



Exploring Workplace Challenges and Perceived Performance Effects among School-Based Administrative Officers in Philippine Public Schools

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A B S T R A C T

Administrative Officers play an important role in school operations, yet limited evidence explains how interconnected workplace conditions shape their administrative performance in geographically dispersed public-school settings. This study explored the workplace challenges experienced by school-based Administrative Officer II (AO II) personnel in the Department of Education–Division of Agusan del Norte and their perceived implications for administrative performance. Using a descriptive phenomenological qualitative design, 18 AO II personnel from public elementary and secondary schools were purposively selected. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s six-phase thematic analysis. Ten interrelated themes emerged: overlapping work demands; frequent work interruptions and role disruption; inadequate equipment and supplies; interpersonal and compliance challenges; limited delegation and additional task demands; transportation and geographic constraints; inadequate workplace conditions; poor internet and mobile connectivity; outdated administrative systems; and unreimbursed work-related expenses. Participants associated these conditions with difficulties prioritizing tasks, maintaining focus, meeting deadlines, completing reports efficiently, and carrying out core administrative responsibilities. The study provides context-specific evidence for educational administration and highlights areas for strengthening workload allocation, resource provision, digital infrastructure, task delegation, and organizational support for school-based administrative personnel.

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1. Introduction

Collaboration among school administrators, teachers, and support personnel is essential to the delivery of quality educational services to learners and stakeholders. Non-teaching personnel play a vital role in supporting school administration by providing essential office assistance and facilitating the efficient implementation of school operations and services (Ramos, 2022). Although they are not directly involved in classroom instruction, their administrative functions contribute significantly to the overall functioning and management of schools.

Within the Department of Education (DepEd), non-teaching personnel, particularly Administrative Officers, assist school heads and teachers in performing administrative tasks, preparing reports, managing records, and supporting the implementation of school programs and services. Section 7(e) of Republic Act No. 9155, or the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, recognizes the role of non-teaching personnel in providing administrative, fiscal, and auxiliary services in schools. Consistent with this mandate, DepEd issued DM-OUHROD-2023-1252, which supports the creation of additional non-teaching

positions, including Administrative Officer II (AO II) positions, to strengthen school-based administrative support systems.

Furthermore, DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024 emphasizes the decongestion of teachers' administrative workloads by assigning key administrative functions to school heads and non-teaching personnel. These functions include human resource management, property custodianship, financial management, and general administrative support. The policy recognizes the importance of appropriately distributing administrative responsibilities among personnel to enable teachers to focus more effectively on their primary instructional functions.

Despite these policy directions, the implementation of administrative functions may present challenges for AO II personnel in actual school settings. In the Division of Agusan del Norte, AO II personnel assigned to clustered schools may be required to attend to multiple schools, offices, personnel, and administrative requirements. Such arrangements may result in overlapping responsibilities, heavy workloads, competing deadlines, and difficulties in maintaining focus on their core key result areas (KRAs). The simultaneous preparation and submission of multiple reports may further increase work pressure. In some instances, AO II personnel may also be required to perform tasks beyond their designated functions, creating additional demands on their time and competencies.

Another concern relates to the preparation and professional development of AO II personnel. Some personnel may initially rely heavily on on-the-job learning, peer assistance, and practical experience to perform newly assigned responsibilities. While these forms of workplace learning can facilitate adaptation, limited access to systematic and continuing capacity-building opportunities may create competency gaps in areas such as financial management, property management, records management, human resource management, and general administrative procedures. These concerns highlight the importance of understanding the actual workplace experiences of AO II personnel and the conditions that shape their ability to perform their responsibilities effectively.

Existing literature has recognized the relationship between increasing job demands, organizational support, and employee outcomes. De Villa (2024), for instance, reported that increasing job demands and limited organizational support may contribute to job dissatisfaction and turnover intentions among non-teaching staff. Similarly, Hawthorne (2021) emphasized the potential value of professional development, workload management, and supportive work environments in improving employee performance and retention. These studies provide a broader understanding of the challenges experienced by non-teaching personnel; however, there remains limited context-specific understanding of how AO II personnel in the Division of Agusan del Norte experience and manage the particular challenges associated with their workload, resources, manpower support, technological conditions, and work-related stress. The ways in which these challenges affect their day-to-day performance and ability to fulfill administrative responsibilities also warrant closer examination.

This research gap is particularly relevant because AO II personnel constitute an important component of school-based administrative support. Understanding their lived workplace experiences can provide evidence on the organizational conditions that hinder or facilitate effective performance. It can also provide school administrators and education

officials with a clearer understanding of the areas in which administrative support systems and working conditions may need to be strengthened.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore the challenges experienced by AO II personnel in the Division of Agusan del Norte and examine how these challenges affect their performance. By documenting their lived workplace experiences, the study aims to provide context-specific evidence on the working conditions of Administrative Officers and their implications for administrative performance. The findings may contribute to educational administration by informing efforts to strengthen workload distribution, resource provision, technological support, manpower assistance, and workplace well-being, thereby supporting more efficient school operations and effective delivery of administrative services.

Review of Related Literature and Studies

Administrative Officers and Non-Teaching Personnel in DepEd

Building upon the creation of 14,813 AO II positions in fiscal years 2020-2022, strategically deployed in selected schools nationwide, this initiative aims to alleviate the administrative workload of public school teachers. By doing so, it enables teachers to focus solely on facilitating the learning experiences of Filipino students. Recognizing the pivotal role of the workplace in the overall well-being of employees, Secretary Duterte-Carpio, upon assuming office at DepEd in July 2022, prioritized the welfare of both teaching and non-teaching personnel. She voiced genuine concerns about the challenges faced by teachers, whether personal or school-related, which could potentially impact the quality of instruction in schools. With a steadfast commitment to addressing these concerns, she actively seeks recommendations to implement concrete measures aimed at enhancing the welfare of all DepEd personnel. Through such initiatives, she envisions a better future for the country, characterized by disciplined and patriotic Filipino learners.

Carillo (2023) aptly acknowledges the invaluable contributions of non-teaching personnel, emphasizing their pivotal role alongside teachers in the daily operations of schools. Their significant contributions to school management and operations are indispensable, ensuring compelling learning experiences crucial for young Filipino learners. In addition to school heads, AO II and other non-teaching personnel fulfill essential roles in school administration. Their responsibilities encompass a wide array of tasks, including financial management, records management, human resources management, property custodianship, office clerical work, administrative duties, and various ancillary responsibilities delegated by their superiors.

Workload, Role Overload, and Emerging Challenges

However, De Villa (2024) highlights concerns within some public schools regarding the potential loss of AOs amid the transition period leading to the full implementation of a policy relieving teachers of administrative duties by the end of March 2024. There are apprehensions that the increased workload resulting from the redistribution of administrative tasks could prompt AOs to consider resigning. For instance, a school head from the Calabarzon region expressed worry during an interview with de Villa, citing the strain on AOs who will now be responsible for the administrative tasks of two or even three schools, potentially leading to their resignation due to the overwhelming workload.

In research conducted by De Chavez (2019), hindering factors affecting the performance of Administrative Assistants assigned to West Butuan District III were identified. These

factors included: (1) Limited public transport options, requiring multiple rides or resorting to motorcycle transportation, which posed risks and sometimes led to physical exhaustion due to exposure to the elements; (2) Adverse weather conditions, such as heavy rainfall causing flooding, which impeded the timely submission of reports from certain schools; (3) Slow internet connectivity, hindering the online submission of reports and memos; (4) Responsibilities extending beyond their job descriptions, resulting in task overlaps; (5) Inadequate job orientation provided, leaving them without proper guidance on their responsibilities; (6) Limited opportunities for professional development, as division office-led training or seminars catering to their roles were minimal. Despite these challenges, respondents expressed satisfaction with being assigned to schools where teachers and communities were friendly and cooperative. They perceived a positive work atmosphere and noted the supportive role of school heads in facilitating effective functioning.

Training Needs and Professional Development

Lacsamana et al. (2018) emphasized the pressing need for tailored training programs to meet the demands of employees, a sentiment echoed by top management. Among the challenges faced by AOs in the Department of Education - Division of Agusan del Norte is a deficiency in essential skills and knowledge pertinent to their roles, impeding their effectiveness and efficiency. These professionals often encounter limited professional development opportunities tailored to their specific requirements, constraining their potential for growth and advancement. Moreover, the absence of streamlined processes contributes to inefficiencies, resulting in time wastage and potential errors in task execution. Effective communication and interpersonal skills are indispensable in any organizational context. However, some AOs struggle in this regard, adversely impacting teamwork and workplace harmony. Resistance to change among specific individuals further compounds challenges, impeding the adoption of innovative practices and technologies that could enhance efficiency. The absence of formal evaluation and feedback mechanisms for AOs complicates efforts to identify areas for improvement and offer constructive guidance.

Furthermore, the recruitment of AOs from external sources may lead to a lack of familiarity with organizational policies and procedures, potentially giving rise to legal or ethical concerns and compromising overall agency functioning. A training needs analysis, as outlined by Lacsamana et al. (2018), plays a pivotal role in identifying the specific training requirements within an organization. In this qualitative research endeavor, an analysis of the training attended by AOs since their appointment will be conducted to pinpoint individual development needs and opportunities for these non-teaching personnel. The findings of this study can serve as a foundation for refining the agency's development plan, ensuring it aligns closely with the identified needs and aspirations of its workforce.

In an online article penned by Chiu (2022), Training and Development emerged as one of nine key factors influencing employees' work performance. He emphasized that organizations witnessing investment in their employees often experience enhanced performance and increased productivity. Continual skill enhancement over time is an expected outcome. Conversely, when training and development are absent from an organization's culture, employees may feel stagnant. Training serves to upgrade employees' skills, making investments in their development tantamount to investments in the organization itself.

Various types of training methods are available to engage employees effectively. HR managers typically employ a diverse range of these methods to foster comprehensive employee development. The following are some types of training that can be offered within an organization:

As expressed by Schosser (2024), Onboarding training is essential for equipping employees with the necessary skills to meet both managerial and organizational expectations efficiently while also facilitating continuous improvement in performance. It not only ensures seamless integration of new team members from the outset but also enhances the overall efficiency of the onboarding process. Moreover, onboarding serves as a platform for organizations to articulate their expectations to new hires and to showcase what they offer in return. This transparent communication fosters lower turnover rates and higher levels of engagement among employees.

According to Continú's latest findings (2024), Skills training encompasses the deliberate cultivation of abilities, competencies, and techniques vital for proficient performance within a specific domain or profession. It entails tailored guidance, hands-on practice, and constructive feedback aimed at bolstering individuals' proficiency in various areas, including technical prowess, effective communication, leadership aptitude, and problem-solving capabilities. These programs are meticulously crafted to elevate job performance, boost productivity, and empower individuals to fulfill the requirements of their respective roles adeptly.

Cited by Mango Limited (2024), Workplace Health and Safety training is a program designed to equip your employees with targeted knowledge and skills related to health and safety practices. By enhancing their understanding in these areas, employees can improve their performance in their respective roles. Additionally, allocating more time to topics such as work ergonomics or managing workplace stress can further enhance the effectiveness of the training program.

For the University of Minnesota (2016), technical training aims to familiarize new employees with the technological components of their positions, ensuring adeptness in utilizing pertinent tools and systems collaboratively within the team. This encompasses software and other programs integral to the organization's operations.

As per GBS Corporate Training (2024), leadership training is instrumental in equipping individuals with the essential skills for effective leadership, including the nuanced abilities required to persuade and influence people, even in situations where direct authority is limited. Moreover, Leadership training fosters the expansion of thinking capacities, enabling leaders to approach challenges with innovation and creativity. By examining organizational issues from various perspectives and devising novel solutions, leaders can significantly contribute value to their organizations.

Work Environment, Well-being, and Job Satisfaction

According to a Research Key article referencing Dorgan (1994:14), individuals, particularly employees, spend approximately fifty percent of their lives within indoor work environments. This extensive duration spent in the workplace significantly impacts their mental state, actions, abilities, and performance. Ensuring the overall well-being of employees is crucial for fostering job satisfaction and retention.

Many employees contend with challenging conditions such as "overwork, job insecurity, low levels of job satisfaction, and a lack of autonomy," as Thomas (2017) highlighted in her

Master's Thesis, citing Bickford (2005, p.6). She emphasized that these occupational challenges pose significant issues across various fields of work today. Thomas further supported the argument made by Houtman et al. (1999), suggesting that when employees perceive their work environment as straining due to unmet expectations or mismatches with their desires or abilities, it can adversely impact their health, well-being, and productivity and even lead to absenteeism.

Van Dick (2023) highlighted several primary challenges impacting employee health and well-being, including uncertainty and pressure leading to mental and physical exhaustion, the responsibility for well-being, the need for preventive and health-promoting work conditions, achieving work-life balance, maintaining detachment from work, coping with dramatic and constant changes, and staying abreast of new developments in an increasingly unpredictable environment.

Hellman et al. (2019) contended that cultivating and sustaining high productivity while prioritizing the health and well-being of employees are crucial considerations for both employers and employees alike. They advocated for the implementation of sustainable work systems, which involve workplaces that concurrently emphasize productivity and the well-being of employees. Such systems are characterized by the regeneration and renewal of human capital and social resources within the work environment while still ensuring productivity. Additionally, they identified several factors that contribute to improving and maintaining productivity and health, including employee work engagement, vitality, empowerment, transformational leadership, supportive management, procedural justice (perceived fairness of decision-making procedures), organizational citizenship behavior, and organizational commitment.

The assertion above finds further support in the work of Chen et al. (2015), who proposed that higher perceived workplace health support correlates independently with increased work productivity. Their study results indicated that employers may observe productivity gains from wellness programs due to enhanced perceptions of workplace health support.

These assertions align with the views of Hawthorne (2021), who advocates for implementing flexible working patterns, reducing workloads, enhancing professional development opportunities, and fostering positive working environments to attain organizational objectives. It is widely believed that a conducive workplace environment leads to improved outcomes and heightened productivity. Research Key also references studies by Blase (2002) and Manthei, as well as Solomon (2008:47), suggesting that the work environment can significantly impact job effectiveness. Moreover, an elevated level of job satisfaction is associated with more excellent employee performance over the long term, even in roles that entail complexity.

Employee Performance, Motivation, and Retention

Jacobs (2003) highlighted how the dynamic business environment and competitive market pressures have compelled organizations to prioritize employee development to maintain their competitive edge. Business entities have underscored the importance of training and dedicated significant efforts to enhance its quality, aiming to sustain competitiveness and improve overall performance (Jacobs & Washington, 2003).

Giday and Elantheraiyan (2002) explored the impact of training on employee performance within the context of Mekelle City, Tigray, Ethiopia. They emphasized training

as a crucial mechanism for updating and enhancing employees' knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The authors asserted that to attain organizational objectives, employees must undergo comprehensive training. In the absence of proper training, employees may not fully utilize their competencies. They outlined several critical steps in the training process, including identifying both employee and organizational needs, planning training initiatives based on the assessment, executing the plan, and evaluating the effectiveness of the training. The authors concluded that the effective implementation of training and development programs is instrumental in cultivating high-performing employees in the workplace.

In an article published by the Department of Education Division of Malaybalay City, Arias (2020) emphasized the importance of resilience among non-teaching personnel in navigating the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous conditions prevalent in the workplace. Arias stressed that while individual employees must exert personal effort to cultivate resilience, the government also plays a pivotal role by providing support such as training and essential tools necessary for fostering both organizational and individual resilience. Building a resilient, non-teaching workforce requires a collaborative effort between the organization and its employees. Ultimately, the shared goal driving their efforts is to ensure the continued delivery of effective and efficient public services despite facing adversity and challenges.

As referenced by Watetu (2017), a study conducted by Ibrahim and Brobbey (2015) investigated whether motivation could impact employee performance in Ghana's financial sector. The research findings revealed that factors such as leadership opportunities, employee recognition, meeting expectations, and positive interactions with employees served as motivators. Conversely, lack of incentives, comfort levels, ineffective management, unfavorable work environments, technological advancements, employee evaluation processes, managerial standards, and motivation itself were identified as potential influences on employee performance. Moreover, the study indicated that fostering motivation among employees in an organization enhances their efficiency, enables them to fulfill personal needs, and contributes to achieving organizational goals. Consequently, this cultivates positive relationships within the organizational framework.

A study by Ghani et al. (2022) unveiled that employee retention hinges on four critical factors related to employee satisfaction: (1) the establishment of a sustainable positive work environment, (2) the provision of sustainable growth opportunities, (3) fostering sustainable and effective communication, and (4) implementing sustainable and effective recruitment and selection practices.

Training Needs Analysis and Organizational Development

An article from the US Office of Personnel Management (OPM) outlined that the primary objective of a training needs analysis is to identify the performance requirements, knowledge, skills, and abilities of an agency's employees. According to the OPM, a practical training needs assessment directs resources, particularly funds, to areas of most significant demand. Addressing specific resource needs is crucial to fulfilling the organizational mission, improving productivity, and delivering quality products and services. The OPM described training needs assessment as the process of identifying the "gap" between required performance and current performance. Any disparity indicates underlying causes for the gap and necessitates methods for closing or eliminating it. Neglecting these gaps, as highlighted in a comprehensive needs assessment, can have detrimental consequences.

Jones (2021), in her online article on Training Folks, emphasized the significance of training needs analysis as a pivotal step in developing solutions to enhance employee performance and organizational effectiveness. She stressed that conducting such analysis ensures that agencies allocate resources wisely, avoiding unnecessary expenditure on training for nonexistent problems or individuals who do not require it. By identifying universal content and performance indicators across the organization, a needs analysis enables the optimization of training development efforts, thus maximizing the return on investment. Jones concluded that a robust training analysis often uncovers gaps and opportunities for further development in leadership, communication, and change management, fostering organizational trust and improving management effectiveness while reducing attrition rates.

George & Scott (2012) outlined that training is an organizational initiative aimed at fostering learning among employees, while development focuses on expanding an individual's skills for future responsibilities. Enga (2017), in her case study, emphasized that training and development constitute continuous efforts intended to enhance employees' competence and performance, aiming to bolster their capacity and overall effectiveness.

Empirical Studies on Non-Teaching Personnel Performance

Evaluated by Lacsamana et al. (2018) in their study, their findings revealed that 62% or 27 out of 43 indicators were identified by respondents as "in great need of improvement." Notably, these areas included Professional Needs related to Health and Safety, Community Extension Services, and Communication. Among the specific skills identified for improvement, Public Speaking emerged as the top priority, followed by Stress Management, Self-Defense, Hazard Communications (related to health and safety in the work environment), and First Aid, which ranked fourth. The administrative personnel of Lyceum of the Philippines University showed minor improvement in terms of organizational needs. A development plan was proposed to address these specific needs. It was recommended that training techniques be tailored based on employees' job performance. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were advised to ensure that administrative personnel are satisfied with the training.

Chan (2021) designed a Career Development Program (CDP) explicitly tailored for Non-Teaching Personnel (NTP), rooted in an assessment of their career development requirements. Recognizing the crucial role NTPs play in the academic setting, supporting and facilitating the technical aspects of educational institutions, this comprehensive CDP spans the entirety of their career life cycle. Encompassing personal, professional, and organizational development needs, the program addresses each stage, from employees' initiation to disengagement. Serving as a strategic tool for administrative management, this study aims to provide direction in identifying, attracting, and retaining talented, well-trained staff committed to long-term careers within a state university. Furthermore, Chan (2021) highlighted in his study that, based on consolidated data from the Human Resource Office of a state university, only 47 out of 166 (28.31%) Non-teaching personnel (NTP) participated in the training, seminars, and workshops provided by the university and other sponsoring institutions/organizations. Over the years, the participation rates fluctuated, with 23.49%, 30.12%, 33.13%, and 6.02% of NTPs attending seminars/training/workshops in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018, respectively. Unlike the teaching staff, who have an established career development plan (e.g., 2013-2016), the professional development of NTPs remains

fragmented. Not all NTPs have the opportunity to engage in career development activities, and their attendance at technical training has been declining, reflecting a shift in demographics. Data from the Human Resource Office indicates that 45.64% or 89 of the NTPs are above fifty years of age, with a mean age of 54.08 years old. Regarding supervisory training/seminars and workshops, participation peaked in 2016, with 9.64% or 16 attending, followed by 9.04% or 15 in 2017, and dropping to 2.40% or 4 in 2018. The primary source of funds for NTP participation in career development activities is the general fund, with allocation following a decentralized approach within the state university's operating units.

A study conducted by Toreno (2022) on the job satisfaction of non-teaching personnel within the Department of Education Division of Pangasinan II concluded that overall, this personnel are content with their current roles, rating their job satisfaction as high. They expressed particular satisfaction with the benefits provided by the agency, including job security, development and training opportunities, communication, and working environments. However, their satisfaction with remuneration could have been more pronounced, indicating a need for improvement in this area. Furthermore, the study found that job satisfaction among non-teaching personnel is influenced by several factors, including job security, development and training opportunities, remuneration, communication, and working environment. Interestingly, job satisfaction did not significantly vary based on the assigned department, suggesting uniform satisfaction levels across similar employment positions and salary structures. Instead, satisfaction levels tended to correlate more with tenure, with longer-serving personnel and those with family commitments expressing greater contentment and a willingness to continue their service until retirement.

Another research by Galinato (2021) revealed insights into the high competency levels of Administrative Assistants in the DEPED Schools Division Office of Butuan City. The study highlighted that their proficiency stemmed from orientation and training rooted in the RPMS (Results-Based Performance Management System), which served as a source of inspiration and motivation for them to excel and explore modern competencies alongside their colleagues. While the study indicated a commendable rating overall, areas identified for further professional development included basic troubleshooting of computer issues, utilization of database software, conducting online presentations via teleconferencing, demonstrating proficiency in spoken English, and meticulous proofreading to ensure accuracy and consistency in all materials. Data from the study also indicated that most Administrative Assistants within the Schools Division Office of Butuan City possessed a clear understanding of their roles and possessed the necessary skills to fulfill their responsibilities effectively. They were deemed adequately prepared for their roles, with an overall descriptive rating of "very satisfactory" in their performance evaluations. Despite juggling multiple functions, the results underscored their high levels of competency in technology, communication, written expression, time management, office coordination, and problem-solving, all contributing significantly to their overall excellent performance. Galinato concluded that as these competencies continue to evolve and improve, corresponding enhancements in performance are expected to follow suit.

The reviewed literature and studies collectively emphasize the indispensable role of Administrative Officers and non-teaching personnel in ensuring the effective operation of educational institutions. These personnel significantly contribute to school management through administrative, financial, and organizational support, thereby enabling teachers to

focus on instructional responsibilities. However, despite policy efforts to strengthen administrative support systems, the literature reveals that these roles have become increasingly complex and demanding. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by exploring the specific challenges affecting the performance of Administrative Officers in the Department of Education. By doing so, it aims to contribute to the development of targeted interventions, training programs, and policy recommendations that will enhance their performance, well-being, and professional growth.

Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical framework primarily draws on Goal-Setting Theory to guide the development of meaningful content and effective learning and development programs for the target research participants.

Goal-Setting Theory, developed by Edwin A. Locke in 1968, posits that goal setting directly influences performance. Locke emphasized that working toward specific goals serves as a strong source of motivation, which ultimately enhances employee performance. His findings show that individuals tend to exert greater effort when pursuing goals perceived as challenging. Accordingly, goals should be clear, specific, and sufficiently challenging to maximize motivation and improve performance. This process encourages employees to remain focused and increases the likelihood of achieving organizational objectives.

Locke and Latham (2002) further expanded Goal-Setting Theory by identifying key characteristics of effective goals, including specificity and difficulty level. The theory also examines goal effects at the individual, group, and organizational levels; the use of learning versus performance goals; mediating and moderating factors influencing goal attainment; the role of goals as mediators of other incentives; and the influence of goal origin, whether assigned, self-set, or participatively developed.

In applying Goal-Setting Theory to the proposed training program for AO II personnel, the researcher emphasizes the establishment of goals guided by the SMART framework – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. This approach provides clear direction and motivates employees to perform at their best, resulting in improved learning outcomes. Breaking down complex goals into smaller, manageable tasks helps prevent cognitive overload and ensures better understanding among AO II personnel.

Regular performance monitoring is also essential to track progress toward established goals, allowing for timely feedback on achievements and areas for improvement. Furthermore, involving employees in goal-setting and incorporating their insights strengthens commitment and enhances engagement in training initiatives.

Grounded in the principles of Goal-Setting Theory, this study aims to explore the challenges affecting the performance of Administrative Officer II personnel in the Department of Education, Division of Agusan del Norte.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to explore the challenges affecting the performance of Administrative Officers in the Department of Education–Division of Agusan del Norte.

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research question: What challenges affect the performance of the Administrative Officers?

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a descriptive phenomenological approach to explore the lived workplace experiences of Administrative Officer II (AO II) personnel in the Department of Education–Division of Agusan del Norte. The approach was appropriate because the study sought to describe participants' firsthand experiences of workplace challenges and their perceived effects on the performance of their administrative duties. The study was informed by Husserlian descriptive phenomenology, with thematic analysis used to identify patterns and themes across participants' accounts.

2.2. Research Participants and Sampling

The study involved 18 school-based AO II personnel from public elementary and secondary schools in the Division of Agusan del Norte. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: they were currently serving as AO II personnel in the division, were assigned to school-based administrative functions, had at least one year of experience in their current position, and voluntarily consented to participate. Personnel who did not meet these criteria or declined participation were excluded.

Four participants were from each of Buenavista and Nasipit Districts; two each were from Carmen, Las Nieves, and Remedios T. Romualdez; and one each was from Santiago, Jabonga, Kitcharao, and Tubay. No participant was recruited from Magallanes District because of scheduling and time constraints. The unequal representation reflected the availability and willingness of eligible participants rather than proportional district representation. Consequently, the findings do not represent the experiences of AO II personnel in Magallanes District.

The sample size of 18 was based on the availability of information-rich participants and [insert actual saturation or sample-adequacy procedure used]. Participant characteristics were reported only in aggregate to protect confidentiality, including [insert characteristics actually collected].

2.3. Research Instrument

A researcher-made semi-structured interview guide was used as the primary instrument. It contained open-ended questions aligned with the study objectives and research questions. The questions focused on participants' work situations, administrative responsibilities, workplace challenges, and perceived effects of these challenges on their performance. Probing questions were used to clarify and deepen participants' responses.

The interview guide was developed from the research questions, relevant literature, and applicable DepEd policies and issuances. It was reviewed by [insert number and qualifications of reviewers] for clarity, relevance, and alignment. [State whether pilot testing was conducted; if none, state that no pilot test was conducted and briefly indicate why.]

2.4. Data Collection

After securing the necessary permissions and informed consent, the researcher recruited eligible participants and conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted at [insert location], lasted approximately [insert duration], and were conducted in [insert language/s] according to participant preference. With permission, interviews were

[audio-recorded] and subsequently transcribed [verbatim]. Field notes were also maintained [if applicable] to document relevant observations and contextual information.

Relevant documents, including job descriptions, DepEd issuances, training records, and organizational policies, were reviewed to provide contextual information about AO II roles and responsibilities. Documentary information was used to supplement and triangulate the interview data.

2.5. Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were analyzed using the six-phase thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, development of potential themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of the final report. Coding focused on workplace challenges and their perceived effects on administrative performance.

Coding was conducted by [one researcher/specify number of coders] using [manual coding/software used]. The researcher maintained [reflexive notes/journal or other actual bracketing procedure] to recognize and manage personal assumptions during data collection and interpretation.

2.6. Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability using [insert actual strategies, e.g., member checking, triangulation, peer debriefing, audit trail, or reflexive journaling].

Ethical approval was obtained from [insert ethics committee/institution and approval number, if applicable]. Participants provided informed consent and were informed of their right to withdraw. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through participant codes and removal of identifying information. Interview recordings, transcripts, and other research materials were securely stored and accessed only by [insert authorized persons] in accordance with applicable data-protection requirements.

3. Results

The thematic analysis generated ten interrelated themes describing the workplace challenges experienced by AO II personnel and their perceived implications for administrative performance: (1) Overlapping Work Demands, (2) Frequent Work Interruptions and Role Disruption, (3) Inadequate Equipment and Supplies, (4) Interpersonal and Compliance Challenges, (5) Limited Delegation and Additional Task Demands, (6) Transportation and Geographic Constraints, (7) Inadequate Workplace Conditions, (8) Poor Internet and Mobile Connectivity, (9) Outdated Administrative Systems, and (10) Unreimbursed Work-Related Expenses.

3.1. Overlapping Work Demands

Participants described receiving multiple administrative requirements with competing and often simultaneous deadlines. School-level requests, Division Office requirements, and financial reports were frequently perceived as urgent, making prioritization difficult. One participant explained that “all are priorities” because tasks from different sources overlap (AO-15). Another noted that the volume and urgency of requests made it difficult to complete everything despite working as quickly as possible (AO-17). These accounts indicate

that competing demands constrain participants' ability to allocate sufficient time to individual tasks.

3.2. Frequent Work Interruptions and Role Disruption

Participants also reported frequent interruptions that diverted their attention from their assigned responsibilities. These included responding to personnel concerns, attending meetings or Division Office activities, assisting applicants, and assuming additional responsibilities when school heads were unavailable. Such interruptions disrupted planned workflows and, in some cases, created uncertainty regarding their core functions. As AO-1 explained, repeated additional assignments caused confusion about what should be considered part of the participant's primary KRA.

3.3. Inadequate Equipment and Supplies

Limited access to office equipment and supplies was another recurring concern. Participants reported using personal laptops, borrowing equipment from other schools, and working without adequate machines for document reproduction. These limitations were perceived to slow document preparation and increase dependence on personally owned or borrowed resources. AO-18, for example, reported relying on a borrowed laptop after the participant's personal computer became nonfunctional.

3.4. Interpersonal and Compliance Challenges

Participants described difficulties arising from delayed submissions, noncompliance, and disagreements with teachers and other personnel. Documents such as DTRs and SF10s were sometimes submitted late or required repeated follow-up. Participants also described the need to manage differing attitudes and avoid interpersonal conflict while enforcing administrative requirements. These experiences added coordination demands to their regular workload.

3.5. Limited Delegation and Additional Task Demands

Participants reported that some school heads assigned them tasks beyond their routine administrative responsibilities, including printing, canvassing, purchasing-related errands, and other activities. In some cases, participants perceived that these tasks could have been completed directly by the school head. The additional assignments consumed time that participants intended to devote to their regular responsibilities.

3.6. Transportation and Geographic Constraints

Distance and limited transportation were particularly challenging for participants assigned to geographically distant schools. Some administrative processes required travel to the Division Office for urgent submissions and other transactions. Participants described lengthy travel times and limited transportation options, particularly when reports had to be submitted immediately. These conditions reduced the time available for regular administrative work and created additional logistical demands.

3.7. Inadequate Workplace Conditions

Participants also reported inadequate physical working conditions, including insufficient office space, lack of dedicated tables and chairs, and offices located in converted classrooms. Some participants described working in remote locations with difficult road conditions and safety concerns. These physical and environmental limitations were

perceived to affect comfort, accessibility, and the efficient performance of administrative tasks.

3.8. *Poor Internet and Mobile Connectivity*

Poor or unavailable internet and mobile connectivity emerged as another significant operational challenge. Participants assigned to remote areas reported difficulties accessing online updates, communicating through group platforms, and completing online submissions. Because many administrative processes depend on digital communication and reporting, connectivity problems were perceived to delay or complicate the completion of required tasks.

3.9. *Outdated Administrative Systems*

Participants further identified continued reliance on manual administrative systems as a source of inefficiency. Concerns included difficulty tracking documents, locating records, and monitoring transactions. Participants expressed the need for more systematic digital tracking mechanisms to reduce dependence on manual verification and repeated follow-ups.

3.10. *Unreimbursed Work-Related Expenses*

Finally, participants reported using personal funds for transportation and other expenses associated with official duties. Some described insufficient or delayed reimbursement, while others reported paying expenses because available school funds were inadequate or because official tasks had to be completed despite limited resources. These experiences placed additional financial demands on participants while carrying out their administrative responsibilities.

Overall, the ten themes demonstrate that AO II personnel encounter interconnected workload, organizational, interpersonal, logistical, technological, and resource-related challenges. Participants consistently associated these conditions with difficulties in prioritizing tasks, maintaining focus, meeting deadlines, completing reports efficiently, and carrying out administrative responsibilities.

Table 1. Common Issues derived from the performance of AOs

Theme	Core issue	Perceived implication for performance
Overlapping Work Demands	Multiple simultaneous and urgent tasks	Difficulty prioritizing and meeting deadlines
Frequent Work Interruptions and Role Disruption	Additional assignments and interruptions	Reduced focus on core KRAs
Inadequate Equipment and Supplies	Limited or unavailable equipment	Slower task completion
Interpersonal and Compliance Challenges	Delayed submissions and workplace disagreements	Additional coordination demands
Limited Delegation and Additional Task Demands	Tasks beyond routine functions	Reduced time for core responsibilities
Transportation and Geographic Constraints	Distance and limited transportation	Delayed transactions and loss of work time
Inadequate Workplace Conditions	Limited space and facilities	Reduced workplace convenience and efficiency
Poor Internet and Mobile Connectivity	Unstable or unavailable connectivity	Difficulties with online reporting and communication
Outdated Administrative Systems	Reliance on manual processes	Slower tracking and processing
Unreimbursed Work-Related Expenses	Personal spending for official tasks	Additional financial burden

4. Discussion

The findings indicate that the challenges experienced by AO II personnel are not isolated difficulties but interconnected conditions involving workload, role expectations, resources, organizational processes, technology, and geographic circumstances. Collectively, the themes suggest that administrative performance is shaped not only by individual effort but also by the organizational environment in which administrative work is performed.

Overlapping work demands and frequent work interruptions were closely associated with difficulties in maintaining focus on core responsibilities. Participants described multiple requests arriving from different sources, often with competing deadlines, while additional assignments interrupted previously planned tasks. These experiences can be understood through Goal-Setting Theory, which emphasizes the importance of clear goals and direction in guiding performance. When employees face competing priorities and unclear or shifting expectations, maintaining attention toward specific work goals becomes more difficult. In the present context, the issue is therefore not simply the volume of work but the simultaneous demands placed on personnel and the disruption of established priorities.

The findings concerning limited delegation and additional task demands further illustrate the organizational dimension of workload. Participants described performing tasks beyond their routine administrative responsibilities, including errands and activities they perceived as appropriately handled by other personnel. This suggests that workload is influenced not only by the number of assigned duties but also by how responsibilities are distributed within the school. The finding extends the broader literature on workload by showing how task allocation and leadership practices may interact with already demanding administrative responsibilities in school-based settings.

Inadequate equipment and supplies, poor connectivity, and outdated administrative systems represent a second cluster of interconnected challenges. Participants reported using personal devices, borrowing equipment, experiencing unstable connectivity, and relying on manual processes. These conditions may create additional steps in completing routine administrative work. Thus, delays cannot necessarily be attributed to individual performance alone; they may also arise from limitations in the organizational infrastructure supporting administrative work. This context is particularly relevant in geographically remote areas where technological and logistical constraints may compound one another.

The findings on transportation and geographic constraints provide an important context-specific dimension of AO II work in the Division of Agusan del Norte. Participants described long travel times, limited transportation options, and the need to travel to centralized offices for urgent transactions. Geographic distance therefore interacts with administrative centralization: a task requiring only a brief office transaction may consume several hours when travel is necessary. This finding adds a spatial dimension to discussions of administrative workload that may be less visible in studies conducted in more accessible settings.

Interpersonal and compliance challenges also emerged as part of participants' administrative experiences. Delayed submission of documents and disagreements concerning administrative requirements required AO II personnel to devote additional time to follow-up and coordination. These experiences indicate that administrative work involves not only document processing but also continuous interaction with teachers, school heads,

and other personnel. The AO II role therefore requires interpersonal coordination alongside technical administrative competence.

The theme of inadequate workplace conditions reinforces the importance of the physical environment in administrative performance. Participants described limited office space, insufficient furniture, and difficult or unsafe working conditions in some locations. These conditions may make routine administrative activities less convenient and may further compound the effects of workload and resource limitations. In this sense, the physical workplace functions as part of the organizational infrastructure supporting administrative performance.

The finding concerning unreimbursed work-related expenses adds a financial dimension to the challenges reported by participants. When personnel use personal funds to complete official tasks, the cost of maintaining administrative operations may be partially transferred to individual employees. Beyond the immediate financial burden, this situation may influence perceptions of organizational support and fairness. This finding highlights the importance of considering the indirect costs experienced by non-teaching personnel when examining administrative effectiveness.

Taken together, the findings extend existing discussions of employee workload and organizational support by demonstrating how multiple constraints may operate simultaneously. An AO II assigned to a geographically distant school, for example, may experience limited connectivity, transportation difficulties, inadequate equipment, and centralized reporting requirements at the same time. Similarly, overlapping deadlines may become more difficult to manage when personnel are simultaneously interrupted by additional assignments and required to work with manual systems. The significance of the findings therefore lies not only in the individual challenges identified but in their interconnected nature.

The study contributes to educational administration by providing context-specific evidence on the workplace realities of school-based AO II personnel. While previous research has examined workload, workplace conditions, and organizational support among employees, the present findings illustrate how these factors converge within the specific administrative environment of public schools in a geographically dispersed Philippine division. The findings consequently broaden understanding of non-teaching personnel as essential actors in school operations whose performance is influenced by organizational structures, resources, leadership practices, and local conditions.

From a practical perspective, the findings point to several areas for organizational attention: clearer allocation of responsibilities, protection of core administrative functions from unnecessary interruptions, adequate provision of office equipment and supplies, improved digital and document-tracking systems, consideration of geographic and transportation conditions, appropriate delegation of tasks, and timely reimbursement of legitimate work-related expenses. These implications are derived directly from the participants' reported experiences rather than from an assumption that a single intervention can address all identified challenges.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that Administrative Officers (AOs) experience interconnected workplace challenges involving workload demands, role expectations, resources, technological conditions, administrative processes, geographic constraints, and organizational support. Participants' accounts indicate that these conditions make it more difficult to prioritize responsibilities, maintain focus on core functions, meet deadlines, and complete administrative tasks efficiently. The findings further suggest that AO performance is shaped not only by the volume of work but also by how responsibilities, resources, processes, and support are organized within the school context.

The study contributes context-specific evidence to educational administration by highlighting the workplace realities of school-based Administrative Officers in a geographically dispersed public-school division. It extends understanding of non-teaching personnel by showing how organizational, technological, logistical, and resource-related conditions can intersect in their day-to-day administrative work. These findings may inform efforts to strengthen administrative support systems, particularly in relation to workload distribution, resource provision, technological infrastructure, delegation of responsibilities, and workplace conditions.

However, the study is limited to 18 AO II personnel from selected districts of the Division of Agusan del Norte, with no participants from Magallanes due to scheduling and time constraints. The findings are also based primarily on participants' reported experiences and therefore should be interpreted within the specific context of the study. Future research may include a larger and more geographically diverse sample, examine the experiences of Administrative Officers across other divisions, and incorporate the perspectives of school heads, teachers, and other personnel to provide a broader understanding of administrative work conditions and performance.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, participants were limited to 18 AO II personnel from selected districts in the Division of Agusan del Norte, and Magallanes District was not represented because of scheduling and time constraints. The findings therefore reflect the experiences of the participating personnel and should not be interpreted as statistically representative of all AO II personnel in the division or in other DepEd contexts. Second, the findings were based primarily on participants' self-reported experiences and perceptions. Future studies may examine these issues using larger samples and mixed-methods designs, including perspectives from school heads, teachers, and other administrative personnel. Comparative studies across divisions or regions may also determine whether the challenges identified in this study are similarly experienced in other educational contexts.

Declarations

Author Contribution Statement

Cindy S. Gumapac contributed to the conceptualization, research design, methodology, data collection, data analysis, and preparation of the original manuscript. She reviewed and edited the manuscript for Publication.

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Declaration of Interests Statement

The author declares that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper. Alternatively, The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships, which may be considered as potential competing interests.

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