement, school leaders can significantly contribute to creating a secure and nurturing learning environment for all students (Miles, 2022).

### **Following a Structured Approach**

Following structured approach involved systematically organizing actions or procedures to achieve specific goals in reducing bullying incidents. Key strategies included promptly acting, providing counseling and psychological support as needed, and involving parents according to the seriousness of the incident. Further, participants emphasized enforcing DepEd policies and adopting a holistic approach to student growth, addressing physical, intellectual, and emotional well-being.

In connection to this, school leaders should carefully gather information about the incident without rushing to a decision due to the crisis itself. They should approach each situation with an open mind, ask questions to determine if a student was acting out of ignorance rather than intent to harm, understanding the motivation will help frame the response to the incident. School leaders must thoroughly investigate to determine if the incident is isolated or part of a broader pattern. They should establish mechanisms for anonymous witness reporting and promptly gather eyewitness accounts to ensure accuracy (Learning for Justice, 2017).

Moreover, bullying laws like Department of Education policies may require specific measures, such as clear definitions in handbooks, to address bullying. Implementing prevention programs and strict disciplinary measures fosters awareness and accountability, creating a safer and inclusive school environment for all (Manzella, 2018).

Indeed, supporting individuals who have experienced bullying helps them restore their confidence, assertiveness and self-worth. This can be accomplished through various methods, such as offering counseling, support groups, and mentoring programs that emphasize building resilience, self-esteem and coping skills (Jansen, 2024).

### **Considering Psychological and Behavioral Aspects**

Fostering a supportive school environment required a holistic approach that prioritized psychological and behavioral well-being. By addressing the emotional needs of students, understanding developmental behaviors with empathy, and safeguarding both children and teachers, school created environments where learning thrived, and every individual felt respected and supported. They also emphasized understanding and supporting students through challenges and protecting their well-being as well as their teachers.



Furthermore, McCoy (2019) pointed out that school leaders engage in educational initiatives to promote empathy and kindness, creating a positive atmosphere that discourages bullying and encourages respectful behavior among students. The study found that such initiatives not only reduced instances of bullying but also contributed to improved academic performance and overall student well-being. Students involved in these programs reported feeling safer and more supported, which fostered a conducive learning environment. Moreover, the emphasis on empathy and kindness helped cultivate a culture where students were more likely to intervene positively in situations of conflict or bullying, thereby further reducing negative behaviors across the school community.

Additionally, it is crucial to involve families in intervention and prevention programs. Educating parents about the nature and dangers of bullying allows them to positively influence their children's attitudes and behaviors. By teaching them proper social conduct, parents can help their children develop healthy peer relationships (Abocejo & Mingoa, 2021). Significantly, the involvement of families in these prevention efforts is crucial, as their contributions can assist students in adhering to prevention activities, guidance within the school environment and fostering students' development of healthy behavioral patterns (Leff et al., 2001, as cited in Turhan, 2020).

### **Insights of Public Junior High School Leaders in the Implemented Initiatives to Address Bullying in School that can be Shared with Others**

School leaders were chosen as participants, and commonly shared on the insights of public junior high school leaders in the implemented initiatives to address bullying in school that can be shared with others. From the responses gathered, the following five (5) major themes emerged: 1) possess good leadership attributes, 2) seek for continuous learning, 3) instill values, uphold inclusivity and equality, 4) uphold collaboration and support and 5) adhering to objectives and program guidelines.

#### **Possess Good Leadership Attributes**

The results from the participants' interviews revealed that possessing good leadership attributes was essential for successful educational leadership. They emphasized the importance of accountability, immediate action, and a balance between heart and mind. According to them, effective leaders were those who could inspire and support while being deeply committed to the well-being and development of their students.

In connection to that, good leadership is essential for ensuring the safety and well-being of the entire school community. To prevent and address student bullying effectively, it is crucial to consistently implement policies and procedures and to communicate anti-bullying strategies and practices widely. This includes having a clearly defined process for parents and students to report bullying confidentially and a clear plan of action for staff to follow when bullying is observed or reported (New South Wales Department of Education, 2023). Moreover, educating about anti-bullying might also encourage positive behaviors like responsibility and accountability (Kazmierczak, 2018).

Further, school leaders can take initiatives to reduce bullying by actively gathering information about incidents that occur within their school premises. Establishing partnerships with community members who can serve as positive role models or sources of support for high school students is another effective approach (Loveless, 2023).

### **Seek for Continuous Learning**

Continuous learning for school leaders addressing bullying was essential for understanding evolving dynamics, implementing effective strategies, and staying updated on policies and best practices. Moreover, it was clear from what they said that school leaders needed continuous learning in effective leadership roles. Leaders had to strive for ongoing improvement, seek expert advice, and leverage technology to enhance their knowledge and implementation of initiatives, ensuring sustained efforts to foster bully-free environments.

This result of this study corroborates with the findings of Raei (2018), which stated that school leaders continuously learning and refining their approach to address the complexities of bullying, being willing to try different approaches and adjust strategies based on the specific needs of their school community. Doing research on the specific strategies for bullying it will help in identifying effective interventions and practices tailored to the unique challenges faced by each school. School leader must prioritize creating a culture and inclusion within their schools, fostering open communication among students, staff, and parents to ensure a collaborative approach to addressing bullying.

In addition, according to Bilz & Fischer (2019), emphasized the importance of educating school leaders about bullying and working to improve their confidence and efficacy when addressing bullying incidents. According to the authors, comprehensive training programs or doing research that equip school leaders with the necessary knowledge and skills are crucial. These programs should cover various aspects of bullying, including its forms, impacts, and prevention strategies. Moreover, ongoing professional development and support systems are essential to ensure that school leaders remain effective in their roles. By fostering a deeper understanding and providing practical tools, school leaders can create safer and more inclusive school environments where bullying is actively addressed and minimized

### **Instill Values, Uphold Inclusivity, and Equality**

Instilling values, uphold inclusivity and equality were crucial in fostering positive environments, whether in education, workplaces, or communities. It involved embracing diversity, understanding and respecting differences in gender, cultural backgrounds, traditions, and beliefs. By fostering inclusivity and non-discrimination, they cultivated a supportive environment where every child could thrive. School leaders emphasized the important need for every child to be treated as special and to feel safe, encompassing not only physical safety but also their overall well-being.

Based on the results of research conducted by Sheehan (2023) that school and even the classroom should exemplify positive and inclusive conduct, fostering a culture that values diversity and reject any form of bullying behaviors, school leaders effectively role-model appropriate responses to bullying for both students and staff. This way, students learn to care about other, show respects, and accept everyone by appreciating differences and making sure everyone feels included. This helps them see different points of view and feels like they belong, creating a strong community together.

Furthermore, the school leaders emphasize the importance of respecting and embracing differences among students, exhibit inclusive behavior, promote a culture of diversity, and condemn any bullying conduct. By exemplifying these positive attitudes and actions, the school leaders effectively serve as role models for both students and school staff in addressing and preventing bullying incidents. This fosters a supportive community where every students feels valued and accepted, ultimately enhancing overall student well-being and academic success (Wilshaw, 2015 as cited by Putra, 2023).

### **Uphold Collaboration and Support**

Upholding collaboration and support to our stakeholders was essential for fostering a productive and harmonious environment, whether in educational settings, workplaces, or communities. Bullying was less likely to occur and more effectively addressed when it did. Continuous support, commitment, and creating opportunities for students to develop social skills maintained effective anti-bullying programs. Moreover, it was evident from the participants' responses that ensuring every member could contribute meaningfully resulted in shared achievements and a more unified and cohesive team.

Further, collaboration and trust among school leaders and teachers, along with positive perceptions of school effectiveness, promotes positive student behavior. When school leaders prioritize bullying prevention, it reflects in the school's ability to address bullying effectively (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018). Moreover, this involvement may include implementing policies and initiatives to reduce bullying, such as monitoring routines, meeting involving parents, students, and teachers, and ensuring that all school staff are committed to anti-bullying interventions (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017).

In addition, effective intervention measures to combat bullying involve collaboration between school leaders, counselors, and psychologists. Through fostering collaboration with these specialists, schools can develop comprehensive strategies that address bullying at different levels, thereby cultivating a more supportive and secure learning atmosphere (Freedman, 2018). Apart from this, school leaders have reported an improvement in the school setting and improved relationships among students and teachers since implementing anti-bullying programs. This underscores the positive impact of such efforts on the school atmosphere. Governments and public authorities play a crucial role in addressing this pervasive issue. Public schools should allocate sufficient funding to support the establishment of safe learning environments (Cantera et al., 2021).

### **Adhering to objectives and program guidelines**

By clearly defining objectives and adhering to established guidelines, schools can implement targeted interventions to prevent bullying within the school. The participants emphasized the importance of consistently implementing initiatives to achieve meaningful outcomes aligned with objectives. They also highlighted the significance of core values and data-driven, research-based program in promoting a positive school atmosphere and effectively managing student development and discipline.

Based upon the study's result conducted by Mileo (2023), school leaders should establish guidelines that emphasize respect, inclusivity, and kindness. For example, implementing rules that promote positive language can create an environment of mutual respect. They should also reinforce positive behavior by acknowledging and rewarding it, thereby fostering a culture where students understand and value the importance of treating others kindly. Furthermore, they should encourage students to embrace their uniqueness by celebrating diverse qualities.

Additionally, Ren et al (2020), states that educating school leaders and teachers about the consequences of bullying and effective prevention methods is a highly successful strategy for reducing bullying. With greater support from school leaders and teachers, bullying can be minimized in schools. Moreover, better supervision on the playground and enhanced classroom management could help reduced bullying incidents. Utilizing a comprehensive approach within schools is effective in optimizing positive outcomes and preventing bullying incidents.

### **Implication for the Initiatives Practice**

The study's findings successfully mirrored the initiatives taken by public junior high school leaders in addressing bullying. The results indicated that implementing preventive measures was crucial for effectively reducing bullying incidents. The school leaders and teachers were accountable for carrying out school's preventive measures; however, to be successful, these had to be custom developed by all participants, including internal and external stakeholders. With all these findings, significant implications could be utilized to improve the implementation of various programs or interventions in junior high schools, as well as to enhance school leaders' initiatives in address bullying. These implications were discussed one by one.

First, school leaders should employ diverse approaches and practical strategies while implementing various initiatives. The study's findings helped school leaders appreciate the importance of implementing comprehensive strategies to address bullying. By utilizing these findings, school leaders created a safer and more inclusive school environment for all students. This included fostering a culture of empathy and respect and implementing clear policies with consistent enforcement. Through these proactive measures informed by this research, school leaders effectively mitigated bullying behaviors and ensured that every student felt valued and protected within the school community.

As such, this study encouraged teachers in the field to actively participate in and support anti-bullying efforts within their classrooms and beyond. By integrating these concepts into daily lessons and extracurricular activities, they potentially reduced bullying incidents. Moreover, they engaged in discussions with other teachers and stakeholders to share strategies and best practices for promoting a bully-free environment. They also collaborated on school-wide initiatives such as awareness campaigns or peer support programs.

Additionally, students directly benefited from the efficient and successful strategies implemented by school leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders. They were encouraged to report bullying, support peers who were being bullied, and actively participate in anti-bullying campaigns, activities, or clubs within the school. Moreover, by understanding and respecting the school's anti-bullying policies, students contributed to a safer environment where bullying behaviors were not tolerated. Further, by working together with other stakeholders, students helped foster a community that valued respect and inclusivity. Similarly, the Department of Education Officials and the government collaborated to ensure the success of anti-bullying initiatives in schools. They implemented clear and comprehensive policies, provided adequate resources and training for educators, and monitored program effectiveness through regular evaluations.

Moreover, this study provided researchers with suggestions for focus in related studies and served as a reference for future research. It introduced new directions and concepts for exploration, highlighting the continued need to understand and learn more about implementing various initiatives to address bullying, including identifying effective strategies.

### **Recommendation for Further Research**

This study was based on the findings from the responses of ten participants. The research effectively achieved its primary aim of exploring initiatives to address bullying from diverse perspectives. The major themes provided comprehensive information and explanations on the same phenomenon.

However, it is important to note that this study did not encompass all research on the specific topic. The researcher acknowledged the limitations of these findings, which were descriptive and not generalizable.

The focus remained on the insights, opinions, and perspectives of the ten participants who experienced the phenomenon under investigation.

Further, this study involved only school leaders, particularly those working in public junior high schools in the Division of Tagum City. Hence, it suggests that future research should explore different initiatives and practices. Additionally, the methodologies used in this study may be replicated by other researchers in their respective settings, and this study could be valuable for those conducting research on school leaders' initiatives.

### Concluding Remarks

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of school leaders in public junior high schools regarding their initiatives to address bullying. The research yielded several key findings, including raising awareness through information dissemination, where school leaders were encouraged to conduct orientations or symposiums at the beginning of the school year, create advocacy teams, and launch anti-bullying campaigns in the school. Further, another finding was the importance of following systematic guidelines and policies to ensure consistent, fair, and effective responses to bullying incidents, thereby promoting a culture of respect and inclusivity. These findings contributed to a deeper understanding of how school leaders approached bullying prevention and intervention within their schools.

Moreover, future studies could explore different types of schools beyond public junior high schools, focusing on various school leader's initiatives in addressing bullying. Researchers might also benefit from using the same methods as this study in their own research, making the findings useful for studying school leadership in different places.

Further, this study shed light on the complex challenges and valuable contributions of school leaders in addressing bullying. Research in this area informed the development of more effective strategies to create safe and inclusive learning environments for all students. By understanding the multifaceted role of school leaders, teachers and policymakers could better support their efforts in fostering a positive school climate. Apart from this, this research could not have been completed without expressing my deepest gratitude to my participants. Thank you for your sincere responses to the questions in this study; your insights were invaluable. I was truly excited to uncover the depth of your perspectives and experiences, and I was deeply grateful for your willingness to share them with me. Your contributions significantly enriched the study and provided a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

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