



LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL HEADS IN HANDLING ACCIDENTAL INJURIES

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological research aimed to explore the lived experiences of school heads in handling accidental injuries in schools, their coping strategies, and the insights they gained from these experiences. The participants of the study, who were selected purposively, are the ten school heads in the Pantukan district division of Davao de Oro. An in-depth interview is the method of data gathering, and the data are analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings of the study reveal that the experiences of the participants can be described in terms of the challenges they encountered in managing accidental injuries, often dealing with time constraints, limited resources, unpreparedness, financial responsibility, and parental reactions. These challenges are further influenced by proximate causes, including environmental risks and student behavior during school activities, prompting school heads to enforce daily preventive student discipline. Moreover, school heads also emphasized emotional experiences during injury management, such as feelings of nervousness.

In addition, school heads cope with the challenges of handling accidental injuries through professional development driven by lessons learned from experience and engagement in formal injury management trainings. They also highlight the implementation of structured protocols for injury management and immediate medical response to ensure organized, timely responses. School heads also employ proactive safety measures and disaster preparedness strategies, engage in effective communication with parents and stakeholders, and maintain emotional composure to lead calmly and make sound judgments. Moreover, the findings of the study highlighted critical insights from school heads' lived experiences in handling accidental injuries, emphasizing the collaborative efforts of teachers, students, parents, and stakeholders as an important factor in effectively managing school emergencies. School heads also emphasize the need to promote a safe and secure school environment by focusing on maintaining the physical environment and promoting emotional and psychological safety. Additionally, strengthening leadership through reflective decision-making, adopting data- and experience-based school safety policies, and promoting school preparedness and responsibility enable them to learn from past incidents and enhance school leadership practices.

KEYWORDS: *Educational Management, School Head, Accidental Injuries, Emergency, Phenomenology, Thematic Analysis, Pantukan, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

Unintended incidents are a common phenomenon that may occur anywhere, such as how accidental injuries happen in schools. As explored by Stadtmuller et al. (2021), one of the main causes of mortality and hospitalization of children is accidental injuries, and because they spend a lot of time in school, this is a very pertinent setting for this incident. Zeedi et al. (2020) found that the most common accidental injuries in schools are abrasions, cuts, and bruises, which are commonly caused by falls and collisions. The study also highlights that unsafe school environments, equipment, and a lack of supervision contribute to the occurrence of these injuries. Moreover, Vermonden et al. (2023) reported that the most common types of school accidents were fractures and bruises, head and brain injuries, and burns. These injuries are mainly caused by children's playful behavior, ignorance, and exposure to unsafe facilities during school activities. Consequently, while these injuries occur, school heads actually encounter problems in handling these incidents.

In the Philippines, particularly in Batangas City, Ularte (2024) found that school heads experienced pressure in making decisions in handling accidents or emergencies since they are

accountable for their results, and it needs to be done quickly and accurately. Moreover, in Cabuyao City, Villalon (2021) found that school heads faced challenges in the application of the emergency preparedness plans because school staff had not had enough training in administering basic first aid, a lack of emergency resources, and a hazard map. Additionally, in Agusan Del Sur, Angwas (2025) reveals that school heads face challenges in handling emergencies due to a lack of first aid kits and supplies. Besides that, they faced communication difficulties due to poor internet and the geographical location of the school.

Moreover, based on the researcher's experience, in Pantukan District, Division of Davao de Oro, school accidental injuries remained alarming and posed challenges to school heads' management. One case involved a student who was hospitalized due to a head injury sustained during a school activity. The said incident alarmed the school community, particularly the parents, teachers, and the school head. While responding to this emergency, even though the school head provided financial assistance from personal funds as support to the parent of the injured learner, challenges still exist in actual situations, such as limited awareness and inadequate skills of the teacher and



stakeholders in administering basic first aid during an emergency situation, and the lack of support from parents due to financial difficulties.

The increasing issues of accidental injuries in schools emphasize the need for further investigation, and since it can happen unintentionally and pose a big challenge to school heads' management, applying a quick and effective solution will not always be easy and needs proper guidance. Examining how school heads really handled these situations on the ground is crucial in discovering the realities of injury management in school settings, especially since there is a growing public concern about student safety.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to unveil and understand the experiences of school heads in handling accidental injuries in Pantukan District, Davao De Oro. It also aims to reveal how school heads cope with the challenges they encounter in handling accidental injuries, as well as their insights that can be beneficial to others.

In this research, handling accidental injuries is generally defined as how school heads dealt with unintended events, crises, or emergency situations, and related instances that happened particularly to students, which were caused by man-made factors, environmental, and natural disasters. Furthermore, it is a challenge for school heads since the said incident can occur unknowingly to anyone in schools.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the lived experiences of school heads in handling accidental injuries?
2. How do the school heads cope with the challenges they encountered in handling accidental injuries?
3. What are the insights drawn from the experiences of school heads in handling accidental injuries that are beneficial to others?

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design employing a phenomenological approach was used in this research in order to gain insight into the lived experiences of school heads in handling accidental injuries in schools. Qualitative research is an approach that seeks to understand and interpret the lived experiences of individuals and the meanings they attach to those experiences. It focuses on exploring participants' subjective perspectives through in-depth narratives and descriptions of their experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Participants of this study were the ten (10) public school heads from Pantukan District, Division of Davao De Oro, who had experience in handling accidental injuries in schools. All of them underwent in-depth interviews (IDI) for the purpose of gathering relevant information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL HEADS IN HANDLING ACCIDENTAL INJURIES

Challenges in Managing Accidental Injuries

It can disrupt the school management because handling injuries takes a bit of time that can be spent on other work that the school head focuses on. IDI-02

Sometimes, the need for a first aid kit in the classroom is overlooked. In some cases, although a first aid kit is available, its contents are already expired. I think as a school head, it is also necessary to regularly check and monitor the condition of first aid kits in every classroom. IDI-03

The findings of the study are somewhat similar to those of Eboh and Asuquo (2025), who found that school heads face challenges in managing emergency situations because they experience pressure when making decisions and lack readiness due to inadequate training, limited medical resources, and many demands of school management.

Preventive Student Discipline

Once dismissal begins, students are discouraged from staying in the gym or any other areas, as these spaces are more prone to accidents due to running and playful behavior. As a result, a new policy was implemented encouraging learners to go home immediately once they are officially dismissed. IDI-02

The findings of the study are somewhat similar to Aydoğdu and Bozkuş (2023), which highlights that school heads implement several school safety policies to prevent accidents that may occur during recess, playtime, lunch breaks, students' arrival and dismissal, and transportation. This includes assigning responsibilities to school personnel to help monitor students' activities, improving school facilities, providing guidance and support, and establishing communication procedures.

Experienced Causes of Accidental Injuries

Common injury experiences in public schools often include minor cuts and bruises resulting from children's play activities. IDI-03
When discussing common accidental injuries, these usually include fractures and wounds that result from student misbehavior. IDI-06

Several studies support the findings of the study in terms of students' behavioral and school environmental issues in schools. However, common accidental injuries occurred with some variation. For instance, Özdemir et al. (2022) reported that school injuries like falls, slipping, and bruises commonly happened due to students' activities like educational activities, play, and fight.

School-Based Financial Responsibility for Injury Response

Call whoever you know, like the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA), you can ask for help from them, especially for financial assistance. IDI-02

Usually, if there are cases of injury or accidents, the first to shoulder the expenses is the school. IDI-06

The findings of the study show that most school heads were competent in managing school funds and stakeholder financial support for injury responses. However, some related literature



focuses more on the schools' safety rather than injury-related financial needs. In Hong Kong, Ho (2023) emphasizes that school principals address learners' urgent safety needs by directly using the school funds and coordinating with stakeholders to support students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds.

Emotional Experiences During Injury Management

Although our school is not prone to incidents, I tend to get anxious easily, and no matter what happens, I'm always the first to feel nervous. IDI-04

In reality, your patience will be tested, along with your ability to handle such cases without panicking. IDI-09

Unlike the findings of the study, some previous research focuses on the emotional experiences of school heads in managing disasters in schools, and limited literature explores the emotional experiences of school heads in injury management. According to Rico (2025), due to the unpredictable nature of disasters, school heads experienced feelings of anxiety and helplessness. Since this incident is hard to control, there is pressure in responsibility in ensuring the safety of students and school staff.

Parental Responses

Based on my experience, when parents are informed immediately after an incident, they tend to remain calm and understanding. On the other hand, if they are not informed or are informed late, parents become angry. IDI-10

Sometimes, parents who are called to come to the school do not respond, which results in the school bearing full financial responsibility. In some cases, the school is even criticized for why such accidents occur, making it particularly challenging since the school head is easily judged. IDI-01

The findings of the study reveal that school-parent communication is important for providing a positive response to injury incidents in schools. Jutara and De Jesus (2024) emphasize that parents like to cooperate to ensure the school's safety when school heads are approachable, honest, supportive, and sustain transparent communication.

HOW DO THE SCHOOL HEADS COPE WITH THE CHALLENGES THEY ENCOUNTERED IN HANDLING ACCIDENTAL INJURIES

Professional Development Driven by Emergency Response Experiences

It does not negatively affect my management; it somewhat gives me additional learning on how to manage in case similar situations occur. Through this experience, I was able to prove to myself that I could effectively manage and facilitate the situation. I learned how to respond and facilitate appropriately, turning the experience into a source of learning rather than a disruption to my management. IDI-02

The findings of the present study indicate that school heads gain learning from their experiences managing unexpected incidents in schools. This is somewhat similar to Welle and Gunnulfsen (2025), who emphasize that school leaders develop their management through their experiences in handling emergency situations in the school environment. It improves their decision-

making, communication, collaboration, and emotional intelligence.

Structured Protocols for School-Based Injury Management

I keep reminding teachers that whenever there is an incident in their classroom, the one responsible for managing the injured learner should be the teacher. The protocol is to inform the school head because it becomes difficult if the school head does not know about the incident, especially when the situation is complex, and the parents are already prepared to complain due to late notification. IDI-10

The findings of the study are consistent with the previous research emphasizing that teachers act as first responders during school accidents for school children during school hours, especially before professional medical assistance becomes available. The study explains that teachers must be capable of managing injuries and health emergencies among students because they are usually the closest adults present when accidents happen in school settings (Negm et al., 2022).

Strengthening Competence in Injury Management

I experienced Red Cross training on handling injuries. Aside from first aid training, I also experienced Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) training conducted by the DRR. I experienced it twice, that's all. IDI-03

Although previous studies have discussed schools' engagement in formal emergency and first aid training and learned principles to strengthen injury management, limited literature focuses specifically on the school heads' experiences receiving this training. For instance, Abou-El-Soud et al. (2023) discuss that first aid training programs conducted in schools strengthened the knowledge of school health staff and helped them respond confidently before professional medical help arrives. It also developed their positive attitudes toward first aid and practical skills in emergency management.

Proactive Safety Measures and Disaster Preparedness in Schools

I cope with it through prevention and preparedness because the Department of Education (DepEd) provides Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) orientations. Our main focus to prepare is the earthquake; we really conduct drills. IDI-01

The finding of the study is consistent with Sagragao et al. (2025), who reveal that school heads are actively leading Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) efforts in schools. This includes activities such as minimizing risks before disasters occur, conducting earthquake and fire drills, organizing training and awareness programs, and ensuring that the school community understands emergency procedures.

Communication with Parents and Stakeholders

I make sure to accompany the teacher when explaining the situation to the parents. Since some teachers, instead of showing humility, may avoid responsibility or even blame the parents for



their child's misbehavior. In situations like this, it is important to be humble, remember that the child is under our care during school hours, and take responsibility. Apologize sincerely, acknowledging that it was an accident. IDI-03

In discovering previous related literature, it was found that these primarily explore school safety and crisis management, and there are limited studies that focus on school heads' leadership experiences in communicating with parents and stakeholders during accidental injuries in schools. The findings of Grissom and Condon (2021) illustrate that managing communication is one of the most important responsibilities of school heads during times of crisis. Specifically, school heads give importance to transparent communication because it helps build trust, reduce confusion, encourage cooperation, and support effective crisis management during emergencies.

Emotional Composure During Accidents

It is also important to remind yourself to remain calm and relaxed, and to think positively as a coping mechanism. This includes believing that nothing serious has happened, such as brain or bone injuries, and maintaining a positive outlook that the parents will understand your side of the situation and respond without anger. IDI-03

While the findings of the study specifically focus on school heads' emotional composure during accidents in schools, some related literature mostly gives emphasis to school emergencies, crises, and challenges. Data from Libre's (2024) research highlights that school heads are ready to respond during disasters and emergencies in schools as crisis leaders, possessing essential behaviors like staying calm, giving clear directions, and guiding stakeholders.

Immediate Medical Response to Accidental Injuries

If there is a need to bring the injured learner to the hospital or barangay health center, we ensure that a teacher accompanies them; we do not allow the injured learner to go alone. Even if it costs us more, the important thing is that the learner reaches the barangay health center safely. We are not careless when an accident happens. IDI-02

The findings of the study are somewhat similar to Che Rani and Ruslan (2024), who discovered that school injury is a serious issue globally, and they found that teachers are the first responders during school accidents. Teachers also provide immediate care to the injured student, making their first aid knowledge and preparedness important to student safety.

INSIGHTS DRAWN FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL HEADS IN HANDLING ACCIDENTAL INJURIES THAT ARE BENEFICIAL TO OTHERS

Strengthen School Safety Practices Through Collaboration

During our assemblies with parents, we always remind them that safety is not just about saying it; it requires the participation of everyone, even the children. Because if a child is not careful, it is hard to ensure safety. For example, when they misbehave, they may trip and get injured. IDI-06

The findings of the study are somewhat similar to Buising (2025) who found that collaboration among students, teachers, parents, and staff improves effective communication and is essential for creating a safe environment. It is also a significant element of a positive school culture where everyone in the learning community shares responsibility for students' protection and works together to achieve a common goal.

Promote Safe and Secure School Environment

Prepare your school to be injury-free by keeping it free from hazards. Then, always check the school surroundings. That's one of my advices, not to neglect the physical condition of the school. IDI-07

We should be aware that safety does not only refer to physical aspects, it also includes the emotional and psychological safety of children. IDI-05

The finding of the study is closely related to Choobsuwan and Chansirisira (2025), who emphasize that school administrators identify unsafe conditions and maintain facilities to prevent accidents and to promote school safety. Aside from physical safety, schools must also support emotional and psychological safety, highlighting the need to protect the learners from fear, humiliation, bullying, and exclusion while nurturing dignity, respect, and belonging for all members of the school community (Dube et al. 2024).

Strengthen Leadership Through Reflective Decision-Making

You should always have good decision-making if situations like that happen, so that you won't be bothered, because if you don't make the right decisions, it might bother you later. You should be attentive." IDI-02

The results of the study show that school heads strengthen their leadership through reflective decision-making during school injury incidents; however, some previous literature does not directly focus on this matter. Data from Asuque's (2025) research highlights that school heads faced natural disasters and health emergencies challenges, which influence their decision as leaders. In response, the school head emphasized that it is important to make quick decisions and take immediate necessary actions for the safety of students and staff.

Implement Data and Experience-Based School Safety Policies

For example, based on my experiences, it helps me, at least next time, though we are not praying for it to happen again, it serves as a guide on how to handle such situations like asking for help from our stakeholders, especially the Barangay. IDI-02

The findings of the study emphasize the importance of data and experiences as the foundation of building a more effective school safety policy. It is somewhat similar to the study of Anjum and Zafar (2022), which suggests that school heads should make decisions based on evidence and past experiences to build a stronger school policy related to discipline and maintaining order within the school. It is also emphasized that it is important to ask advice from parents, students, and school staff to make sound judgments in any circumstances.



Promote School Preparedness and Responsibility

Teachers have limited training to handle such situations. As we all know, our teachers here have not really received special training in first aid. Due to that, as a member of Barangay Development Council (BDC), I encourage the barangay to give teachers special training in handling accidents and giving first aid. IDI-07

Corresponding with the study's analysis, Gonzaga and Castillo (2025) found that many teachers panicked immediately and could not apply first aid when injuries arose, and only relied on the school clinic. Thus, the study stressed the importance of continuous training among teachers, particularly in first aid and emergency response.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT PRACTICE

Based on the findings of this study, school heads' challenges in managing accidental injuries in schools revolve around the availability of time and materials. Therefore, school heads must apply systematic planning, and ensure the availability of emergency resources. Moreover, the results highlight that those accidental injuries in schools are mostly caused by students' misbehavior. Thus, school heads must apply proactive safety leadership through continuous risk evaluation and the consistent implementation of school safety measures. It is also essential to implement more stringent supervision and preventive student discipline, such as encouraging learners to go home immediately after dismissal and parent orientation for shared responsibility for students' safety. School heads should also promote emotional and psychological safety, encouraging respect, gender sensitivity, and anti-bullying.

Also, to support prevention before accidents happen, school heads are encouraged to implement Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) practices for school safety. School heads should also ensure timely care and financial responsibility for injury response through the appropriate use of school funds, and seeking for stakeholder support. Moreover, the results highlight the importance of structured injury management protocols and collaboration to ensure school safety and immediate care for injured learners, with teachers serving as first responders. It also suggested that, to maintain trust, minimize conflict, and ensure collaborative responses during emergencies, school heads should engage in transparent, timely, joint communication with parents and stakeholders.

Finally, the findings of the study reveal that some school heads experienced nervousness during injury management; thus, it is suggested to manage this emotional stress through thinking positive and to remind yourself to stay calm and relaxed. School heads are also expected to be responsible in making decisions and to use their experiences as an opportunity for professional growth.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The lived experiences of school heads in handling accidental injuries in schools reveal how they manage such unforeseen incidents. However, there are instances in which

participants' experiences lack sufficient supporting evidence in existing literature. Some of the gaps discovered include understanding the financial, emotional, and managerial aspects of school heads' experiences and coping processes when handling accidental injuries. These gaps suggested the need for future research to strengthen the evidence that these experiences were shared by many school heads. Hence, addressing these gaps through further research can help uncover the reality of school heads' management of accidental injuries in schools.

First, further studies may explore school-based financial responsibility that specifically focuses on injury response, including soliciting financial support from the Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) and assuming initial injury-related expenses. Second, further studies may explore school heads' approaches to communicating with parents, teachers, and stakeholders during injury incidents, with a focus on showing humility and taking responsibility. It is also recommended to explore school heads' communication practices, such as jointly explaining incidents to parents with teachers.

Third, further investigations may also focus on school heads' strategies for managing their emotions to overcome fear and stress when handling school accidents, particularly on being calm, maintaining composure, having a positive mindset, and preparing emotionally and mentally. Future researchers may also investigate more about school heads' emotional capacity to handle accidental injuries in schools. Particularly those school heads who are nervous, in handling emergency situations. Lastly, research is also suggested on school heads' experiences in receiving formal emergency and first aid training particularly in Red Cross and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) trainings.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Discovering the lived experiences of school heads in handling accidental injuries in schools has helped me a lot in my journey as an educational management student. It paves the way for me to realize that this study not only deals with the school heads' ability to handle accidental injuries, but it also reflects educational management as a whole. Also, it made me realize the importance of school safety, how experiences can shape school leaders' abilities, and the value of collaboration, preparedness, and management. Moreover, I realized the importance of emotional composure, ethical judgment, and strategic planning as helpful qualities to possess when you are a school head. I learned that the lived experiences of school heads in the proper management of accidental injuries in schools strongly rely on calm decision-making, collaboration, clear communication, preparedness, and the ability to transform crisis situations into learning opportunities. Therefore, school safety practices must be understood as a continuous administrative responsibility that should be applied daily rather than activated only during emergencies.

Additionally, through the insights gained in this study, I respectfully and humbly encourage the Department of Education, school heads, and local stakeholders to engage actively with the realities of handling accidental injuries in schools. Moreover, it is also important to recognize that this situation can possibly present



complicated challenges that need collaboration. Thus, cooperation is important to help achieve a safe and secure school environment, as well as to protect the well-being of the people in the school community, particularly the students.

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