



GINHAWA AT GALING: AN INSIGHT INTO THE WELL-BEING AND WORK LIFE BALANCE OF THE MEGA SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS OF KORONADAL CITY, SOUTH COTABATO

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of mega school administrators in the Koronadal City Division, focusing on how they manage their well-being and work-life balance while leading complex, mega school organizations. Administrators in mega schools often face heavy workloads, multiple responsibilities, and institutional pressures that may affect both their professional effectiveness and personal well-being. Despite the important role they play in school leadership, limited studies have examined how these administrators maintain balance while fulfilling demanding leadership roles. To address this gap, the study employed a qualitative research design using Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological approach. Eight mega school administrators from public elementary and secondary schools in the Koronadal City Division participated in the study. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants with experience managing mega schools. The collected data were transcribed and analyzed thematically using phenomenological procedures. The findings revealed that administrators encounter significant challenges in maintaining work-life balance due to heavy administrative workload, numerous leadership responsibilities, institutional pressure, and limited time for personal life. However, the participants demonstrated resilience by employing coping strategies such as effective time management, delegation of responsibilities, seeking support from colleagues and family, maintaining positive relationships, and practicing self-care and emotional regulation. The results of this study highlight the importance of supporting the well-being of school administrators to sustain effective leadership and promote a positive school environment. The findings may serve as a basis for developing institutional support systems, administrator wellness programs, and policies that promote balanced and sustainable leadership practices in the education sector.

Keywords: *Well-being, mega school administrators, work-life balance, Ginhawa at Galing, insights*

INTRODUCTION

School administrators serve as the backbone of educational institutions, carrying immense responsibilities in directing teachers, implementing innovations, and shaping learning environments. Their leadership is critical in ensuring that school's function effectively, yet their well-being is often overlooked, particularly in mega schools with very large student populations and demanding workloads. International studies consistently highlight that administrators experience high levels of stress and burnout due to multiple responsibilities, long working hours, and emotional exhaustion, which negatively affect their health and job satisfaction (Marinac et al., 2024). This neglect of administrator welfare creates risks not only to their personal well-being but also to the overall performance of schools.

Ginhawa at Galing reflects the balance between administrators' well-being (ginhawa) and leadership effectiveness (galing). Well-being is not simply the absence of stress but a state that enables individuals to function effectively and make sound decisions (Charles et al., 2021). When administrators experience ginhawa, they maintain emotional stability, build positive relationships, and sustain motivation. Meanwhile, galing is demonstrated through effective leadership practices such as decision-making, supervision, and management. Studies show that balancing well-being and leadership competence leads to better school performance and a more positive school environment (Daly et al., 2025).

Globally, the importance of well-being has been emphasized through Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3, which advocates for healthy lives and well-being for all ages (UNICEF, 2025). However, despite this global emphasis, school administrators often lack adequate support systems to maintain their well-being and sustain their professional excellence while fulfilling their leadership roles. In the Philippine context, administrators face challenges such as inadequate resources, excessive workloads, and societal pressures (Quirap, 2022; Dulog, 2024). While policies such as Republic Act No. 11036, also known as the Mental Health Act, and DepEd Order No. 14, s. 2020 provide general support for school personnel, their implementation largely emphasizes students and teachers. Frameworks such as the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads focus on leadership competencies but provide limited explicit provisions addressing administrators' mental health and well-being (DepEd.gov.ph, 2020).

Consequently, administrators experience considerable emotional, mental, and physical stress, which is often overlooked despite their critical need for flexibility, effectiveness, and resilience. This persistent neglect contributes to burnout and, in many cases, resignations (Agyapong et al., 2022). In Mindanao, administrators frequently encounter challenges such as insufficient support, lack of well-being initiatives, and high levels of burnout (Castañeros et al., 2023). These realities underscore the timeliness of examining administrator well-being, particularly in mega schools where leadership demands are magnified.

Existing literature has largely focused on teachers or general school management, leaving a significant gap in understanding the personal experiences of Filipino school administrators in balancing professional excellence with well-being (Martinez & McAbee, 2020; Evangelio & Villocino, 2023). This gap is particularly evident in Koronadal City, where mega school administrators manage very large student populations and complex organizational structures. Despite South Cotabato ranking ninth among the top provinces in functional literacy rates (Mordeno, 2025), little empirical evidence exists on how administrators sustain their well-being while ensuring professional excellence. Addressing this gap is crucial, as strong and well-supported leadership is essential for sustaining educational achievements in marginalized areas.

Theoretical frameworks such as Allardt's Theory of Welfare, Ecological Systems Theory, Boundary Theory, and Ryff's Psychological Well-being Model provide lenses for understanding the multidimensional nature of administrator well-being. These frameworks emphasize the interplay of personal, social, and organizational factors in shaping leadership effectiveness (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lukasik, 2021; Khateeb, 2021; Prasad et al., 2025). Integrating these perspectives situates administrator well-being within both local and global contexts, highlighting the need for holistic support systems.

Thus, this study explored the lived experiences and insights of mega school administrators in Koronadal City as they navigate the challenges of maintaining well-being and work life balance. By addressing this research gap, the study contributed to a deeper understanding of how administrators balanced personal and professional demands, identifies coping strategies, and provides recommendations for policy and practice. The timeliness of this research lies in its potential to inform leadership approaches and well-being initiatives that can enhance administrator resilience, sustain educational achievements, and ultimately improve school performance.

Research Questions

This study explored the lived experiences and insights of mega school administrators in the Koronadal City Division as they managed their well-being while carrying out their leadership responsibilities. It addressed the following questions:

1. How do mega school administrators experience and navigate the challenges of maintaining well-being and work-life balance in their leadership roles?
2. What personal and institutional factors contribute to or hinder the well-being of the mega school administrators?
3. What coping strategies and leadership practices do mega school administrators develop to sustain their well-being while ensuring professional excellence (Ginhawa at Galing)?
4. What are the insights of the mega school administrators regarding their well-being and work-life balance (Ginhawa at Galing), and what improvements do they suggest to enhance their overall well-being?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design using a modified transcendental phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences and insights of mega school administrators regarding their well-being and professional excellence. It was conducted in a public school in Koronadal City Division, selected for its inclusion of mega schools at both elementary and secondary levels. The study utilized purposive sampling to identify participants who met specific criteria. The participants were eight (8) mega school administrators, the principals, who were currently managing very large public schools. To qualify, participants had to be practicing administrators, handle mega schools with at least 51 teachers for elementary or 101 for secondary, and have a minimum of three (3) years of administrative experience. The participants were composed of both male and female administrators, aged approximately 40 to 60 years old, with administrative experience ranging from 6 to 23 years, and holding positions from Principal I to Principal IV.

Data were collected using a researcher-made semi-structured interview guide consisting of ten (10) open-ended questions designed to gather in-depth information about participants' experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and insights related to well-being and professional excellence. The instrument was validated by a panel of experts to ensure clarity and content relevance. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility in probing participants' responses. Prior to data collection, permission was secured from the schools' division superintendent in Koronadal City Division, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Interviews were conducted in a private and comfortable setting at a time convenient for the participants. Responses were recorded with permission and supplemented with notes, and all interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis guided by a modified transcendental phenomenological framework. The process included bracketing, transcription and familiarization, identification of significant statements through horizontalization, clustering of meaning units into themes, and the development of textural and structural descriptions, leading to the synthesis of the essence of the participants' experiences. The study focused on the lived experiences and insights of mega school administrators in one public-school division, particularly on their well-being, professional excellence, challenges, and coping strategies. The study was limited to eight (8) participants, and the findings were based on self-reported data, which may not be generalizable to other contexts. Additionally, perspectives from other stakeholders such as teachers and students were not included. Despite these limitations, the study provides in-depth and context-specific insights into the experiences of mega school administrators.

RESULTS

The findings of the study revealed several themes that directly address the research questions of the study. For the lived experiences of mega school administrators, three major themes emerged: demanding and multifaceted leadership roles, work-life balance struggles and strategies, and emotional strain and mental pressure in leadership. These experiences reflect the dynamic and intensive nature of

leadership in mega school settings, where administrators manage complex responsibilities that extend beyond routine school operations.

In terms of challenges affecting their well-being, two major themes were identified: resource management and allocation, and institutional challenges affecting well-being. These include heavy workload and time constraints, limited institutional support, resource limitations, and role conflict between personal and professional responsibilities. Administrators emphasized the difficulty of balancing administrative duties with personal life, often extending their work beyond regular working hours. These challenges highlight the pressures associated with managing large and complex school environments.

In terms of coping mechanisms, three themes emerged: supportive and participatory leadership practices, stress mitigation and coping practices, and balancing professional excellence and self-care. Supportive and participatory leadership practices involve shared decision-making and maintaining positive relationships with teachers and colleagues. Stress mitigation strategies include delegation of tasks, collaboration, continuous professional learning, seeking support from family and friends, and engaging in recreational activities for stress relief. Balancing professional effectiveness and self-care reflects the administrators' conscious effort to sustain performance while protecting their well-being. These strategies enabled them to manage stress and maintain effectiveness in their leadership roles.

Finally, in terms of the leadership insights, the themes identified include time management, effective decision-making and prioritization, instructional leadership, continuous professional growth, adaptability, commitment to service, and maintaining strong community relationships. Administrators emphasized that their well-being is closely linked to their leadership effectiveness and school performance. Overall, the findings suggest that the well-being and work life balance of mega school administrators are interconnected and influenced by both personal coping strategies and institutional conditions.

DISCUSSION

Mega school administrators experience and navigating the challenges of maintaining well-being and work–life balance in their leadership roles

The findings revealed that mega school administrators experienced leadership as a highly demanding and multifaceted responsibility. Participants described managing multiple campuses, supervising large teaching staff, and addressing daily operational concerns while ensuring that instructional quality remains consistent. Their experiences illustrated how leadership in mega schools requires constant coordination, visibility, and responsiveness to emerging challenges.

These experiences reflect patterns identified in the literature discussed in Chapter II. Previous studies had shown that principals in large schools often face expanded administrative responsibilities and increased workload demands (Tintoré et al., 2020; McCabe, 2023). Similarly, research by Erickson (2019) and Li (2023)

emphasizes that school leaders working in complex institutional settings must continuously balance operational management with instructional leadership.

The administrators' emphasis on supervision and monitoring also aligned with literature on instructional leadership. Studies indicate that regular classroom monitoring and staff supervision help maintain instructional quality and accountability within schools (Kandemir, 2022; Golcuk & Atik, 2022). However, these responsibilities simultaneously increased leadership pressure and require administrators to carefully manage their time and attention.

From a theoretical perspective, these experiences reflect Ecological Systems Theory, originally proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner. According to this perspective, individuals operate within interconnected systems that shape their experiences and behaviors. In the context of mega schools, administrators interact with multiple layers of the educational environment, including teachers, students, policies, and community expectations. These interacting systems influence both leadership practices and personal well-being.

In addition, these findings were also be viewed through Allardt's Welfare Theory, which emphasized that well-being is influenced by the dimensions of having (resources and conditions), loving (social relationships), and being (personal fulfillment). The demanding nature of administrators' roles reflects challenges in all three dimensions, as they must manage limited resources, maintain relationships with stakeholders, and achieve personal fulfillment and work-life balance simultaneously.

Furthermore, these experiences aligned with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3, which promotes good health and well-being for all. The persistent demands and pressures faced by administrators highlight the need for institutional support systems that ensure not only effective leadership and well-being.

Overall, the findings suggested that mega school leadership requires administrators to navigate complex institutional environments while simultaneously protecting their personal well-being. Their experiences demonstrated how leadership responsibilities and environmental demands continuously interact within the school context.

Personal and institutional factors contribute to or hinder the well-being of mega school administrators

The findings indicated that both institutional and personal conditions shape administrators' well-being. Participants identified resource availability, school infrastructure, funding limitations, institutional culture, and student performance expectations as significant factors influencing their leadership experiences. These conditions often create additional pressure on administrators as they attempt to maintain school performance despite limited resources.

Studies had shown that insufficient infrastructure and limited resources place significant strain on school leaders, particularly in large or under-resourced schools (Navarro, 2022; Dyantyi & Cishe, 2025). When administrators must address facility shortages or financial limitations, leadership responsibilities become more complex and demanding.

Financial management also emerged as a critical factor in sustaining school operations. Administrators emphasized the need to carefully allocate funds to ensure that programs and instructional needs are supported. This finding corresponds with research suggesting that strategic financial management strengthens organizational stability and supports school improvement initiatives (Abellon et al., 2020; Gomez, 2025).

The participants' experiences also highlighted the influence of institutional culture and internal dynamics. School culture, interpersonal relationships, and informal groupings within the organization often affect leadership effectiveness and workplace harmony. Scholars have similarly noted that organizational culture significantly shapes leadership experiences and employee satisfaction within educational institutions (Bakır & Altunay, 2025; Plaku & Leka, 2025).

These findings were also understood through the lens of Ecological Systems Theory, which explained how environmental factors influence individual experiences. The school was a microsystem in which administrators interact with teachers, students, and institutional structures. At the same time, external policies, community expectations, and governance structures form part of the broader system that shapes leadership realities.

Moreover, Allardt's Welfare Theory, explained that administrators' well-being was directly affected by their access to resources (having), the quality of relationships within the school (loving), and their sense of purpose and fulfillment in leadership (being). Limitations in any of these dimensions can negatively influence their overall well-being.

These findings also supported SDG 3, emphasizing that well-being was not solely an individual responsibility but a shared institutional concern. Ensuring administrators' well-being requires systemic support, policies, and programs that address both environmental and personal factors.

These factors demonstrated that administrators' well-being was not determined solely by personal resilience. Rather, it was shaped by the broader institutional environment in which leadership occurs.

Coping strategies and leadership practices, mega school administrators sustain their well-being while ensuring professional excellence (Ginhawa at Galing)

The findings showed that administrators actively develop strategies to managed the pressures associated with leadership. Participants emphasized delegation, collaborative decision-making, professional learning, social support, and recreational activities as important practices that sustain both their well-being and leadership effectiveness.

Collaborative leadership practices emerged as a key strategy. Administrators explained that involving teachers and stakeholders in decision-making helps distribute responsibilities and strengthens shared accountability within the school. This observation aligned with studies highlighting the benefits of participatory leadership in improving organizational engagement and institutional performance (Fadhilah et al., 2024; Chang & Abdullah, 2025).

Delegation also appeared as an important leadership practice. By distributing tasks among teachers and staff, administrators reduce individual workload and encourage shared ownership of school initiatives. Previous research had similarly emphasized that distributed leadership enhances organizational effectiveness while reducing stress among school leaders (Leithwood et al., 2020; Bodson, 2021).

Participants also highlighted the role of continuous professional learning in sustaining leadership competence. Attending seminars, reading leadership materials, and exchanging practices with other administrators allow leaders to remain informed and confident in addressing emerging challenges. These findings correspond with studies suggesting that ongoing professional development strengthens leadership capacity and supports effective school management (Marinac et al., 2024).

The coping strategies described by the participants reflect Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Theory, developed by Carol D. Ryff. Ryff's framework emphasizes dimensions such as environmental mastery, personal growth, and positive relationships. By cultivating supportive networks, developing leadership skills, and maintaining self-awareness, administrators strengthen these dimensions of well-being while sustaining professional excellence.

At the same time, these practices aligned with Allardt's Welfare Theory, as they help administrators strengthen their social connections (loving), improve their working conditions (having), and achieve personal fulfillment (being).

Moreover, these strategies supported the goals of SDG 3, as they promote mental, emotional, and social well-being among school leaders, ensuring that they can sustain both their health and leadership effectiveness.

These practices illustrated how administrators strive to achieve "Ginhawa at Galing," balancing personal well-being with professional competence in their leadership roles.

Insights of the mega school administrators regarding their well-being and work-life balance (Ginhawa at Galing), and what improvements do they suggest enhancing their overall well-being

The administrators shared several insights regarding the importance of maintaining balance between professional responsibilities and personal well-being. Time management, emotional resilience, work-life boundaries, community engagement, and self-care emerged as key recommendations for sustaining leadership effectiveness.

Participants emphasized the importance of organizing tasks and identifying priorities. Effective time management allowed administrators to remain focused on essential responsibilities while minimizing unnecessary pressure. This finding reflects earlier research indicating that structured planning helps leaders maintain productivity and manage competing responsibilities in complex organizational settings (Erickson, 2019; Li, 2023).

Emotional resilience also appeared as an important theme. Administrators explained that reflection, positivity, and self-awareness help them navigate leadership

challenges more effectively. Studies support this observation, suggesting that emotionally resilient leaders demonstrate stronger decision-making and greater adaptability when managing organizational stress (Hayes et al., 2022; Marsh et al., 2022).

Participants further emphasized the importance of establishing boundaries between work and personal life. Maintaining clear distinctions between these roles helps administrators prevent burnout and support their well-being. This insight aligned with Boundary Theory, which explained how individuals regulate the interaction between work and personal domains to minimize role conflict.

Administrators stressed the importance of self-care and supportive professional networks. Maintaining strong relationships with colleagues, engaging in physical and social activities, and seeking guidance from team members contribute to resilience and the sustainability of leadership. These practices correspond with the principles of well-being discussed in the literature, which emphasize the importance of social support and personal health in sustaining leadership effectiveness. These practices also aligned with Allardt's Welfare Theory, particularly in strengthening social relationships (loving) and personal fulfillment (being).

Additionally, these insights reflected Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Theory, particularly in fostering autonomy, self-acceptance, and purpose in life, as administrators strive to maintain control over their time and personal well-being.

Moreover, these recommendations strongly supported SDG 3, reinforcing the need to promote holistic well-being through both personal practices and institutional support systems.

Taken together, these insights suggested that sustainable leadership requires both institutional support and personal strategies that enable administrators to balance professional demands with personal well-being.

Conclusions

This study explored the lived experiences of mega school administrators in the Koronadal City Division regarding their well-being and work–life balance within the framework of “Ginhawa at Galing.” Guided by modified transcendental phenomenology, the study sought to understand how administrators experience leadership, what conditions influence their well-being, how they sustained their professional roles, and what insights they offered for improving the balance of leadership. Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

Mega school leadership was a highly demanding role that required administrators to continually navigate multiple responsibilities, complex institutional environments, and the expectations of diverse stakeholders. The nature of leadership in mega schools requires administrators to maintain constant engagement in decision-making, coordination, and organizational management while sustaining their personal capacity to lead. As a result, effective leadership in mega schools required administrators to consciously manage their time, responsibilities, and personal boundaries to sustain both leadership performance and personal well-being.

The well-being of mega school administrators was shaped by an interaction between institutional conditions and individual leadership practices. Organizational structures, resource availability, and institutional culture created the context in which administrators carry out their responsibilities. These structural realities significantly influence how administrators experience leadership and how they managed professional demands. As such, leadership well-being cannot be understood solely as an individual concern but had to be viewed within the broader institutional environment that frames administrative work.

Mega school administrators sustained their leadership roles through adaptive practices that combine professional competence with personal resilience. Effective leadership involved fostering collaborative environments, strengthening professional relationships, and engaging in continuous learning that supports both institutional effectiveness and personal development. These practices demonstrated that sustaining leadership in complex school environments requires not only managerial capability but also reflective leadership and intentional strategies that support long-term resilience.

Mega school administrators emphasized the importance of maintaining balance between professional responsibilities and personal well-being as a foundation for sustainable leadership. Effective leadership was strengthened when administrators cultivate emotional resilience, maintain clear boundaries between work and personal life, and invested in professional growth and collaborative relationships. Sustainable leadership, therefore, emerged not only from institutional performance but also from administrators' capacity to maintain personal well-being while fulfilling their leadership roles.

Overall, the study concluded that leadership in mega schools required administrators to continuously balance institutional demands with personal well-being. Sustaining leadership effectiveness depended on integrating professional competence, collaborative leadership practices, and intentional self-care.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. **Support Systems for Mega School Leadership.** Educational authorities and school divisions may strengthen leadership support structures for mega school administrators by providing targeted programs that address the realities of managing large or multi-campus schools. Leadership initiatives that focus on sustainable management practices, workload coordination, and leadership well-being can help administrators navigate complex responsibilities while maintaining effectiveness in their roles.
2. **Institutional Conditions that Promote Administrator Well-Being.** School divisions may reinforce organizational structures that support administrator well-being by improving resource allocation systems, strengthening administrative support, and fostering a positive institutional culture. Creating environments where responsibilities, expectations, and support mechanisms are clearly structured can help administrators manage institutional demands while maintaining professional and personal balance.

3. Leadership Practices that Sustain Professional Effectiveness. School administrators may continue cultivating collaborative leadership practices that encourage shared responsibility, teacher engagement, and collective decision-making within the school community. Strengthening participatory governance and professional collaboration can reduce leadership isolation while sustaining organizational stability and effectiveness.
4. Strategies that Sustain Work–Life Balance and Leadership Resilience. Mega school administrators may sustain leadership effectiveness by maintaining practices that support both professional performance and personal well-being. Intentional time management, emotional resilience, reflective leadership, and cultivating supportive relationships within the school community contribute to a healthier balance between leadership responsibilities and personal life.
5. Future researchers may further explore leadership sustainability and administrator well-being in large or multi-campus school settings across different educational contexts. Longitudinal and comparative studies may provide deeper insights into how institutional conditions, leadership practices, and support systems influence the long-term well-being and effectiveness of school administrators.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The researcher affirms that this research was conducted in full compliance with ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to participation, and they were given the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. The anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents were strictly maintained, and their well-being was safeguarded throughout the research process. No conflict of interest exists in the conduct of this study. Plagiarism was strictly avoided, and all sources were properly acknowledged. The interpretation of findings was carried out with impartiality, ensuring that no bias influenced the results. The outcomes of this research were used purely for academic and scholarly purposes.

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