International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

Challenges and Strategies in the Financial Management of a Public Elementary School: A Phenomenology

Myka Jean Atazan Diaz[1], Mildred Accad[2]

[1]Teacher, Education, Department of Education
[2]Dean, Graduate School, Sultan Kudarat State University

Abstract

Effective financial management is a cornerstone of quality education systems, ensuring that schools provide students with the necessary resources, facilities, and experiences for academic growth. However, managing finances in educational institutions presents unique challenges that require strategic planning and innovative solutions. This qualitative study explores the challenges, practices, and strategies in financial management within the Tupi District in the Schools Division of South Cotabato. The study involved nine participants: three school heads, three disbursing officers, and three teachers. Using thematic analysis, the study identified key financial management challenges: insufficient funding, delayed and cumbersome fund release processes, inadequate financial planning and budgetary control, negative impacts on school operations and educational programs, and a lack of transparency and stakeholder involvement. To address these issues, participants highlighted practices such as collaborative budget planning and allocation, efficient and regulated utilization of government funds, and adopting best practices and external innovations. Similarly, the strategies employed included strengthening financial collaboration, optimizing fund utilization, and integrating innovative financial management approaches. The findings underscore the need for improved financial policies, increased transparency, and enhanced stakeholder engagement to ensure effective school financial management. These insights can serve as a foundation for developing policies and programs that promote financial efficiency and sustainability in educational institutions.

Keywords: financial management, strategies, solutions, practices

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION
Background of the Study

Effective financial management is a cornerstone of quality education systems around the world. Schools rely on financial resources to provide students with the necessary tools, facilities, and educational experiences that foster growth and development. However, managing finances within educational institutions offers a unique series of challenges that need consideration and creative solutions.

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping individuals and societies. A well-managed and adequately funded education system is essential for nurturing talent, promoting economic growth, and fostering social development. According to Tucker and Duke (2019), the basic education sector presents distinct financial management challenges compared to higher education or other sectors. K-12 education institutions often have limited budgets and unique funding structures, so investigating their specific financial management needs is crucial.

Public schools across Southeast Asia face significant challenges in financial management that hinder their ability to provide quality education and meet the needs of learners. A key issue lies in the inconsistency of financial practices; while some schools have established effective systems, others struggle due to limited budgeting knowledge among administrators and staff. This disparity reveals a critical gap in financial literacy and resource management. Moreover, despite efforts to involve stakeholders in decision-making, many schools still encounter difficulties in ensuring transparent and efficient allocation of funds. However, there are viable opportunities for improvement, such as leveraging digital tools for financial tracking, implementing regular financial reporting to boost transparency, and fostering stronger partnerships with local communities.

In the Philippines, Llego (2023) highlighted that the principal or school head is appointed not purely based on their expertise but also on the individual in the school management and their training in leadership and management. Instead, most principals or school heads are appointed based on seniority or the length of service rendered. Therefore, school heads must manage their finance and accounts, assisted by the financial clerk. Over time, this can lead some of the school heads to lose confidence in making decisions regarding the financial management of their schools. This inadequate situation can worsen if Department of Education (DepEd) officials are not involved in monitoring and assisting them.

Educational challenges and financial management practices differ markedly across public elementary schools, often resulting in unequal access to quality education. Variations in funding allocation, resource availability, and administrative efficiency highlight the need for a comparative analysis to identify gaps and best practices. Sound financial management is crucial, as it directly influences how resources are distributed and utilized within the school system. Financial resources can support equitable access to learning materials, teacher development, and school infrastructure when managed effectively. Conversely, inadequate funding or poor financial practices can severely limit educational opportunities, compromise teaching quality, and delay necessary maintenance or improvements. Hence, understanding how public elementary schools allocate and manage their funds is essential to promoting fairness and improving educational outcomes across different contexts.

Tupi, a municipality in South Cotabato, has unique demographic, economic, and geographic characteristics that make it an interesting case study. Understanding the specific challenges public elementary schools face can provide insights into the broader issues of education systems, particularly financial management across different school contexts.

Several studies have been conducted on financial management. However, those studies overemphasize challenges; in fact, Williams and Lindh (2019) shift from challenges to identifying and promoting practices in financial management. Moreover, there is an underrepresentation of the type of schools, as Shan (2015) aims to address the gap in understanding the financial dynamics of different school types.

Therefore, this study on challenges and solutions has generated information to fill the gap for policy recommendations for the local government, education authorities, and schools in South Cotabato to inform the development of strategies and policies to enhance financial management and promote the sustainability of the basic system in the province focusing on public elementary schools.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is anchored on Agency Theory by Jensen and Meckling (1976), which posits that conflicts arise between the principal (those in authority or control) and the agent (those acting on behalf of the principal) due to conflicting interests. This theory is particularly relevant to the study as it provides a framework for understanding the potential conflicts and misalignments of interests that may occur within Tupi, South Cotabato's basic education system, in the context of financial management. It highlights how individuals acting as agents may seek to maximize their rewards or minimize effort, potentially leading to inefficiencies or mismanagement of financial resources in educational institutions.

Furthermore, Ostman's Theory of Financial Control (2007) underlines the significance of financial tools and processes in organizational decision-making. It stresses the importance of considering the financial tools' present and future functions and examining financial factors at all phases and levels. This theory supports the study by emphasizing that understanding how activities relate to financial processes is crucial. In the context of Tupi, South Cotabato's basic education system, this theory can shed light on how monetary tools and processes impact decision-making and the efficient allocation of resources.

The Social Capital Theory, as proposed by Coleman (1988), is pertinent to the study as it focuses on the value derived from social relationships and networks. Trust, collaborative relationships, and social norms play a pivotal role in enhancing the effectiveness of resource allocation and financial management. This theory can be applied to examine how trust and collaborative relationships within educational communities and among stakeholders influence the allocation of financial resources and the establishment of financial partnerships. It provides a lens through which to understand the role of social capital in addressing financial challenges and promoting efficient financial management.

Further, the Resource Dependency Theory, suggested by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), indicates that organizations depend on external resources (such as funding) and that their survival and success are influenced by their ability to acquire and manage these resources. In the context of public elementary schools, the theory would help explain how schools manage their finances in response to the external funding they receive (e.g., from government, donors, or the community) and how they mitigate dependence on scarce resources. In this study, schools face financial constraints due to limited public funding, and this framework could explain how they strategically seek alternative resources (fundraising, partnerships) or reallocate existing funds to address challenges.

These theories can help develop a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and solutions in school financial management in Tupi, South Cotabato. These theories offer valuable perspectives on how conflicts, financial tools, social relationships, and stakeholder interests interplay in the context of educational finance, ultimately informing strategies for improving financial management practices.

Research Questions

Effective financial management is critical to ensuring the quality and sustainability of basic education systems. In Tupi, South Cotabato, as in many other regions, educational institutions face unique challenges in managing their finances efficiently and effectively. These challenges may hinder the delivery of quality basic education and impact the overall educational experience of students. The study explored the challenges and strategies in the financial management of public elementary schools in Tupi, South Cotabato. It answered the following research questions:

1. What are the common financial management challenges faced by public elementary schools in Tupi, South Cotabato?

2. What are the various financial management practices across different public elementary schools?
3. How do school administrators in public elementary schools address financial management challenges?

Significance of the Study

The study's significance lies in its potential to inform policy improvements, enhance financial management practices, and promote transparency, equity, and sustainability in Tupi, South Cotabato, public elementary schools. It can benefit educational institutions, administrators, teachers, stakeholders, and researchers.

Department of Education. The study can provide insights to DepEd on how financial policies and guidelines can be improved to better support basic education schools in South Cotabato and potentially in other regions. It can inform policy refinements that promote transparency, equity, and sustainability in education financing. Furthermore, a better understanding of resource allocation challenges and solutions allows for a more effective distribution of resources to ensure quality education.

School Administrators. They can gain valuable insights into effective financial management practices that successfully address challenges. This knowledge can help them make informed decisions and optimize resource allocation within their schools. They can also learn about sustainability strategies that can be applied to maintain the quality of education over the long term.

Teachers. They can benefit from a study highlighting how financial constraints, such as teaching materials, impact classroom resources. The study can help teachers understand how resource allocation can be optimized to improve teaching and learning. It may also inspire teachers to advocate for innovative solutions and participate in the decision-making process for school resource allocation.

Stakeholders. They can become better informed about the financial challenges schools face and how they can contribute to addressing them. Understanding financial equity and transparency can empower stakeholders to advocate for equal educational access for all students.

Researchers can build upon the findings to further explore financial management in education, both in the Philippines and globally. The findings can serve as a reference point for future research in the field. Researchers can also contribute to developing evidence-based policy recommendations, fostering positive change in education financing and management.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

Several key parameters defined the scope. Geographically, the study is limited to Tupi, South Cotabato, a province in the southern Philippines that provides basic education systems within the locality. The study primarily concerned financial management practices within basic education schools, encompassing budgeting, resource allocation, financial planning, and related financial activities. It examined the experiences and perspectives of key stakeholders directly involved in or affected by basic education financial management, including school administrators, teachers, and school budget officers.

In contrast, the delimitations of the study set its boundaries and establish what is not within its scope. Temporally, the study mainly focused on financial management practices and challenges until 2024. The study did not include Quantitative data analysis, as it used a qualitative approach emphasizing rich, context-specific insights. The study centered on Tupi, South Cotabato, and did not extend its coverage to basic education systems in another municipality in South Cotabato. While recognizing the importance of broader economic and political factors, the study did not extensively dig into these aspects, concentrating primarily on the micro-level financial management practices within basic education.

Finally, the study refrained from conducting in-depth comparative analyses between Tupi, South Cotabato, and other municipalities, instead seeking to provide a detailed understanding of Tupi, South Cotabato's basic education system within its specific context.

Definition of Terms

To help ensure that the terms used in the research are clearly defined and provide a common understanding for the study's stakeholders, researchers, and readers, the following terms are operationally defined:

Challenges refer to the specific obstacles, difficulties, or problems related to financial management faced by basic education institutions in Tupi, South Cotabato.

Financial Management is the practices, processes, and decisions involved in planning, budgeting, allocating, monitoring, and controlling financial resources within Tupi, South Cotabato's basic education system. This term includes revenue generation, expenditure management, and financial accountability activities.

Public Elementary School refers to schools in Tupi, South Cotabato, regulated and controlled by the Department of Education.

School Operations refers to all the activities and functions involved in the day-to-day functioning of educational institutions within Tupi, South Cotabato's basic education system.

Strategies refer to approaches, or actions implemented or proposed to address the identified challenges in the financial management of basic education institutions in Tupi, South Cotabato.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

This chapter presents various literature reviews and related studies. These materials, including online sources such as articles and news, significantly contribute to the study's conduct.

Challenges in School Financial Management

Several key challenges in financial management in public secondary schools. According to Magak (2013) include issues such as overspending and underspending, problems with entry into financial records, the doubling of administrative roles, low salaries for bursars and accounts clerks, incompetence among bursars/accounts clerks and storekeepers, teachers' failure to provide accounting support documents, delays in the disbursement of funds, school fee defaults, unauthorized levies, insufficient financial knowledge among head teachers, inadequacies in procurement committees, limited auditing knowledge among head teachers, irregular school audits by district auditors, and difficulties in preparing financial records up to the final accounts. Moreover, Kaguri et al. (2014) posited that financial planning and budgeting are often done either cursory or not at all, with minimal involvement of education stakeholders in the budgetary process. Financial reports are poorly prepared, while Auditing is done arbitrarily.

Similarly, Mwangi and Kimani (2020) emphasized that financial decision-making remains centralized without stakeholder participation, increasing the risk of fund misallocation and corruption. Schools that fail to involve parents and community leaders in budget discussions may struggle to secure external support and resources. However, some school heads also encountered problems with their budgeting, accounting, procurement, and asset management tasks. Their issues have somehow limited them from performing well and achieving better results. Moreover, according to Espiritu (2020), the accountability to properly manage public resources rests directly with them as school fiscal managers. In consonance,

Aina and Bipath (2020) found that the mismanagement of school funds is largely due to principals and the school governing bodies (SGB) in many schools not having good working relationships with stakeholders and lacking the necessary financial skills, more specifically in schools in townships and rural areas.
On the other hand, Mestry (2018) identified that public schools face financial mismanagement, incompetence, inadequate resources, and a lack of financial management skills. Consequently, Myende et al. (2018) found that there tends to be limited financial accountability, a lack of transparency in financial reporting to school governing bodies and other stakeholders, and an absence of proper forecasting regarding financial resources in public schools.
Alio and Githui (2019) also identified challenges in public secondary schools, such as inadequate funding, poor budgeting practices, and a lack of transparency and accountability in financial management. Aina and Bipath (2020) also found that SGB parents' unavailability and limited financial skills were barriers to effective financial decisions.
Mugambi and Wanjiru (2021) point out that cumbersome fund release processes hamper schools' ability to plan their expenditures effectively, resulting in delays in critical areas such as infrastructure, procurement of learning materials, and implementation of development projects. This inefficiency leaves schools vulnerable to disruptions in their operations. Similarly, Osei and Boateng (2021) emphasize how ineffective financial planning exacerbates financial instability by leading to recurring deficits. Schools often resort to emergency measures, such as borrowing or requesting supplementary funds, to mitigate these shortfalls that further destabilize their financial health. Lastly, the Philippine Institute on Development Studies (2018) reveals that although government investment in education and training in the Philippines has grown, it remains low compared to more developed countries. This underinvestment results in poor learning outcomes and a lower quality of education, creating systemic challenges that restrict schools from effectively addressing financial instability and improving educational standards.

Financial Management Practices in Education

Financial management is “planning, organizing, directing, and controlling financial activities by applying general management principles to financial resources.” The findings of Sabri et al. (2020) suggest that healthy financial management should incorporate different financial practices, such as credit management, cash management, estate planning, and retirement planning. It is performed in each household to utilize the most accessible money. As Mwangi and Kimani (2020) stated, engaging various stakeholders in budget planning leads to more informed financial decisions, preventing unnecessary expenditures and ensuring that funds are directed toward critical areas such as teacher development, student programs, and infrastructure improvements.
Furthermore, Osei and Boateng (2021) emphasized that participatory budgeting fosters a sense of ownership among stakeholders, encouraging them to actively monitor and support the financial well-being of schools. When financial decisions are made collectively, it minimizes the risk of misallocation and promotes greater accountability, ensuring that resources are utilized effectively for long-term institutional sustainability. Moreover, Adebayo and Mensah (2019) emphasized that transparency in financial transactions fosters stakeholder confidence, particularly among teachers, parents, and community members. When school administrators actively disclose budget allocations and expenditures, they minimize the risk of mismanagement and enhance public trust in the institution’s financial governance. Establishing clear economic policies and digital tracking systems has also improved accountability, as Tshabangu and Moyo (2022) noted.

Despite the reforms implemented in recent years, Kasradze et al. (2023) noted that the education system continues to face numerous shortcomings and challenges that hinder the development of well-educated and globally competitive human resources. Without a strengthened and responsive education system, meaningful participation in global competition remains unattainable. In examining financial management practices, Nisa et al. (2023) found that budget planning for facilities and infrastructure was generally well-managed, with school budgets aligned to existing needs, organizational conditions remaining stable, and financial activities being closely monitored through systematic bookkeeping. This approach facilitated the procurement and maintenance of facilities while supporting overall financial oversight. Furthermore, Raman et al. (2022) emphasized that financial management and planning are essential to ensuring the efficient and effective use of resources within the education sector. This involves the strategic planning, organizing, directing, and controlling financial activities to optimize educational outcomes.

For financial management to succeed, planning and control should be interdependently linked. The researcher recommends improving resource policy tracking to ensure proper, adequate, and accountable utilization of resources budgeted for education. According to Kaguri et al. (2014), this can be done through external auditing or outsourcing of services. In addition, Nyamita and Dorasamy (2020) posited that transparency in financial reporting fosters trust among stakeholders and minimizes the risk of mismanagement. Similarly, Abrahams and Kinyua (2021) emphasize that schools that adopt structured borrowing practices and external financial support mechanisms can sustain their operations more effectively during budget constraints.

Financial management involves the strategic allocation and responsible utilization of limited resources to minimize waste and promote organizational accountability. Nwafukwa and Sunday (2015) emphasize that school heads, as financial managers, are tasked with preparing budgets, procuring resources, disbursing funds, and maintaining accurate financial records. Espiritu (2020) reported that competence in these areas is considered critical and indispensable to effective school operations. In support of this, the Commission on Audit has identified a pressing need to review and improve school financial management practices, including a thorough evaluation of financial managers' performance. Recognizing this, the Department of Education issued DepEd Order No. 60, series of 2016, which mandates the implementation of the Financial Management Operations Manual (FMOM) across all levels, like central, regional, division, and school. This directive underscores DepEd's commitment to strengthening financial accountability and highlights the importance of continuous professional development for financial management personnel as key drivers of educational reform and institutional transformation.

Strategies and Best Practices

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d), best practices are defined as procedures that, based on research and experience, yield optimal results and are proposed as standards suitable for widespread adoption (In the context of school leadership, financial management best practices refer to the consistent and strategic actions undertaken by school heads to ensure effective use of resources. According to DepEd Order No. 24, s.2020, school heads are expected to recognize challenges and opportunities in financial operations and to lead, empower, and build their personnel's capacity to promote equity and equality in schools.

To support this, various organizations have identified strategies that contribute to sound financial management in K-12 schools. ESS (2021) outlines six core strategies: continuous monitoring of data, public policy, and legislation; strategic planning over a three- to five-year horizon; minimizing administrative costs; proper asset management; promoting transparency and accountability; and utilizing technology effectively. Similarly, Vanco Payments (2021) provides practical tips for improving financial oversight, such as cutting excess spending, setting financial milestones, regularly evaluating spending goals, exploring operational partnerships, using school-specific accounting software, and implementing change-management practices.

In addition, the *International Journal of Educational Management* (2021) emphasizes the importance of mechanisms that hold school principals fully accountable for their financial decisions to sustain public trust. Locally, CORE (2021) offers foundational insights into how financial management practices operate within the Philippine educational context. Complementing these perspectives, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2019) recommends that school leaders focus on stakeholder communication and transparency, form a budget committee, develop a long-term financial plan, and conduct routine audits to ensure fiscal responsibility.

Oduor and Karanja's (2021) emphasis is that using credit for emergency purchases is a common strategy among schools with irregular funding disbursements, allowing them to meet urgent operational demands. However, they caution that excessive reliance on credit can lead to long-term financial instability if not properly managed.

Moreover, Kamau and Nyaga (2019) suggest that adopting structured cash flow management practices, such as forecasting expenditures, establishing emergency financial reserves, and negotiating better payment terms with suppliers, can help mitigate the risks associated with spending-first strategies. Schools that fail to implement proactive financial planning may face mounting debt and difficulties sustaining long-term economic stability.

According to Obonyo and Njoroge (2020), who found that schools prioritizing timely liquidation of expenses ensure that government-allocated funds are promptly utilized for their intended purposes, reducing the risk of financial bottlenecks and audit discrepancies.'

This finding aligns with Garcia and Castillo (2020), who emphasized that LGU and BLGU financial assistance is vital in bridging budgetary gaps, particularly in public schools with limited government allocations. Similarly, Mendoza and Cruz (2021) found that PTA involvement in fundraising activities and infrastructure development enhances school financial capacity, fostering a shared responsibility between parents and educators.

Additionally, Martinez and Santos (2020) emphasize that schools that actively engage in fundraising initiatives, such as benefit concerts, community bazaars, and crowdfunding campaigns, generate additional resources for infrastructure development and student programs. Similarly, Okafor and Adebayo (2021) found that schools adopting alternative procurement methods, such as bulk purchasing, donations, and barter exchanges, significantly reduce operational costs while maintaining educational quality.

Moreover, Nyarko and Boateng (2019) highlighted the effectiveness of partnership-based initiatives, where schools collaborate with local businesses, corporate sponsors, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to secure financial aid, equipment donations, and student scholarships. Additionally, Chavez and Ramirez (2022) noted that external collaborations with organizations like the Rotary Club, Lions Club, and international development agencies provide schools with financial assistance, training programs, and infrastructure improvements that would otherwise be unattainable through government funding alone.

Synthesis

Effective educational financial management is essential for optimizing resources and maintaining transparency and accountability. Challenges in financial management, such as overspending, recordkeeping issues, and administrative duplication, necessitate careful planning, control, and external auditing. Implementing best practices and accountability mechanisms is crucial for enhancing financial management and ensuring funds are used efficiently and educational outcomes are improved.

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the research design, the study's locale, participants, sampling techniques, data gathering instrument, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to deeply examine the lived experiences of school stakeholders in terms of financial management. This approach was chosen to align with the central aim of the research: to explore the challenges, practices, and strategies that emerge in the day-to-day financial operations of schools. By using phenomenology, the study sought to uncover the underlying meanings and perceptions that participants attach to their financial management roles. Qualitative research, by nature, is an iterative and reflective process that allows for a rich and nuanced exploration of complex social realities. It offers the opportunity to generate new insights by closely analyzing how individuals interpret and respond to particular phenomena within their unique contexts. In this case, the study delved into participants' subjective experiences to gain a deeper understanding of how they construct their realities around financial decision-making.

Phenomenology provided a lens to access the essence of participants' experiences; how they make sense of their roles, respond to financial constraints, and implement strategies within the school environment. This emphasis on meaning-making is especially critical in revealing the layered and often context-specific practices that influence school financial management. Through this design, the study was able to capture not only what participants do but also how and why they do it, offering valuable insights into their beliefs, challenges, and strategies.

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in Tupi, South Cotabato, Philippines. Tupi's selection as the research locale is supported by several scientific considerations that align with the study's objectives. As a first-class municipality, Tupi offers a diverse educational landscape encompassing remote and mainstream public schools. This diversity is vital for examining the varied financial management challenges and strategies experienced by schools across different contexts.

Tupi also serves as a representative microcosm of the broader educational environment in South Cotabato. It falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Education's South Cotabato Division Office, which oversees the implementation of educational programs and policies in the region. As such, insights from this locale may apply to other areas within the division, contributing to the generalizability and relevance of the study's findings.

According to the 2020 census, Tupi has a population of 73,459, providing a sufficiently large and demographically diverse community. This diversity supports including a wide range of educational institutions and stakeholders, which is essential for generating rich, meaningful data that reflects multiple perspectives.

Moreover, Tupi's proximity to the DepEd South Cotabato Division Office enhances the feasibility of the research by facilitating access to key informants, relevant documents, and official policies. This access enables a more in-depth exploration of the financial management practices within the local K-12 educational system.

Finally, Tupi’s ongoing implementation of the K-12 curriculum aligns directly with the focus of this study. The challenges and strategies related to financial management in K-12 schools are best examined in a setting where such a program is actively in place, making Tupi a strategically appropriate and contextually relevant site for this research.

Participants

The primary participants of this study were school heads, teachers, and school disbursing officers. School heads serve as the primary decision-makers in their respective institutions and carry significant responsibilities in budget allocation, resource management, and the implementation of financial policies. Their perspectives are essential in effectively identifying the core challenges involved in managing limited resources. Their insights also contribute to understanding the leadership strategies that promote financial transparency and sustainability at the school level.

Teachers, meanwhile, hold a critical position in the education system as they are directly involved in curriculum delivery, classroom management, and responding to student needs. They experience firsthand the effects of resource limitations and budgetary decisions, making their input vital in assessing how financial constraints influence teaching quality and student learning outcomes.

Additionally, school disbursing officers play a technical but equally important role in the financial management process. They were in charge of disbursement, accounting, and financial record-keeping, which positions them as key sources of information on the operational side of financial systems. Their expertise offers valuable insight into the complexities of financial documentation, compliance, and the mechanisms used to ensure accountability within schools.

The study constructed a comprehensive and multidimensional analysis of financial management in public education by including these three groups: school heads, teachers, and disbursing officers. Their collective experiences, challenges, and proposed solutions enrich the research by fully understanding how financial practices influence the broader goals of educational equity and effectiveness.

Sampling Technique

In the study on the challenges and strategies in school financial management of K-12 education systems in South Cotabato, purposive sampling is an appropriate and strategic approach for selecting research participants. Purposive sampling involves intentionally selecting participants who possess specific characteristics or have experienced particular situations relevant to the research focus (Creswell, 2013).

Purposive sampling allows for the deliberate selection of key stakeholders directly involved in school financial management, such as school heads, teachers, and school disbursing officers. These participants possess essential insights and experiences related to financial challenges and solutions (Patton, 2015). The study can capture a more comprehensive view of the financial dynamics within Tupi, South Cotabato's basic education system, by including individuals who hold central roles in the educational system.

This may also enable the inclusion of participants with varying roles and perspectives. For instance, school heads bring an administrative viewpoint, teachers offer insights from the classroom, and school disbursing

officers provide technical and financial expertise. This diversity in roles ensures a well-rounded exploration of financial management issues (Merriam, 2009).
The selection of participants through purposive sampling can focus on those with substantial expertise and experience in Tupi, South Cotabato's educational context. By including individuals who have worked within the region for an extended period, the study can tap into a wealth of knowledge about the specific financial challenges and the cultural and contextual factors that influence financial management (Patton, 2015).
It also aligned participant selection with the research questions and objectives. This study aimed to understand the challenges and solutions within the basic education system in Tupi, South Cotabato. Selecting participants directly connected to these issues ensures that the data collected is highly pertinent (Creswell, 2013).

Data Gathering Instruments
A researcher-made, unstructured interview guide was utilized in the study on the challenges and solutions in school financial management of K-12 education systems in South Cotabato. This can provide flexibility and depth in capturing the perspectives and experiences of research participants. Unstructured interviews allow for open-ended conversations that can reveal nuanced insights and uncover unexpected factors related to the research topic (Merriam, 2009).
Unstructured interview guides allow the researcher to adapt and explore various aspects of school financial management as they emerge during the interview process (Patton, 2015). This flexibility is particularly valuable in research where the financial management landscape may vary between schools and stakeholders. It enables the researcher to delve into issues that may not have been anticipated.
Furthermore, it prioritizes the participants' perspectives and narratives. This participant-centered approach aligns with the study's qualitative nature and allows participants to express their views in their own words, offering rich, context-specific data (Creswell, 2013).
Unstructured interviews can yield in-depth insights into the challenges and solutions in school financial management by using open-ended questions and allowing participants to share their experiences and perceptions (Merriam, 2009). Participants can elaborate on their experiences, providing a holistic view of the issues. Unstructured interviews can be complemented with other data sources, such as document analysis and observations, to enhance the rigor of the research through data triangulation. This approach helps ensure the findings are well-supported and reliable (Patton, 2015).
Given the complex nature of financial management, unstructured interviews were particularly useful for uncovering unforeseen or hidden factors that may affect the financial practices in South Cotabato's K-12 education system (Creswell, 2013).

Data Collection
In this descriptive phenomenological study, data gathering followed a systematic and rigorous process to explore the meaning of participants' experiences (Ang Karugasik, 2016).
The researcher followed a formal communication process to obtain all necessary approvals from relevant officials. This began with the approval of the Dean of SKSU Graduate School to conduct the study. Afterward, the researcher sent a letter to the Schools' Division Superintendent of South Cotabato, outlining the research aims and requesting permission to conduct the study in the district. Finally, the researcher coordinated with the participants, informing them about the research and seeking their voluntary

participation through an informed consent process. All communication was conducted professionally, and the researcher followed up on official approvals to ensure the research's smooth commencement. Before the interview, the researcher conducted an orientation informing the participants of the nature and purpose of the study.

The researcher scheduled the semi-structured interviews; by this time, the researcher ensured that no classes were affected by the conduct of the interview. After the interviews, the researcher translated the teachers' responses as necessary and transcribed, coded, and analyzed the data to gain insights into their challenges and coping strategies.

After the interview, the researcher transcribed the audio-recorded file into written text. Thematic analysis came after the transcription. The figure below shows the flow of the data collection employed in this study.

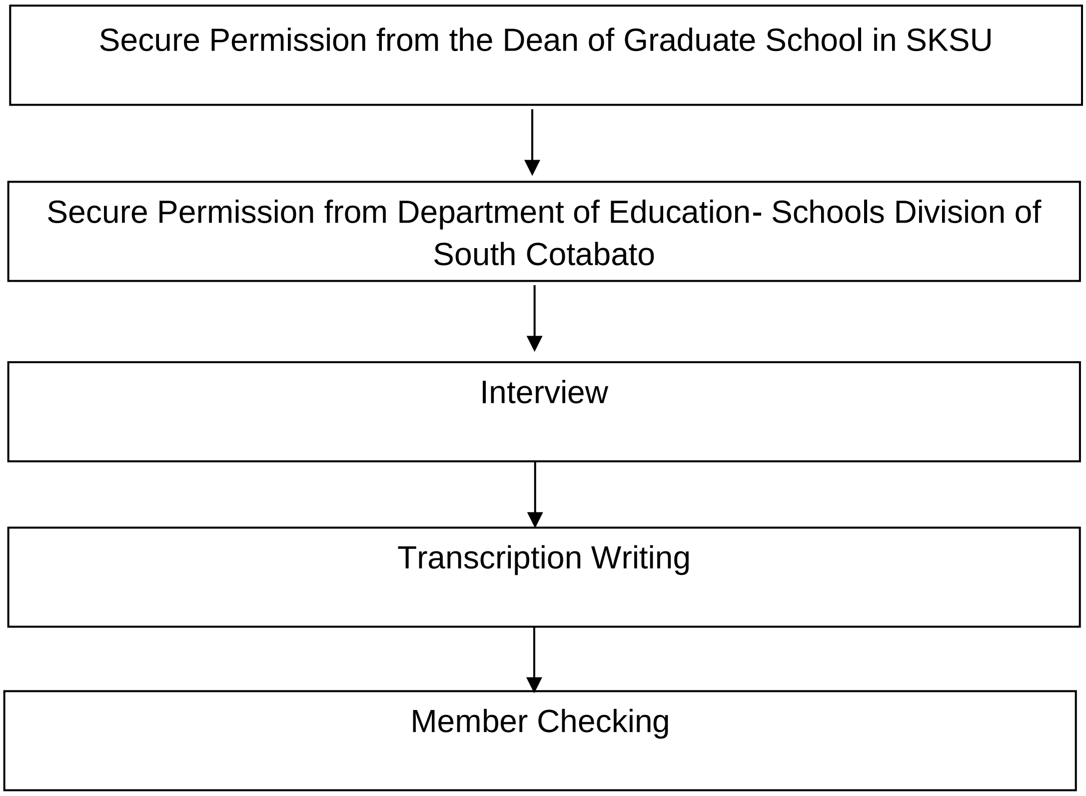

Figure 3. Waterfall Diagram of Data Gathering Procedure

Data Analysis Method

In doing data analysis, the researcher used a thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that thematic analysis emphasizes identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. It organizes and describes all data in detail. There are six steps covered in thematic analysis:

The first step was familiarizing with the data, which required the researcher to read and re-read the data to become familiar with its needs and pay attention to patterns. The researcher completed the data collection by transcribing the data into written form.

The researcher generated the initial codes by documenting where and how patterns occur. This was done through data reduction, where the researcher collapsed the data into labels to create categories for more efficient analysis. The researcher also made inferences about what the codes mean.

Next, the researcher combined codes into overarching themes that accurately depict the data. It was important to develop themes that describe exactly what they mean, even if the theme does not fit. The researcher also described what was missing from the analysis.
While reviewing themes, the researcher examined how the themes support the data and the overarching theoretical perspective. If the analysis seemed incomplete, the researcher reviewed it and added what was needed.
The researcher then defined and named the theme, identifying which aspects of the data were captured and what was interesting.
Finally, the researcher produced the reports. She decided which themes made meaningful contributions to understanding what was going on within the data. The researcher also conducted member checking, where she returned to the sample at hand to see if their description accurately represented it.

Ethical Considerations
Participation in this study was entirely voluntary, with no associated risks, loss of benefits, or promise of compensation. Before involvement, participants were fully briefed on the study's objectives, methods, and possible benefits to ensure informed consent. Their rights as contributors to academic research were upheld, including the freedom to withdraw at any stage if they felt uncomfortable.
In alignment with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, which affirms the right to privacy, stringent steps were taken to maintain participant confidentiality. Respondents were not asked to include their names on the survey forms, and no sensitive demographic information such as age, gender, occupation, employment status, or medical history was collected or published. All data were handled with strict confidentiality and securely stored to protect participants' identities and responses.
The research was conducted by a graduate student at Sultan Kudarat State University (SKSU) under the close supervision of her thesis adviser. The adviser provided valuable insights and recommendations throughout multiple revisions of the manuscript. Recognizing this significant academic guidance, the adviser is acknowledged as a co-author of the final publication.
Triangulation: The study employed multiple data sources and methods, including interviews, observations, and document analysis, to cross-validate the findings (Creswell, 2013). Triangulation ensures the study's credibility by corroborating information from various perspectives (Patton, 2015).
Member checking: After conducting interviews, the researcher provided the participants with a summary of their responses for verification and validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking allows participants to confirm the accuracy and interpretation of their experiences, enhancing the study's credibility.
Peer debriefing: The researcher engaged in discussions with research advisors and colleagues to reflect on the research process and analysis (Morrow, 2005). Peer debriefing provided valuable insights and contributed to the study's trustworthiness.
Thick description: The study provided detailed and rich descriptions of the research setting, participants, data collection, and analysis processes (Geertz, 1973). Thick description allowed readers to understand the context and interpret the findings accurately.
Reflexivity: The researcher maintained a reflexive journal to record personal thoughts, biases, and assumptions throughout the research process (Finlay, 2002). Acknowledging and addressing the researcher's influence enhances the study's credibility.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of this qualitative study on the challenges and solutions in the financial management of public elementary schools in Tupi, South Cotabato, the following strategies were employed:

Credibility. Extended participant involvement, member checking, and triangulation helped establish the study's legitimacy. School heads, financial managers, and important players with personal knowledge of public elementary school finance management participated. Member checking was conducted by returning transcriptions and emerging themes to participants for validation, ensuring their perspectives were accurately represented. Triangulation of data sources, such as interviews, focus group discussions, and school financial documents, further enhanced the authenticity of the findings.

Dependability. From creating the interview guide to data collecting techniques to coding and theme analysis methods applied, the study process was painstakingly recorded to guarantee dependability. An audit trail was kept to offer openness in data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This documentation allows the study to be replicated, or external researchers or auditors can review its processes.

Transferability. Although the study is context-specific, detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and findings were provided to enable readers to determine the applicability of the results to similar settings. The thick description allows other researchers or educational administrators to judge the relevance and applicability of the insights gained in their own institutional or regional contexts.

Confirmability. The study's confirmability was ensured by maintaining objectivity and minimizing researcher bias. The study used reflexive journaling to record the researcher's assumptions, choices, and thoughts. It ensured the results came from the viewpoints and experiences of the participants rather than the researcher's impressions. Additionally, an external peer review sought to verify the accuracy of data interpretation and thematic development.

Researcher's Positionality

In this study, the researcher explored the challenges and solutions in financial management in Tupi, South Cotabato. The researcher is an insider with 6 years of service, which shapes her perspective on the study. She chose this study to contribute to or help schools experiencing hard times by solving financial management challenges.

The researcher acknowledges that her experiences may introduce biases into the study. She conducted interviews, administered surveys, and reviewed and analyzed records. She also embedded me in the research activity to obtain the necessary information. By clearly stating her positionality, the researcher aims to enhance the study's credibility and ensure that the findings authentically reflect the school stakeholders' experiences in Tupi, South Cotabato.

In this study, the researcher's positionality plays a pivotal role. The researcher's background, encompassing their educational and professional experiences, significantly influences their understanding of the educational system and financial management practices (Smith, 2018). For instance, a researcher with a background in education or finance may have insights that shape their perspective on the challenges faced by these institutions.

Furthermore, the researcher's values and beliefs were essentially acknowledged, as they can guide the choice of research topics, research questions, and the interpretation of findings. The researcher places a high value on transparency and accountability in public institutions; this may influence how they perceive and analyze financial challenges within educational institutions. To ensure the research's integrity, the researcher was mindful of potential biases arising from their background and beliefs and strived for objectivity in the research process. Additionally, ethical considerations were paramount, and any conflicts of interest should be disclosed and addressed.

Reflexivity, a critical practice in qualitative research, necessitates regular self-awareness and self-criticism. Researchers should reflect introspectively to identify how their positionality may affect the research and take proactive steps to minimize bias. Researchers employed strategies to mitigate potential biases, including diverse data collection methods, triangulation through multiple data sources, and participant validation of findings.

CHAPTER IV
PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section presents the study's findings and examines the implications of the data gathered from participant interviews using an interview guide questionnaire.

Presentation of Findings

This section discloses the presentation of the study's findings. The consecutive presentation explores the challenges and solutions to financial management in public elementary schools.

Relevant themes on Common Financial Management Challenges in Public Elementary Schools in Tupi, South Cotabato

Table 1 presents the relevant theme of the Common Financial Management Challenges in Public Elementary Schools in Tupi, South Cotabato. After a rigorous data analysis and interpretation process, five (5) emerging themes were identified, which were formulated from fifteen (15) clustered themes.

It was revealed that Insufficient Funding, Delayed and Cumbersome Fund Release Process, Inadequate Financial Planning and Budgetary Control, Impact on School Operations and Educational Programs, and Lack of Transparency and Stakeholder Involvement were the descriptions of common financial management challenges in public elementary schools in Tupi, South Cotabato.

Table 1. Themes on Common Financial Management Challenges in Public Elementary Schools in Tupi, South Cotabato

Emerging Theme	Clustered Themes	Codes
Insufficient Funding	Shortage of funds; Inadequate budget allocation; Insufficient resources	“shortage of funds”; “lack of funds”; “not enough financial budget”; “insufficient funds”
Delayed and Cumbersome Fund Release Process	Delayed release; Strict liquidation requirements; Inconsistent instructions; Complex procedures	“release of MOOE not on time”; “delay of funds”; “strict compliance with liquidation requirements”; “lack of attachments”; “business permit was not renewed”; “a lot of requirements”; “many processes”
Inadequate Financial Planning	Lack of financial planning; Misalignment between AIP and actual needs; Reactive	“lack of financial planning”; “projects cannot be supplied 100% based on the annual implementation plan”; “lack of

and Budgetary Control	planning; Difficulties in purchasing items	planning"; "only when the deadline approaches"; "misalignment of the budget"
Impact on School Operations and Educational Programs	Operational disruptions; Delayed repairs/projects; Compromised learning environment; Delayed implementation	"incidental expenses"; "unexpected events"; "delay in repair"; "disruption in class"; "delayed test papers"; "teacher seminars delayed"; "no restroom"; "running late"; "affect the children"
Lack of Transparency and Stakeholder Involvement	Transparency issues; Inadequate prioritization; Limited stakeholder participation	"transparency"; "what belongs to Pedro should be given to Pedro"; "stakeholder involvement"

Emerging Theme 1: Insufficient Funding

Insufficient funding is a lack of financial resources necessary to support a project, program, organization, or initiative. It occurs when available funds are insufficient to cover essential costs such as salaries, equipment, materials, operational expenses, or expansion efforts. Insufficient funding can lead to delays, reduced quality, limited scope, or even the cancellation of activities.

This theme is characterized by four (4) clustered themes: a shortage of funds, inadequate budget allocation, and insufficient resources.

School Stakeholders described their challenge in financial management as insufficient funding when they said:

> "Shortage of funds is a challenging experience, ma'am." … "Ana
>
> "...we cannot address all the needs of the teachers because of a shortage of funds..." … Maria.
>
> "lack of funds. In other words, there are many school activities that our budget cannot cover. There are certain areas where the budget should be spent, so some problems will arise that are not included in the SIP and AIP; there is no budget for those problems. That needs to be addressed. Plus, the budget from the local governments has not been released yet, so that is one challenge." … Angela
>
> "Not enough financial budget. There are a lot of programs, projects, and activities that are not pursued because of a lack of financial resources. There are many plans for improving the school to provide better services for the learners, yet we are constrained to reach that… " … Cris.
>
> ''Late ang intended na fund so ang teacher magspend first. Kung may mag abot man na fund kis a kulang ang fund sa needed. Kulang pa sa teacher o sa mga bata."…Carmella
>
> *"The intended fund is late, so that the teacher will spend it first. If any funds arrive, they are sometimes insufficient for what is needed. They are lacking for the teacher or the children." …*
>
> *Carmella:*
>
> *"In o*ur teacher training, we get the funds from our pockets".Ana

Emerging Theme 2: Delayed and Cumbersome Fund Release Process

A delayed and cumbersome fund release process is a slow, inefficient, and complicated procedure for disbursing financial resources. This theme is characterized by four (4) clustered themes: delayed release, strict liquidation requirements, inconsistent instructions, and complex procedures. School Stakeholders described their challenge in financial management as insufficient funding when they said:

> "...the release of MOOE from the division is not on time because compliance with liquidation requirements is very strict, causing delays in the second or third releases due to a lack of documents…" … Maria.
>
> "...delay of funds in 1st quarter of the fiscal year, the process of implementation, and liquidation that does not have consistent instructions for the attachments of the liquidation. I was once paid for the disallowance of the purchases due to a lack of attachments, and the supplier did not renew the business permit." … Diwata
>
> "...the funds for the MMOE take a long time to arrive, and you cannot spend them easily because you need many requirements, and there are so many processes…" Ligaya

Emerging Theme 3: Inadequate Financial Planning and Budgetary Control

Inadequate financial planning and budgetary control refer to poor management of financial resources due to ineffective budgeting, forecasting, and monitoring. This theme is characterized by four (4) clustered themes: lack of financial planning, misalignment between AIP and actual needs, reactive planning, and difficulties in purchasing items. School Stakeholders describe their challenge in financial management as insufficient funding when they said:

> "...so when you plan and advance in making the annual or your annual implementation plan, and then teachers have needs that arise after the AIP has been finalized, there are challenges because their requests cannot be easily accommodated." … Maria:
>
> "...there are some problems that will arise that are not included in SIP and AIP; there is no budget from the local government, which is the challenge." … Angela:
>
> "So, for 18 years in service, the most common financial management issues faced by public elementary schools here in Tupi, South Cotabato, are, first, lack of financial planning, difficulties in purchasing items, and budgetary control. The school's real challenge is the lack of Sometimes, it is only when the deadline approaches that they decide to plan, so by the time implementation comes, it is still lacking."… Andy:

Emerging Theme 4: Impact on School Operations and Educational Programs

The impact on school operations and educational programs refers to the effects that various factors, such as changes in policies, funding, health crises, technology adoption, or social issues, can have on the day-to-day functioning of a school and its ability to deliver quality education.

This theme is characterized by four (4) clustered themes: operational disruptions, delayed repairs/projects, compromised learning environment, and delayed implementation. School Stakeholders describe their challenge in financial management as having an impact on school operations and educational programs when they say:

> "There are times when the budget allocation for a particular activity on resources available is lesser than the amount needed. The school will get an additional amount from some sources like a canteen. Sometimes, some incidental expenses need abrupt attention, like repair."... *Ana*

"For example, if something unexpected happens, like our water pipe bursting, and it is not in the AIP, then that is very challenging because you have to modify and create another AIP." Maria …

"Some projects cannot be supplied 100% based on the annual implementation plan, and some of those projects and activities will be sacrificed … The project/activities might be delayed because of financial challenges; for example, in our training as teachers, we get the funds from our pocket. Sometimes, the school gives us a refund." … Angela

"One of the problems in our school is that there are classrooms without restrooms, but due to the lack of budget, the effect is that the children have to leave the classroom to go outside to use the restroom, which sometimes disrupts the class because every minute someone goes out to urinate." Cris

"This affects the delivery and implementation of the school. As school heads who focus 70% on instructional supervision, we have deprived our time for teaching and learning and much time for purchases and other things." … Diwata

"Our project did not materialize last year because there was no restroom for the grade 2 and grade 5 rooms. It was already aligned and included in our AIP, but there was a modification because, during that time, there was a pandemic. Ma'am prioritized what was more needed at that time or that quarter, so she bought some handwashing stations and lavatories and provided alcohol and facemasks." … Andy

"Kung may mga guba sa room d ka dali dali mka paayos. Like na guba imo board, o ang fan d maka dali mkapailis kay d available ang fund"… Susan

"If there is damage in the room, you cannot easily fix it. For example, if your board is broken or the fan is not working, you cannot easily replace them because the funds are unavailable." ... Susan

"So it will affect the children because your class will not be effective. We are running late because of financial challenges. … if there is no budget or funds available in the school, production will be delayed. Like, for example, the test papers that need to be made…" … C3SH3

"Maka affect po sya maam, Ah yung ano kumbaga magkaroon ng problema yung activities o madelay sa schools daily operation. Halimbawa, sa AIP, kahit anong mangyayari gagawin ko talaga kasi yun ang plano ko. Kung ang problema maam, ay teacher naga asa kung di sila gagawa ng effort magkakaroon ng problema." Carmela

"It might affect it, ma'am. The activities might be affected or delayed in the school's daily operations. For example, regardless of what happens in AIP, I will implement it; that is my plan. But the problem, ma'am, is if the teacher just relies on it, if they do not make an effort, then there will be a problem." Carmela

Emerging Theme 5: Lack of Transparency and Stakeholder Involvement

Lack of transparency and stakeholder involvement refers to key stakeholders, such as students, parents, teachers, staff, and the wider community, not being adequately informed or engaged in decision-making processes related to school operations, policies, and educational programs.

This theme is characterized by three (3) clustered themes: transparency issues, inadequate prioritization, and limited stakeholder participation. School Stakeholders describe their challenge in financial management as a Lack of Transparency and Stakeholder Involvement when they say:

> "...everything in DEPED should be transparent, provided that everything undergoes different kinds of liquidation. But we are blessed because I can say that our school head has been here for 5 years, right, sir? Yes, he is very transparent with us, even presenting every centavo. How many were left? Where does the money go? But the problem is that when he opens up to us every time we have a learning action cell or an urgent meeting, he insists that it is difficult to canvass now because the business should be under Philips." … Andy
>
> Unang una doon is ahh yung transparency. Oo, unahin gud yung the most priority. Tapos ahh what is due to pedro, ibigay sa kaniya." Carmela
>
> *"First is the transparency. Then, what is necessary should be prioritized. Then, what belongs to Pedro should be given to Pedro." Carmela*

Financial Management Practices Across Public Elementary Schools

Table 2 presents the emerging theme of financial management practices
across public elementary schools. After the data analysis and interpretation, three (3) emerging themes were identified, which were formulated from eleven (11) clustered themes. It was revealed that collaborative budget planning and allocation, efficient and regulated utilization of government funds, and adoption of best practices and external innovations were key.

Table 2. Financial Management Practices Across Public Elementary Schools

Emerging Theme	Clustered Themes	Codes
Collaborative Budget Planning and Allocation	School Planning Team; Inclusive Meetings; Stakeholder Collaboration	"call the teachers", "prepare a budget", "school planning team", "SGC", "PTA", "AIP", "SIP"
Efficient and Regulated Utilization of Government Funds	Budget Restrictions; Monitoring and Control; Alignment with AIP; Liquidation and Approval Process	"cannot be spent under whatever circumstances", "well spent", "shortage if not managed", "divert, borrow", "LGU", "MOOE", "liquidation", "committee", "AIP"
Adoption of Best Practices and External Innovations	Transparency; Borrowing and Fund Management; Community Involvement; Fundraising and External Contributions	"transparency", "borrow from the supplier", "no practices", "involve everybody", "manual preparation", "learned from Ma'am Ellen", "tapping of stakeholders", "fundraising", "school gardens", "outreach program"

Emerging Theme 1: Collaborative Budget Planning and Allocation

Collaborative budget planning and allocation refers to a process where various stakeholders, such as school administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members, actively create and distribute a school's budget.

Theme 1 comprises three (3) clustered themes: school planning team, inclusive meetings, and stakeholder collaboration. School Stakeholders describe their financial management as collaborative budget planning and allocation when they say:

> "The school head will call the teachers for the meeting. I will tell the teacher coordinators to prepare a budget for the specific area the teachers are handling. Our SGC officials, the committee in education chairman, and the teachers' association president are called for the final preparation of the budget." … Ana
>
> "I am calling for an SPT(School Planning Team); we have a school planning team where we all convene to plan for the next school year's budget. Well, there is, so they just give it like, ma'am, maybe we can allocate that budget like that because, like before, water and electricity were not in our AIP, so now even though it is newly rehabilitated, we allocate a portion for it in case of emergencies that are beyond our control, like if something gets damaged, so we allocated a budget for that." … Maria
>
> "We are calling the SGC to help in our planning and annual budget, as well as the teachers." … Angela
>
> "Our school usually prepares the Annual School Improvement Plan through collaborative expertise sessions, where we share ideas and make plans for the allocated allocation." … Cris
>
> "Each school here in Tupi has a different context, and I believe we do not have the same challenges experienced by our station. We have created a school planning team involving our school teachers and stakeholders in deciding and planning the projects, programs, and activities. We prioritize each expenditure based on the needs of our learners and teachers." … Diwata:
>
> "All the school planning teams are included in creating the SIP, the school improvement plan. So, the school improvement plan comprises leaders, stakeholders, and internal and external stakeholders. They plan the allocation of their annual budget." … Andy
>
> "Patawag ng meeting sa parents. E discuss ang mga dapat e tackle na challenges nga present sa body para ma planuhan at mabigay ang right allocation ng budget." … Susan
>
> *"Call a meeting with the parents. Discuss the challenges that need to be tackled by the body so that they can be planned and the right budget allocation can be given." … Susan*
>
> "Of course, there is a school planning team, right? The school planning team will have a conference to discuss the school's budget, which is where the AIP, the Annual Improvement Plan, comes in. Before you can create the Annual Improvement Plan, there should be a…a meeting, a conference of the school planning team that includes the PTA officers, the SGC, the retired teacher, a representative from the pupils, and the officers of the…the whole community of Palian Elementary School." … Ligaya
>
> Sa meeting , Kasali lahat ginapatawag, teaching forces, PTA at BOD. Tapos tinatanong ang teachers, kung ano ang implement nila ngayong taon. Halimbawa sa guidance, sports. Swerte if may magpartner katulad ng NDEP, MADAK." Carmela:
>
> *"In the meeting, everyone is called: the teaching forces, PTA, and BOD. Then, the teachers are asked questions. Teachers were asked what their implementation was this year. For example, in the guidance of sports, Lucky if you have a partner like NDEP or MADAK." Carmela*

Emerging Theme 2: Efficient and Regulated Utilization of Government Funds

Efficient and regulated utilization of government funds refers to the responsible, effective, and transparent management and allocation of public funds, which ensures that financial resources are used to maximize their impact and adhere to legal and regulatory standards.

Theme 2 comprises four (4) clustered themes: budget restrictions, monitoring, and control, alignment with AIP, liquidation, and approval process. School Stakeholders describe their financial management as efficient and regulated utilization of government funds when they say:

> "Funds from the government cannot be spent under whatever circumstances come along the way. It is already particular where it is supposed to be spent, or you will be in a mess." … Ana
>
> "It is well spent, but sometimes there might be a shortage if you do not manage the spending properly. If you do not monitor it and it goes over, that is why what we do is, for example, in the 1st quarter, if the school supply budget is 30,000, you should not go beyond 30,000, so you can manage it. Now? You can divert, borrow, or use funds like those from the LGU for the future because the MOOE is just one container. When you say there is a shortage, there are still other sources you can borrow from. You will repay what you get from the LGU and the future funds. Unlike before, when you could spend from the MOOE first and then get a refund, you must wait for the funds unless the supplier lends you money, which is good. But if not, for example, if you need something here, you can only buy it here and get a refund, which is no longer possible." … Maria
>
> "It was utilized for the needs of the learners and at school." … Angela
>
> "Our school ensures that the funds provided will be used efficiently and appropriately. We composed a committee to monitor and check the transparency and accuracy of the liquidations presented and prepared." … Cris
>
> "The funds are being utilized based on the needs reflected in the Annual Improvement plan." …Diwata
>
> "Putting it in the SIP and AIP so that at least the budgets can align to where they are supposed to go. Then, the projects that have not been included will also come in, which is why modifications are made so that the budget provided by the government can be utilized." … Andy
>
> *Ilagay AIP para ma utilized ang fund ng government. Kung anon aka plan sa AIP."… Susan*
>
> "Utilized properly. Include it in the AIP so that the government's funds can be utilized if it is planned in the AIP." … Susan
>
> "The fund provided by the government was utilized properly' because a liquidation was submitted quarterly in the division office. So, these funds the government gave were utilized in their proper area of utilization because they were planned out in the AIP. Yeah, because some activities or events are emergencies, and you need to... in other words, diversion of funds, but what is happening is that some funds are not being used because some are being modified. However, the division office still needs approval. It is not that simple because whatever you put in your AIP, you have to follow it. We are now allowed to modify it, but it still needs to be approved by the division office. It is not that simple, and it is not easy. Even in liquidation, even in spending MOOE funds,

we have a hard time because we need (field…) if there is no (field…) from the supplier, we cannot make purchases there. It is difficult to manage the government's funds." … Ligaya

"So far, provided tanan, so nagamit gyd siya. Kasi nagtatanong ako. Kasali alam ko may budget. Kung di katatanong, sabihin lang nila nawala. " Carmela

"So far, everything is provided, so the funds are utilized. Because I keep asking, I know there is a budget. Because if you do not ask, they will just say no." Carmela

Emerging Theme 3: Adoption of Best Practices and External Innovations

Adoption of best practices and external innovations refers to the process by which organizations, including schools, governments, businesses, and others, identify, adopt, and integrate proven methods, strategies, and innovations from both within their sector (best practices) and external sources (external innovations) to improve performance, achieve goals, and drive positive outcomes.

Theme 3 comprises four (4) clustered themes: transparency, borrowing and fund management, community involvement, fundraising, and external contributions. School Stakeholders describe their financial management as the adoption of best practices and external innovations when they say:

"Transparency is a practice that needs to be adopted. For you to run the organization smoothly. Be transparent to the stakeholders." … Ana:

"If the budget is insufficient, I will first borrow from the supplier, just like when the kids have exams and there is no budget. I will borrow first, like other schools, and pay when the budget arrives." … Maria:

"One of the practices I have learned from other schools is to involve everybody in the school community in the planning and allocating of budget to the different programs, projects, and activities proposed to come up with a mutual understanding of whatever the outcomes are, everyone will share accountability and to make ways how to make progress to the plans being discussed in case there are unexpected events or problems encountered along the way. Trying to make everyone involved." …Cris

"So far, I have not yet adopted the system that needs to be utilized. We only manually prepare documents that are convenient in our context." … Diwata

"This is what I learned from Ma'am Ellen. It seems that it is easier to liquidate if there are receipts every time there is a purchase, and everything is intact every time there is training. All her documents and even the pictures are intact, right, ma'am? Sometimes, if there are many pictures, it is necessary because every time there is a purchase, there should be an attachment of pictures." … Angela

Ang utang anay sa mga supplier para ma provide ang needs then bayaran pag abot sa budget." … Susan

"Tapping of stakeholders, private sector alumni, and alumni to help the school. The debt to the suppliers is incurred to provide the needs, and then it will be paid when the budget arrives." ... Susan

"Just like other school practices, if there are not enough funds, they do some activities to cope with their financial management, like fundraising. Sometimes, you can also increase the school's funds through that method to adopt it, or they have projects like school gardens; although they already exist, you just need to enhance them in your

International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

school so that they can be beneficial. So, there are instances where you need to adopt certain practices." … Ligaya

"Parang ang ibang school ang naga adopt. Best practices lang na adopt ng school gaya ng outreach program, ramadam karem. May contribution ang school so far donation. Nakasolicit kami from private persona sang 181,000 yung nandito si Sota. Nakatanggap rin kami ng isang sakong bigas. Kasi mahilig ako magpost at nabasa ng KCC." Carmela

"It seems like other schools are the ones adopting. The school just adopts best practices, like the outreach program Ramadan Kareem. The school has received contributions so far in the form of donations. One time, we had an outreach program during Ramadan. We received donations from private individuals amounting to 181,000 while Sota was here. We also received one sack of rice. What happens is that I love to post, and then KCC reads it." Carmela

The table presents four emerging themes regarding the strategies employed by school administrators to address financial management challenges. After the data analysis and interpretation, four (4) emerging themes were identified, which were formulated from thirteen (13) clustered themes.

Table 3. Strategies Employed by School Administrators to Address Financial Management Challenges

Emerging Theme	Clustered Themes	Codes
Borrowing and Credit for Urgent Needs	Borrowing funds; Using credit for immediate purchases	"credit first"; "borrow money"; "lending us money"; "borrow from wherever we can"; "spend first"
Timely and Transparent Liquidation Processes	Process improvement; Faster document preparation; Emphasis on transparency	"liquidate faster"; "prepare the documents"; "liquidation is delayed"; "speed it up"; "transparency"
Leveraging Community and External Support	Utilizing LGU/BLGU support; Engaging PTA, IGP, stakeholders; External donations	"LGU"; "BLGU"; "donations"; "IGP"; "PTA"; "SDO"; "stakeholders"; "local government"; "DA"
Innovative Strategies for Enhancing Education	Fundraising and alternative initiatives; Partnership-based innovations; External collaborations	"fundraising"; "innovative"; "borrowing materials"; "sliding gate"; "step-by-step procurement"; "fund-raising activities"; "Rotary Club"; "NGOs"; "private sector"; "outreach program"

The table presents four emerging themes regarding the strategies employed by school administrators to address financial management challenges. After the data analysis and interpretation, four (4) emerging themes were identified, which were formulated from thirteen (13) clustered themes.

It was revealed that borrowing and credit for urgent needs, timely and transparent liquidation processes, leveraging community and external support, and innovative strategies for enhancing education.

Emerging Theme 1: Borrowing and Credit for Urgent Needs

Borrowing and credit for urgent needs refers to obtaining funds or credit to meet immediate financial requirements, especially when insufficient cash is available.

Two (2) clustered themes characterize this theme: borrowing funds and using credit for immediate purchases.

School Stakeholders describe their strategy to address challenging financial management as borrowing and credit for urgent needs, when they said:

> "If there is a problem, for instance, about hardware materials or school supplies. They credit first for the meantime, then pay when the tranche is already downloaded. Yes, very successfully. This is done to provide for the urgent needs of the school." …Ana
>
> "Yes, successful. It is successful because we can liquidate faster with someone lending us money. We can also prepare the documents better since we know what to purchase. You only pay when the money arrives, so everything is ready. That is the advantage of the strategy of borrowing money. The materials are already there, the documents are prepared, and you just need to pay. This helps operate and process the liquidation faster than waiting for the money and making the purchase, which takes time. However, with the lender, the goods have already been delivered; you can take pictures and prepare all the documents before liquidation." … Maria
>
> "Teacher I: Ahh, what is it? Sometimes, when we run short on funds, we borrow money. Sometimes, for example, if something needs to be done and we do not have the money, we borrow from wherever we can, and then when the money comes, we pay it back. The issue was addressed." … Angela
>
> "The teacher should borrow first or spend first. The issue was successfully addressed because the problem was remedied, but some problems still cannot be resolved." Susan

Emerging Theme 2: Timely and Transparent Liquidation Processes

Timely and transparent liquidation processes refer to the efficient and clear procedures used to sell or dispose of assets or liabilities. They are typically used when a company or individual faces financial distress or undergoes a formal process like bankruptcy or liquidation.

This theme is characterized by three (3) clustered themes: process improvement, faster document preparation, and emphasis on transparency

School Stakeholders describe their strategy to address challenges in financial management as timely and transparent liquidation processes when they said:

> "...We can also prepare the documents better since we already know what we need to purchase. You only pay when the money arrives, so everything is ready. That is the advantage of the strategy of borrowing money..." Maria
>
> "were implemented. Maybe the right thing here is, ahh…whatever the school budget has, whatever is in the AIP, just do that, let us not; in other words, we will live by our, like in a family, whatever the income is, like whatever the earnings are, just spend that, but ahh…impact financial challenge them… the financial challenge is just the delay, the delay, uh, the delay MOOE arriving. The liquidation is delayed. Because there are still many things to do, maybe the challenge here is just to speed it up. For example, when you liquidate, after you spend and issue the check, prepare the documents

immediately so that when your budget for that quarter is done, you can submit it right away. If you submit it immediately, it will be released, but what the school heads often do is sometimes they just leave it there, waiting until the due date. Yes, if you liquidate on time, the release will also be on time, and there should be transparency in all aspects. Transparency is the transparency in all the finances that the school receives; for example, in liquidation, there is liquidation. ...” Ligaya

“Siguro maam yang ano, unahin siguro ah communication and transparency strategies. Tapos kung ano yung panindigan ang sinasabi. Lalo na dito sa Palian Es . Kasi ang Palian ES maraming cctv.” Carmela

“Maybe, ma'am, we should prioritize documentation of code communication and transparency strategies. I think that is the problem. Then, stand by what you say. Especially here in Palian ES. Because Palian ES is surrounded by everything we do, it is exposed.” Carmela

Emerging Theme 3: Leveraging Community and External Support

Leveraging community and external support refers to seeking assistance, resources, or partnerships from outside one’s immediate circle or organization to address challenges, meet goals, or resolve urgent needs. Theme 3 comprises three (3) clustered themes: Utilizing LGU/BLGU support, Engaging PTA, IGP, Stakeholders, and External donations.

School Stakeholders described their challenge in Leveraging Community and External Support when they said:

“Our generous LGU and BLGU have an all-out support for our school activities. They are of great help too.” … Ana

“Ah, we do have donations here as well. The LGU provides materials every brigada, giving out items worth 10,000 pesos for things like paint and such, but we do not have any for supplies. It is only the alumni who give. During the first day of classes, some alumni give notebooks, pencils, and ball pens through the initiative of the teachers.” … Maria

“We have our IGP, ma’am, that can generate income, which helps our school.” … Angela

“Having PTA and LGUs is a great support system that is very helpful in implementing projects that do not have a budget in our school.” … Cris

“Our SDO is always there to help us through our AO II and assist us in liquidation.” … Diwata

“particular resources from our BLGU and DA. The D.A. here in Bolomala assists by giving us garden materials, and other sectors that help the school financially,” … Andy.

“Yes, the barangay or local government can provide assistance or help. And the stakeholders of the school. It is helpful to our school.” … Susan

“Yes, specific resources or support system, yes. The support of the teachers and the school personnel is there during the implementation because before you implement the project, the teachers know about it, so you will not have a hard time. Aside from those funds I mentioned earlier, Palian is receiving, or we have another source of funds, which is our IGP, the school's IGP, where we earn almost fifty thousand a year, but those funds are also liquidated to the teachers; they know where the money goes. So, the resource support system you found helpful in implementing, as long as you are transparent in everything if you are transparent in everything, there will be no problem." … Ligaya

"That IGP is the beauty of the Palian because, in history, this is the school with the widest reach. This school was established by the grandfather of the Sultan's grandfather, but was taken over by the government. What was approved back then was 5 hectares. The barangay or government took 4.5 hectares. We have CCTV here, but in terms of tapping, ask for help, especially in recognizing the stakeholders for their support, because if you do that and ask for help from them, they will give their support." Carmela:

Emerging Theme 4: Innovative Strategies for Enhancing Education

Innovative strategies for enhancing education refer to new and creative approaches to teaching and learning that aim to improve the quality, accessibility, and effectiveness of education.

This theme is characterized by three (3) clustered themes: fundraising and alternative initiatives, partnership-based innovations, and external collaborations. School Stakeholders describe their strategy challenge in Innovative Strategies for Enhancing Education when they said:

"Before, we had some fundraising in school, like the culmination of nutrition, buwan ng wika, or science, but now it is no longer allowed." …Ana

"Okay, so the innovative thing based on what I did was just borrowing materials to implement the project, which, based on experience, was about electricity and water. That is really what I did. Yes, I borrowed ... It has gone because of the zero collection implemented by our governor, no such thing, and no collection for the parents. So, it seems like it was collected because they also have quotas. All right, in our classroom, let us do a 50-50, but where is the policy on zero collection? So far, since I started here, we have no longer had a money contest. But I did not want to, even the teachers; I did not want to bother them and the school head, so I did not initiate it." … Maria

"It seems like I did not see anything, ma'am. I did not see any innovation." … Angela

"One of the planned projects to be built is a sliding gate for the safety of the learners. There are already materials from the BLGU, but there is no budget for the labor. PTA conducted a general meeting, presented the existing problem to the parents, and devised an initiative for every parent to donate any amount to cover the needed budget for the labor of the sliding gate. It was a successful initiative because our school already had a sliding gate." … Cris

"The school should have a step-by-step procurement process that will not hamper the disallowance of each purchase." … Diwata

"The strategies usually involve having a partnership because it is lacking if we follow the MOOE or the amount given to us by the government. To fill the gaps and sustain the needs of the school." …Andy

Pareha sang may mga igp ang school maskin ginagmay may makabulig sa financial sang school. Makahiram kis a fund sa canteen. Or mga teachers magbuligbulig magprovide " … Susan:

"Just like having some IGP in school, even small ones, can help the school financially. Sometimes, we can borrow funds from the canteen. Or the teachers will help each other by providing a specific fund" … Susan.

"Innovative strategies, Ahmm…there are fund-raising activities, we will throw this into the PTA, and the PTA will implement it so that we will not be affected. However, the strategies, for example, actually in Palian, are not a financial problem because of the support from the community. We have support from the Rotary Club of Metro Dadiangas, which provides yearly school supplies like TVs and printers. It will be less of a burden on the MOOE. Aside from that, some NGOs help, so the school might be short on resources, but we would not say that the school is facing a huge amount of difficulty and struggle. But it depends on how the school head manages it." …Ligaya

"Pagpapatupad sa mga project pagdumating ang project. Kasi my history na dumating ang budget tapos hindi na ano. Kaya di masayang ang mga tao. Lalo na ang stakeholder. Try sa private o tap sa iban na agency. Kagaya sa lifeskills mag augment ang health amg conduct ako o seminar. Pero kaliwaan kay need man nila ang accomplishment. " Carmela

"Implementation of the projects when the project arrives. Because there is a history of the budget arriving and nothing happening, people are unhappy with it, especially the stakeholders. So we try the private sector or an agency reaching out to other agencies. Like in life skills, I will augment health and conduct a seminar. But it is a trade-off because they need accomplishments."Carmela

Discussions of Findings

This section discusses the emerging themes of the practices, challenges, and strategies in financial management in public elementary schools in Tupi, South Cotabato.

Common Financial Management Challenges in Public Elementary Schools in Tupi, South Cotabato

The succeeding themes describe the participants and their financial management challenges.

Emerging Theme 1: Insufficient Funding

Insufficient funding is a recurring theme that underscores schools' pervasive lack of resources, significantly impacting their ability to sustain operations and deliver quality education. The clustered themes, such as a shortage of funds, limited budget allocations, and insufficient financial resources, highlight a pattern where participants frequently express concerns using phrases like lack of funds and insufficient financial budget. These concerns emphasize the' critical role of financial shortages in shaping school management and decision-making processes. This persistent financial inadequacy not only hampers the schools' ability to meet essential operational needs, such as procuring instructional materials, maintaining facilities, or supporting professional development, but it also significantly influences administrative decision-making. School leaders are often forced to prioritize basic survival needs over long-term developmental goals, leading to reactive rather than strategic financial management. As a result, chronic underfunding shapes how school heads allocate limited resources, negotiate with stakeholders, and cope with competing demands—all of which have implications for educational delivery's overall effectiveness and sustainability.

This finding aligns with the study by Alio and Githui (2019), who identified that public secondary schools face significant financial challenges, including inadequate funding, poor budgeting practices, and a lack of transparency and accountability in financial management. Similarly, these financial constraints hinder schools from maintaining infrastructure, supporting teacher development, and implementing necessary educational innovations. This also aligns with the Agency Theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976), which is particularly relevant as it explains potential conflicts of interest between school administrators (agents) and higher education authorities or funding bodies (DepEd). The study's findings on inefficiencies, delayed fund release, and lack of transparency reflect the challenges when administrators, acting as agents, must balance institutional interests with external financial policies and regulations. These conflicts can lead to financial mismanagement, budget constraints, or inefficient resource allocation, highlighting the need for clearer accountability mechanisms in school financial governance.

Emerging Theme 2: Delayed and Cumbersome Fund Release Process

The delayed and cumbersome fund release process is a critical issue that exacerbates financial constraints in schools, further limiting their ability to function effectively. Schools rely on the timely disbursement of funds to cover essential expenses such as teacher salaries, instructional materials, facility maintenance, and student programs. However, bureaucratic inefficiencies and administrative bottlenecks often result in significant delays in fund allocation, disrupting school operations and planning.

Participants frequently express frustration over the slow release of funds, using phrases like delayed budget approval, long processing time, and funds not disbursed on time. These delays force schools to suspend planned programs or seek alternative financial sources, which may not always be available.

This finding aligns with Mugambi and Wanjiru (2021), who emphasize that a cumbersome fund release process results in poor financial planning. Schools cannot accurately forecast their expenditures without knowing when funds will be available. This challenge is particularly evident in government-funded schools, where complex procurement processes and compliance requirements slow down resource disbursement. Consequently, schools face delays in infrastructure improvements, procurement of learning materials, and implementation of development projects.

Emerging Theme 3: Inadequate Financial Planning and Budgetary Control

Inadequate financial planning and weak budgetary control are major challenges that hinder schools from effectively managing their resources and sustaining quality education. Schools require strategic financial planning to allocate funds efficiently, yet many institutions struggle with poor budgeting practices, resource misallocation, and a lack of financial oversight. Participants frequently mention concerns such as unclear financial priorities, ineffective budget distribution, and fund mismanagement, indicating that financial instability often stems from weak planning and control mechanisms.

The lack of transparent and well-monitored financial processes not only disrupts day-to-day operations but also undermines the capacity of school leaders to respond proactively to emerging educational needs. Strengthening financial governance and instituting comprehensive budget control mechanisms are therefore essential steps toward building more resilient and responsive educational institutions.

The findings align with those of Osei and Boateng (2021), who emphasized that ineffective financial planning contributes to recurring deficits. This forces schools to depend on emergency measures such as borrowing or requesting supplementary funds, which can further destabilize their financial health. Weak budget monitoring systems also increase the risk of fund leakage, corruption, and financial mismanagement, exacerbating the funding crisis in many schools.

Emerging Theme 4: Impact on School Operations and Educational Programs

Insufficient funding significantly affects school operations and educational programs, limiting the ability of institutions to provide quality learning experiences and maintain a conducive environment for both students and teachers. Financial constraints often lead to shortages in essential resources, inadequate infrastructure, and disruptions in academic and extracurricular activities. Participants frequently express concerns through phrases like lack of classroom materials, insufficient program budget, and delayed school projects, highlighting how funding challenges negatively impact daily school functions. The persistence of these challenges reveals a systemic issue that compromises educational equity and highlights the urgent need for more adequate and timely funding mechanisms to support sustainable school improvement.

This finding aligns with the Philippine Institute on Development Studies (2018), which states that government investment in education and training has increased but remains low compared to the Philippines' more developed peers. This results in students' poor learning outcomes and low quality of education. The study said the comparatively lower education financing has negatively impacted schooling quality in the Philippines, with students underperforming in learning competencies and education quality remaining deplorably low.

Emerging Theme 5: Lack of Transparency and Stakeholder Involvement

A lack of transparency and limited stakeholder involvement in financial management pose significant challenges to the effective allocation and utilization of school funds. When financial decisions are made without clear accountability measures and minimal participation from key stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and community representatives, mismanagement, inefficiencies, and distrust can arise. Participants frequently highlight concerns such as unclear budget reports, lack of consultation in financial planning," and "fund misallocation," underscoring the need for greater openness and stakeholder engagement in school financial management.

This finding aligns with Alio and Githui (2019), who pointed out that a lack of transparency in budget reporting and weak financial oversight mechanisms often exacerbate financial mismanagement in public schools. Similarly, Mwangi and Kimani (2020) emphasized that financial decision-making remains centralized without stakeholder participation, increasing the risk of fund misallocation and corruption. Schools that fail to involve parents and community leaders in budget discussions may struggle to secure external support and resources.

Furthermore, Osei and Boateng (2021) argued that stakeholder involvement is crucial in ensuring financial accountability. Collective oversight minimizes the risk of fraudulent activities and enhances trust between school administrators and the broader community. A transparent financial system, where stakeholders are regularly updated on fund allocation and expenditures, fosters a sense of shared responsibility and promotes better financial governance.

Financial Management Practices Across Public Elementary Schools

It was revealed that collaborative budget planning and allocation, efficient and regulated utilization of government funds, and adoption of best practices and external innovations.

Emerging Theme 1: Collaborative Budget Planning and Allocation

Collaborative budget planning and allocation is a crucial financial management practice that enhances transparency, efficiency, and accountability in school financial operations. This approach involves active participation from key stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, parents, and local government representatives, to ensure that budget decisions align with institutional priorities and student needs. Participants emphasized the importance of shared decision-making, inclusive financial planning, and stakeholder consultation in budgeting, underscoring the benefits of involving multiple perspectives in financial management.

This finding is supported by Mwangi and Kimani (2020), who highlighted that engaging various stakeholders in budget planning leads to more informed financial decisions, preventing unnecessary expenditures and ensuring that funds are directed toward critical areas such as teacher development, student programs, and infrastructure improvements. Moreover, Osei and Boateng (2021) emphasized that participatory budgeting fosters a sense of ownership among stakeholders, encouraging them to actively monitor and support the financial well-being of schools. When financial decisions are made collectively, it minimizes the risk of misallocation and promotes greater accountability, ensuring that resources are utilized effectively for long-term institutional sustainability.

The Social Capital Theory (Coleman, 1988) aligns with the study's findings on collaborative financial management strategies, such as stakeholder involvement, PTA participation, alumni contributions, and external partnerships. Strong social networks and trust among school administrators, teachers, parents, and the community enhance financial sustainability by fostering resource-sharing, joint fundraising efforts, and alternative financial support mechanisms. This reinforces the idea that schools do not operate in isolation but benefit from collective action and shared financial responsibility.

Emerging Theme 2: Efficient and Regulated Utilization of Government Funds

The efficient and regulated utilization of government funds is a fundamental financial management practice that ensures schools can sustain operations, enhance educational programs, and maintain accountability. Proper fund allocation and spending require strict compliance with financial regulations, transparency, and strategic planning to maximize the impact of government-provided resources. Participants frequently emphasize concerns such as delayed fund disbursement, misallocation of budget, and lack of clear financial guidelines, highlighting the need for stronger financial controls and efficient fund utilization.

Furthermore**,** Osei and Boateng (2021) highlighted that regulatory compliance and financial auditing play crucial roles in maintaining transparency and accountability in using public funds. Schools that fail to regulate their financial practices often face budget deficits, delayed project implementation, and reduced stakeholder trust. Proper documentation, regular audits, and adherence to government financial policies ensure that funds are utilized to benefit students and enhance school development.

The findings also conform to the Theory of Financial Control (Ostman, 2007), which further supports the study by emphasizing the importance of financial tools and processes in decision-making. The study's findings on budget planning, regulated fund utilization, and best financial practices demonstrate how schools navigate financial constraints by ensuring efficient allocation and management of funds. This theory suggests that effective financial planning, tracking, and transparency mechanisms are essential for mitigating financial risks and ensuring sustainable financial operations in schools.

Emerging Theme 3: Adoption of Best Practices and External Innovations

Adopting best practices and external innovations in financial management is crucial for schools aiming to enhance operational efficiency, accountability, and educational quality. By integrating modern financial strategies and technologies, educational institutions can optimize resource utilization and strengthen stakeholder trust. Schools that embrace innovative financial management approaches are better equipped to address funding challenges and improve overall financial sustainability.

The theme unveils a willingness to integrate proven strategies from other institutions, demonstrating a proactive approach to financial management. The clustered themes of transparency, borrowing practices when necessary, manual documentation processes, and community engagement highlight how schools actively adopt external best practices to strengthen their financial governance. According to Nyamita and Dorasamy (2020), transparency in financial reporting fosters trust among stakeholders and minimizes the risk of mismanagement. Similarly, Abrahams and Kinyua (2021) emphasize that schools that adopt structured borrowing practices and external financial support mechanisms can sustain their operations more effectively during budget constraints.

Strategies Employed by School Administrators to Address Financial Management Challenges

It was revealed that school administrators use borrowing and credit for urgent needs, implement timely and transparent liquidation processes, leverage community and external support, and employ innovative strategies for enhancing education to address financial management challenges.

Emerging Theme 1: Borrowing and Credit for Urgent Needs

This theme underscores a pragmatic and adaptive approach to addressing cash flow gaps within schools. Clustered responses such as borrowing funds, utilizing credit for immediate purchases, and adopting “spend-first” strategies reveal how school administrators often resort to informal or provisional credit arrangements to sustain operations during delayed fund releases. These temporary solutions allow schools to respond to urgent needs, such as procuring materials or funding essential activities, without halting core functions. Participants noted that once the official budget was disbursed, the borrowed amounts were promptly repaid, indicating a reactive but responsible approach to managing financial delays. While these practices demonstrate resourcefulness, they reflect underlying systemic challenges in fund disbursement processes and raise concerns about the sustainability and risks of relying on credit-based stopgap measures.

The findings conform to Oduor and Karanja's (2021) emphasis that using credit for emergency purchases is a common strategy among schools with irregular funding disbursements, allowing them to meet urgent operational demands. However, they caution that excessive reliance on credit can lead to long-term financial instability if not properly managed.

Moreover, Kamau and Nyaga (2019) suggest that adopting structured cash flow management practices, such as forecasting expenditures, establishing emergency financial reserves, and negotiating better payment terms with suppliers, can help mitigate the risks associated with spending-first strategies. Schools that fail to implement proactive financial planning may face mounting debt and difficulties sustaining long-term financial stability.

Emerging Theme 2: Timely and Transparent Liquidation Processes

The theme underscores the importance of process efficiency and open-
ness in financial management, emphasizing how streamlined procedures contribute to accountability and smooth school operations. The clustered themes, including prompt document preparation, speeding up the

liquidation process, and ensuring transparency, reveal that administrators recognize the value of timely financial processing in mitigating delays and maintaining stakeholder trust. These actions help reduce administrative delays and reinforce stakeholder confidence in the school's financial integrity.

This finding aligns with Obonyo and Njoroge (2020), who found that schools prioritizing timely expense liquidation ensure that government-allocated funds are promptly utilized for their intended purposes, reducing the risk of financial bottlenecks and audit discrepancies.

Moreover, Adebayo and Mensah (2019) emphasized that transparency in financial transactions fosters stakeholder confidence, particularly among teachers, parents, and community members. When school administrators actively disclose budget allocations and expenditures, they minimize the risk of mismanagement and enhance public trust in the institution's financial governance. Establishing clear financial policies and digital tracking systems has also improved accountability, as Tshabangu and Moyo (2022) noted.

Emerging Theme 3: Leveraging Community and External Support

The theme highlights the critical role of external partnerships in strengthening school financial sustainability. Clustered themes, such as support from Local Government Units (LGU) and barangay local government units (BLGU), Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) involvement, alumni donations, and income-generating projects (IGP) contributions, underscore the importance of community resources and external collaborations in supplementing limited school funds. These partnerships provide additional financial support, ensuring schools can maintain operations and improve educational services despite funding constraints. The local government of Tupi adopted Municipal Resolution number 037, dated February 22, 2021, to provide financial support to elementary schools within the town.

This finding aligns with Garcia and Castillo (2020), who emphasized that LGU and BLGU financial assistance is vital in bridging budgetary gaps, particularly in public schools with limited government allocations. Similarly, Mendoza and Cruz (2021) found that PTA involvement in fundraising activities and infrastructure development enhances school financial capacity, fostering a shared responsibility between parents and educators. Moreover, the Resource Dependency Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) explains how schools facing limited public funding actively seek external resources and financial alternatives to sustain operations. The study's findings on partnership-based initiatives, income-generating projects (IGPs), and external financial collaborations illustrate how schools mitigate financial dependency by diversifying funding sources. This theory highlights the importance of strategic resource acquisition and management in ensuring financial stability despite external funding limitations.

Emerging Theme 4: Innovative Strategies for Enhancing Education

The theme highlights innovative strategies to address financial constraints, ensuring that schools continue to provide quality education despite budgetary limitations. Clustered themes—such as fundraising activities, alternative procurement methods, partnership-based initiatives, and external collaborations (e.g., support from Rotary Club or NGOs)—demonstrate how schools adopt creative financial management solutions to sustain operations and improve learning environments.

Martinez and Santos (2020) support this finding, emphasizing that schools that actively engage in fundraising initiatives, such as benefit concerts, community bazaars, and crowdfunding campaigns, generate additional resources for infrastructure development and student programs. Similarly, Okafor and Adebayo (2021) found that schools adopting alternative procurement methods, such as bulk purchasing, donations, and barter exchanges, significantly reduce operational costs while maintaining educational quality.

Moreover, Nyarko and Boateng (2019) highlighted the effectiveness of partnership-based initiatives, where schools collaborate with local businesses, corporate sponsors, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to secure financial aid, equipment donations, and student scholarships. Additionally, Chavez and Ramirez (2022) noted that external collaborations with organizations like the Ro[illegible]ub, Lions Club, and international development agencies provide schools with financial assistance, [illegible]g programs, and infrastructure improvements that would otherwise be unattainable through government funding alone.

CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study's findings, conclusions, and recommendations are covered in this section. It outlines the researcher's findings about the challenges, practices, and strategies for financial management in Tupi, South Cotabato.

Summary

Effective financial management is a cornerstone of quality education systems around the world. Schools rely on financial resources to provide students with the necessary tools, facilities, and educational experiences that foster growth and development. However, managing finances within academic institutions presents a unique set of challenges that require careful consideration and innovative solutions. This study used qualitative methods to unravel Tupi's financial management challenges, practices, and strategies. The participants were three (3) school heads, three (3) disbursing officers, and three (3) teachers from the Tupi in the Schools Division of South Cotabato.

The thematic analysis revealed that the participants described their challenges in financial management as Insufficient Funding, a delayed and Cumbersome Fund Release Process, Inadequate Financial Planning and Budgetary Control, an Impact on School Operations and Educational Programs, and a Lack of Transparency and Stakeholder Involvement.

The participants described the practices as collaborative budget planning and allocation, efficient and regulated utilization of government funds, and adoption of best practices and external innovations. They described their strategies as borrowing and credit for urgent needs, timely and transparent liquidation, leveraging and external support, and innovative strategies for enhancing education.

Conclusions

The study's results on financial management challenges, practices, and coping strategies led to the following conclusions.

The schools face significant financial management challenges. These issues hinder resource allocation, disrupt educational programs, and limit institutional growth. Hence, the schools employ proactive financial management practices and strategies to manage financial constraints. Collaborative budget planning and allocation indicate that administrators, teachers, and stakeholders collaborate to ensure equitable resource distribution. The efficient and regulated utilization of government funds reflects a commitment to accountability and compliance with financial policies.

Additionally, adopting best practices and embracing external innovations enable schools to enhance operational efficiency and ensure financial sustainability, contributing to improved educational quality.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that public elementary schools in Tupi, South Cotabato, implement a Comprehensive Financial Management Framework to address financial challenges, enhance existing practices, and improve administrative strategies.

1. Schools may establish a financial contingency plan to address common financial management challenges, including emergency funding mechanisms, proactive budget forecasting, and streamlined fund liquidation processes. Capacity-building initiatives such as financial management training, stakeholder engagement programs, and external funding partnerships may also be prioritized.
2. Schools may institutionalize collaborative budgeting to strengthen financial good practices. This model's administrators, teachers, and stakeholders actively participate in financial planning and decision-making. Schools can also implement transparency mechanisms to enhance accountability and efficient fund management.
3. To improve school administrators' responses to strengthening collaboration with LGUs, private organizations, and NGOs can also provide alternative funding sources and resource-sharing opportunities. Additionally, adopting digital financial tracking systems will help monitor finances.
4. Future research may explore the effectiveness of digital financial management systems in enhancing transparency and efficiency in public elementary schools. Investigating how technology-driven financial solutions, such as automated budgeting tools and digital fund tracking systems, impact financial decision-making and accountability could provide valuable insights.

REFERENCES

1. Abrahams, J., & Kinyua, J. (2021). *Public financial management practices and performance in educational institutions*. Journal of Public Administration and Governance, 11(3), 144–157.
2. Adeboyo, T., & Mensah, K. (2019). *Budgetary control and financial accountability in public sector organizations*. African Journal of Accounting, 5(2), 89–101.
3. Aina, A., & Bipath, K. (2020). School financial management: Insights for decision making in public primary schools. *South African Journal of Education*, 40(1), 1-11
4. Al Breiki, M., & Nobanee, H. (2019). The role of financial management in promoting sustainable business practices and development. *Available at SSRN 3472404*.
5. Alio, M., & Githui, D. (2019). Financial management practices and challenges in public secondary schools in Kenya: A case of Kisii County. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 7(5), 1-14[2]
6. Aspers, P., & Corte, U. (2021). *What is qualitative in qualitative research*. Qualitative Sociology, 44, 129–160. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-020-09451-w
7. Bagheri, A., & Chitsazan, H. (2018). *Challenges of entrepreneurial finance: a systematic analysis of empirical researches.* In Entrepreneurship Education and Research in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (pp. 347-361). Springer International Publishing.
8. Baptista, S. M. J., & Dewi, A. S. (2021). The influence of financial attitude, financial literacy, and locus of control on financial management behavior. *International Journal of Social Science and Business*, *5*(1), 93-98.
9. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). *Using thematic analysis in psychology*. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

10. Brigham, E. F., & Ehrhardt, M. C. (2019). *Financial management: theory & practice.* Cengage Learning.
11. Chavez, M. A., & Ramirez, L. J. (2022). *School heads' financial leadership and budget allocation practices in Philippine public schools*. Journal of Educational Management and Policy Studies, 10(1), 35–48.
12. Coleman, J. S. (1988). *Social capital in the creation of human capital*. American Journal of Sociology, 94, S95–S120. https://doi.org/10.1086/228943
13. CORE. (2021). *School finance and governance in Southeast Asia: A regional study*. *Center for Organization Research and Education (CORE)*. [Please verify official publication title and authorship]
14. Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2018). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
15. Department of Education. (2020). *DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2020: Guidelines for the release, use, reporting, and liquidation of school MOOE for public elementary and secondary schools*. https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/DO_s2020_024.pdf
16. DepEd South Cotabato. (2023). *Home*. https://depedsouthcotabato.org/
17. Doszhan, R., Nurmaganbetova, A., Pukala, R., Yessenova, G., Omar, & Sabidullina, A. (2020). *New challenges in the financial management under the influence of financial technology.* In 2020 International Conference on Information Science and Communications Technologies (ICISCT) (pp. 1-6). IEEE.
18. Dovetail Editorial Team. (2023). *What is a case study? Definition, methods, and examples*. Dovetail. https://dovetailapp.com/research/what-is-a-case-study/
19. Espiritu, C. M. (2020). *Financial literacy and budgeting practices among school heads in public elementary schools*. Philippine Journal of Education, 95(2), 45–56.
20. ESS. (2021). *Education support services report on financial compliance and* school *accountability*. Education Support Services Philippines.
21. Finlay, L. (2002). *"Outing" the researcher: The provenance, process, and practice of reflexivity*. Qualitative Health Research, 12(4), 531–545. https://doi.org/10.1177/104973202129120052
22. Garcia, M. T., & Castillo, R. M. (2020). *Challenges in managing school funds among public elementary school principals in the Philippines*. Philippine Journal of Educational Administration, 56(1), 22–34.
23. Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. Basic Books.
24. Groenewald, Elma & Rabillas, Annabelle & Uy, Francisca & Kilag, Osias Kit & Bugtai, Gresilda & Batilaran, Janice. (2024). Enhancing financial management practices in public schools: a systematic literature *Review in Southeast Asia. 1.* 207-212.
25. Jensen, M. C., & Meckling, W. H. (1976). *Theory of the firm: Managerial behavior, agency costs and ownership structure*. Journal of Financial Economics, 3(4), 305–360. https://doi.org/10.1016/0304-405X(76)90026-X
26. Johnson, R. B. (2019). *Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come*. Educational Researcher, 33(7), 14–26.
27. Kaguri, M., Ibuathu, C. N., & Kubaison, S. T. (2014). *Financial management challenges facing implementation of free day secondary education in Imenti North District, Kenya.*
28. Kamau, J., & Nyaga, G. (2019). *Financial management practices and academic performance in public secondary schools in Kenya*. International Journal of Education and Research, 7(4), 67–78.

29. Kasradze, T., Antia, V., & Gulua, E. (2023). *Challenges of financial management of the higher education institutions in Georgia*.Llego, M. A. (2023). *Fiscal management in Philippine public schools: Issues and recommendations*. Department of Education. https://www.deped.gov.ph/
30. Magak, E. O. (2013). *Challenges facing head teachers in financial management in public secondary schools: a case of Kisumu East District Kenya* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi,).
31. Martinez, A. D., & Santos, F. R. (2020). *Transparency and accountability in school fund utilization: A case of public elementary schools*. Journal of Educational Finance and Policy, 15(2), 90–103.Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
32. Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
33. Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Best practices*. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/best%20practices.
34. Mestry, R. (2018). The challenges of financial management in public schools. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 56(2), 97-105[2]
35. mindanao/r12/south-cotabato.html
36. Morrow, S. L. (2005). *Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology*. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52(2), 250–260. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.250
37. Mugambi, F. M., & Wanjiru, J. (2021). *Impact of financial planning on the performance of public primary schools in Kenya*. International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management, 9(5), 120–135.
38. Mwangi, P., & Kimani, G. (2020). *School leadership and financial resource management: A Kenyan perspective*. African Journal of Educational Leadership, 8(3), 45–59.
39. Myende, P., Mestry, R., & Nkambule, S. (2018). Financial management practices in public schools: A case study of selected schools in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 9(6), 1-10[2]
40. Nisa, C., Kharisma, A., Fadillah, R., & Fatmawati, R. S. (2023). School financial management for facilities and infrastructure at elementary school. *Proceedings Series on Social Sciences & Humanities*, *12*, 6–11. https://doi.org/10.30595/pssh.v12i.765
41. Nwafukwa and Sunday (2015). Financial management skills required of principals for the implementation of the universal basic education programme in junior secondary schools in Ebonyi State of Nigeria, *IJELD*, *3* (5), 31-37.
42. Nyamita, M. O., & Dorasamy, N. (2020). *The influence of financial management practices on school performance in South Africa*. Journal of Education and Practice, 11(6), 155–167.
43. Obonyo, M. A., & Njoroje, T. K. (2020). *The role of financial literacy in enhancing school managers' effectiveness in fund management*. Journal of African Educational Studies, 13(2), 102–115.
44. Odour, F. O., & Karanjas, M. (2021). *Budgeting practices and financial accountability in public secondary schools in Kenya*. International Journal of Finance and Management, 6(1), 48–58.
45. OECD. (2021). *Education at a glance 2021: OECD indicators*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en
46. Okafor, J. O., & Adeboyo, T. (2021). *Principals' financial management competencies and school development in Nigerian public secondary schools*. Nigerian Journal of Educational Research and Development, 18(1), 78–89

47. Osei, K., & Boateng, F. (2021). *Financial accountability mechanisms in basic education in Ghana: A policy and practice review*. West African Journal of Education, 41(1), 25–39.
48. Ostman, R. E. (2007). *Understanding agency theory in public organizations*. Public Management Review, 9(3), 325–340. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719030701498235
49. Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
50. Petlenko, Y., & Kotovskyi, T. (2019). Public finance management in Ukraine: problems and solutions. *World of finance*, (1 (50)), 21-28.
51. Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G. R. (1978). *The external control of organizations: A resource dependence perspective*. Harper & Row.
52. PhilAtlas. (2021). *South Cotabato*. https://www.philatlas.com/
53. Philippine Institute for Development Studies. (2018). *Improving the efficiency of public spending on education in the Philippines*. PIDS Policy Notes No. 2018-10. https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/
54. Raman, S. (2022). *School budgeting and financial accountability in Southeast Asia: A comparative perspective. Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 23(1), 15–28. https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2022/v23i130545
55. RAND **Corporation**. (2023). *Financial sustainability for nonprofit organizations: a review of the literature*.
56. Rola, W. R., Rubzen, M. F., & Blackmore, E. (2014). *Financial management practices in Philippine schools: A case analysis*. Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 34(3), 350–366. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2013.860005
57. Sabri, M. F., Reza, T. S., & Wijekoon, R. (2020). Financial management, savings behavior, investment behavior and financial well-being of working women in the public sector. *Majalah Ilmiah Bijak, 17*(2), 135-153.
58. Shan, H. (2019). *Stakeholder perspectives on school budgeting and resource allocation*. Journal of Educational Administration, 57(5), 518–533. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-08-2018-0150
59. Smith, J. A. (2018). *Participants and researchers searching for meaning: Conceptual developments for interpretative phenomenological analysis*. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 15(2-3), 114–135. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2017.1402944
60. Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage Publications.
61. Tshabangu, I., & Moyo, T. (2022). *Governance and financial management practices in Zimbabwean public schools: A policy evaluation perspective*. African Journal of Public Affairs, 14(2), 60–72.
62. Tucker, P. D., & Duke, D. L. (2019). *Teacher and principal leadership for school improvement*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429027983
63. Vanco Payments. (2021). *The state of K–12 school finance: Trends and digital solutions*. https://www.vancopayments.com/education/resources/k12-school-finance-report
64. Walsh, B., & Lim, H. (2020). Millennials' adoption of personal financial management (PFM) technology and financial behavior. *Financial Planning Review*, *3*(3), e1095.
65. White, K., Park, N., Watkins, K., McCoy, M., & Thomas, M. G. (2019). The relationship between financial knowledge, financial management, and financial self-efficacy among african-American students. *Financial Management, and Financial Self-Efficacy Among African-American Students (October 12, 2019)*.
66. Williams, C., & Lind, C. (2019). *Financial management in education: Theories and practices*. Oxford

University Press.
67. World Bank. (2019). *Improving public sector financial management in the Philippines: Key challenges and recommendations*. World Bank Group. https://documents.worldbank.org/
68. Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.