Understanding the Challenges in Supervisory Functions: Towards Fostering a Healthy Mental Environment during Pandemic

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Abstract

Managers face a significant challenge in effectively bridging the distance through communication. This challenge highlights the importance of managers developing proficient listening and speaking skills, as these skills greatly contribute to the success of their teams. In this study, it is aimed to determine challenges on supervisory functions of the respondenhe ts in terms of virtual conferences/meetings, monitoring and evaluation, teachers' development, and technical assistance.This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design with the aid of a questionnaire-checklist. The population of the study were school heads of the selected public elementary schools in the Division of Zamboanga City. There were 165 school heads involved in this study assigned in small, medium, and big schools located in the lowland areas, hinterland, mountain, and island geographic areas. It was concluded that the challenges on supervisory functions of the respondents in terms of virtual conferences/meetings, monitoring and evaluation, teachers' development, and technical assistance were moderate and that the supervisory functions of respondents are related to instructional leadership challenges.

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Introduction

Salsberry (2010) stated that the virtual world of work is a strategy in reaction to the rapid move to remote labor, which has presented issues for companies, notably in the education sector. In the virtual workplace, it can be difficult to manage and monitor performance effectively. Despite the fact that the epidemic may have made their personal life more stressful, executives must now more than ever be aware of the demands of their company and their employees.

The beginning of the abrupt move to remote labor was highlighted. While remote work options and video conferencing have steadily advanced in recent years, many delicate interactions within the company are still frequently performed in person. It is also noted that face-to-face interactions are the most effective way to create and maintain trust and openness, which are crucial for promoting successful communication, information exchange, and commitment to fulfillment (Richardson, et., al. 2011).

As a result, the inability to physically bring together internal and external stakeholders in the near future makes decision-making more difficult and raises the possibility of conflict. The primary problem in the contemporary context revolves around how leaders may digitally involve stakeholders and internal team members in crucial decision-making processes in ways that improve trust, transparency, and teamwork. The crisis presents a crucial opportunity to reconsider how local decision-making is supported and handled.

Quilici et al. (2011) have emphasized that principals' roles in the virtual world of work in facilitating the emergence of online connectivity

with school heads, teachers, students, and other stakeholders are parallel to the challenges and experience in instructional leadership and supervisory functions among school heads.

Related Literature and Studies
Virtual World of Work Supervisory Functions of School Heads
Relatively, according to Compton et al. (2009), successful remote work relies on efficient communication and feedback. However, with the shift to virtual work, the ease of organic opportunities and low-stakes communication, such as casually sharing observations before or after meetings, has diminished.

The key findings presented by Cortellazzo, Bruni, and Zampieri (2019) demonstrate the importance of leaders in creating a digital culture. Their task involves cultivating connections with multiple stakeholders spread across different locations and focusing on enabling collaborative processes in demanding circumstances, all the while being attentive to pressing ethical concerns. Our study offers a thorough and methodical examination of the topic, identifies important areas for further research, and advances the conversation around leadership and digital transformation.

Guinalu and Jordán (2016) examined a variety of antecedent elements for trust in virtual team leaders, which they divided into two categories: the leader's attractiveness on the outside and their behavioral traits on the inside (justice and empathy). The research also analyzes how different leadership philosophies, such as transactional or transformational, can affect how these variables relate to one another. According to the findings, leaders that are appealing, sympathetic, and just are better able to win people over.

Compton et al. (2009) emphasized the importance of being deliberate and intentional with feedback in virtual work settings. Despite the absence of spontaneous in-person opportunities for providing feedback, leaders must not let this hinder team development. In a regular office environment, it is effortless to offer advice or constructive comments during informal interactions, meetings, or chance encounters. However, in virtual settings, leaders must purposefully create time and space to provide feedback, even though it may not be as straightforward as face-to-face interactions.

According to Handke, Klonek, O'Neill, and Kerschreiter (2022), feedback that addresses the entire group, remains objective, and incorporates performance-related information along with details about team processes and psychological states is particularly valuable for virtual teams. In the absence of in-person interactions, such as informal conversations during meetings or chance encounters in common areas, the interpersonal relationships at work may be limited, affecting the pace of action (Compton et al., 2009).

On the other hand, Quilici et al. (2011) disclosed that achieving success in virtual work amid challenging circumstances involves pausing to carefully evaluate the arrangement and distribution of decision-making. The current situation might offer a chance to expedite the development of leadership capacity to handle critical decisions in such environments. Organizations can become more adaptable and better withstand tumultuous, complicated, and dynamic situations by using Global Virtual Teams (GVTs). Teams like these cross boundaries like time, location, and territory while cooperating to accomplish a common goal. To flourish in the realm of innovation, these teams need to be thoughtfully crafted with both structural and non-structural components. These elements should enable seamless integration with advanced technology for communication, knowledge sharing, and project management, allowing them to operate and excel at the forefront of innovation. The human experience of participating in virtual teams is still not fully understood, despite being essential to their viability (Maley, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has unintentionally turned into a worldwide experiment for businesses. While it has presented numerous daunting challenges, it has also opened up possibilities for organizations to embrace a flatter leadership structure and decentralize decision-making. This shift allows businesses to enhance their agility and resilience during these challenging times. This study which attempted to determine the virtual world of work, its challenges

and experiences in instructional leadership and supervisory functions among elementary school heads focuses specifically on communication, decision-making, ICT skills, and work relationship as determinant variables subscribed to Phelps (2012) suggestion that a vital aspect of virtual leadership lies in the ability to effectively connect with today's students.

Trivedi and Desai (2012) state that the new paradigm brings forth a diverse range of opportunities. These opportunities include the ability to have instantaneous communication with employees, customers, and suppliers; the flexibility to access talent from anywhere; the potential to enhance organizational performance through the formation of more effective multi-functional teams; the opportunity to enhance customer satisfaction by adopting the follow-the-sun approach; the capability to reduce costs; and the possibility of gaining superior knowledge resources. These may have a favorable effect on an organization's competitive edge. E-leaders must overcome a number of new obstacles, including how to create trust with people who may have never met the leader and how to effectively connect with team members who are located far away.

In addition, Miller and Ribble (2010) highlighted that virtual school leaders may encounter an extra obstacle concerning staffing. They pointed out that not all teachers and school administrators possess the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively teach and communicate in an online setting. The literature review's findings are confirmed by Gallego, Ortiz-Marcos, and Romero (2021), who state that when virtual teams are incorporated in a project team, it is essential to properly prepare human resources, risk, and communication management. By emphasizing the value of virtual teams in the processes of requirements gathering and scope management during project planning, his work adds to the body of knowledge in the subject in a way that has not yet been acknowledged by other authors. It has been shown that project managers should take integration and scope planning into account when evaluating the impact of virtual teams, as opposed to just considering the impact resources, communication, and costs.

Jarrell (2019) demonstrated how strategies used in virtual workspaces can reduce obstacles and challenges to knowledge sharing in a virtual environment by fostering the growth of strong team relationships, utilizing a variety of technologies and platforms, and being transparent with and encouraging team members. Understanding how information is exchanged among team members and the many forces that motivate information sharing in virtual workspaces may aid in promoting social change. On the contrary, Miller and Ribble (2010) demonstrated that schools struggle to keep pace with the rapid technological advancements, particularly in the context of K-12 education. The challenges faced by K-12 schools revolve around understanding how to effectively harness the potential of online learning.

Oliver et al. (2010) highlighted lessons on virtual school leadership from North Carolina Virtual Public Schools. They found that building curriculum and establishing a virtual infrastructure are both time-consuming and costly endeavors. Additionally, teachers designing online courses expressed a desire for strong leadership and guidance from school leaders. The transition from traditional classrooms to virtual teaching environments can be challenging for many teachers, with potential resistance stemming from shifting workloads and a lack of technical and pedagogical support.

Salsberry (2010) provided non-empirical commentary that underlined several difficulties virtual school leaders might face. These challenges include creating a shared vision for geographically dispersed faculty and staff and providing effective guidance and leadership to enhance student performance and overall school effectiveness. The swift shift to remote work has brought about various challenges for organizations, especially in the education sector.

Stephenson et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of high-quality and equitable learning in a virtual setting, which they referred to as "powerful learning." They identified three essential factors: meaningful utilization of technology, inclusive access to technology, and the leadership of principals who understand how to facilitate meaningful use and inclusive access. Amidst the pandemic, leaders must stay mindful

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of their organizations and employees, even though they may experience heightened personal pressures. While video-conferencing and remote work have advanced, certain sensitive discussions and relationships within the organization are often best handled in face-to-face interactions. Trust and transparency are crucial for fostering effective communication, sharing information, and ensuring commitment follow-through, and they are most effectively established through in-person interactions. The current inability to bring external and internal stakeholders together physically poses challenges in decision-making and heightens the potential for conflicts. In the present environment, the key challenge for organizations lies in how leaders can effectively engage with stakeholders and internal team members virtually, ensuring that trust and confidence in the workforce are enhanced throughout the decision-making processes.

According to Hebert and Lovett (2021), higher education must prepare its administrators for a world that is becoming more and more virtual. During the COVID-19 pandemic, which started in 2020, this was more apparent than ever. The management of virtual faculty teams was not successfully accomplished using previously employed leadership techniques. Nearly overnight, brand-new, innovative strategies for managing employees who operate remotely across large geographic areas were introduced. Some of them were successful, some were not. In order to mentor, inspire, and lead their teams in virtual environments, academic leaders should consider the best practices that have been identified. A number of characteristics of effective leaders have been identified in the literature, including cultivating a culture of trust, teamwork, collaboration, and communication.

Mapoy, Manguerra, Evangelista, Lusterio, and Fortes (2021) explored how Filipino leadership and management might be misleading due to the influence of deeply ingrained indigenous core values in Filipino culture. The culture's emphasis on kinship, family, and social acceptance results in distinct leadership styles among Filipinos, such as pakiramdam, takutan, kulit, and patsamba-tsamba, among others. These leadership styles have significant effects in various settings, including the workplace and schools, and can significantly impact individuals' mental health. For instance, leaders using takutan as their style may cause stress and anxiety among employees, as they have been taught that demanding and tough approaches yield the best results.

Tria (2020) pointed out that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has presented extraordinary challenges and severely impacted the education sector, with uncertain timelines for resolution. Each country is currently implementing measures to contain the virus, but infections continue to rise. In the context of education, it is crucial to consider the "new normal" when planning and implementing educational policies to ensure quality education despite lockdowns and community quarantine measures.

Guiab and Ganal (2014) revealed that administrators in elementary and secondary schools possess the necessary qualifications for their positions but may lack the organizational skills needed to create effective schools that can achieve quality education. Being a virtual team leader, according to Varela and Gonzalez (2018), entails more than just guiding subordinates in their many organizational and functional sectors. Goals are more difficult in VWTs because of the hour variations in team members' time zones. Additionally, problems worsen when a local communication infrastructure breakdown takes place or when hardware and software are incompatible. Furthermore, leaders and team members must act right away to meet local organizational goals.

Research Questions

In order to better understand the common challenges experienced by school leaders when carrying out their supervisory and instructional leadership responsibilities online, the researcher set out to identify these challenges.

1. What are the challenges on supervisory core functions of the respondents in terms of:
a. virtual conferences/meetings,
b. monitoring and evaluation,
c. teachers' development, and
d. technical assistance?

Methodology

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The research utilized a descriptive-correlational research design and relied on a questionnaire-checklist as a data collection tool. Descriptive research, as defined by Gall & Borg (2007), is a quantitative research approach aimed at gathering quantifiable data from the population sample for statistical analysis. The goal of descriptive research is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. Descriptive research in this study described the virtual world of work, the challenges in instructional leadership and supervisory functions of school heads in the selected public schools in Zamboanga City Division. It also determined the profile of respondents in terms of age, sex, present position, educational attainment, and the number of years as school head.

The population of the study were school heads of the selected public elementary schools in the Division of Zamboanga City. There were 165 school heads involved in this study assigned in small, medium, and big schools located in the lowland areas, hinterland, mountain, and island geographic areas. The researcher utilized the Raosoft Sample Size calculator as sampling design. The Raosoft Sample Size calculator is employed to determine a suitable sample size from a given population. Statistics involves examining a population's behavior by selecting a sample, often with a confidence level of 95% (represented by a = 0.05) and a critical value of 1.96, along with a margin of error (MOE). This study employed a researcher-made survey questionnaire with structured questions in a form of statement. The research instrument comprises of four (4) parts.

Part I solicited the data on the profile of the respondents such as age, sex, present position, education, and number of years as elementary school head;

Part II solicited the data on the challenges of virtual world of work in terms of online-meetings/conferences; issuances of memoranda; monitoring and evaluation; and provisions of technical assistance;

Part III consisted of the statements on the instructional leadership of school heads in terms of communication, decision-making, ICT skills, and work relationship; and

Part IV consisted of the statements on the supervisory functions of school heads in terms of virtual conferences/meeting; monitoring and evaluation; teachers' development; and technical assistance.

Results and Discussions

On the challenges in supervisory functions of the respondents in terms of virtual conferences/meetings, monitoring and evaluation, teachers' development, and technical assistance

Table 1. illustrates the challenges on supervisory functions of the respondents in terms of virtual conferences/meetings. It shows that respondents obtained a highest mean of 3.08 on statement "virtual meetings with Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) periodically" with its descriptive rating of "agree" and interpreted as "moderately challenged." This means that majority of the respondents had the constraints in facilitating virtual meetings with Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) periodically because not all of the parents have internet connectivity coupled with non-accessibility in online.

On the other hand, respondents obtained a lowest mean of 2.77 on statement "issuing directives, announcements to teachers through online/virtual," with its descriptive rating of "agree" and interpreted as "moderately challenged. This means that most of the respondents facilitates issuing directives, announcements to teachers through online/virtual. It implies that communication becomes more virtual than printed in the present situation. Hence, respondents obtained an average mean of 2.90 with its descriptive rating of "agree" and interpreted as "moderately challenged." This means that the supervisory functions of school heads in terms of virtual conferences/meetings becomes essential in facilitating such supervisory function.

Table 1. Challenges in Supervisory Functions of the Respondent in terms of Virtual Conference/Meetings

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Statements In my supervisory function, I encountered challenges in…	Mean	Descriptive Rating	Verbal Interpretation
1. virtual meetings with Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) periodically	3.08	Agree	Moderately Challenged
2. School Learning Action Cell Session with teachers through virtual mode	2.98	Agree	Moderately Challenged
3. seminars for teachers through virtual approach	2.88	Agree	Moderately Challenged
4. regular virtual conferences/meetings with teachers	2.78	Agree	Moderately Challenged
5. issuing directives, announcements to teachers through online/virtual	2.77	Agree	Moderately Challenged
Average Mean	**2.90**	**Agree**	**Moderately Challenged**

Legend: 3.25-4.00 Strongly Agree (SA) = Highly Challenged   2.50-3.24 Agree (A) = Moderately Challenged
1.75-2.49 Disagree (D) = Less Challenged   1.00-1.74 Strongly Disagree (SD) = Not Challenged

Technology improvements, according to Daros, have made it possible for workers to collaborate across geographical borders (2016). Today's organizations benefit from teams who collaborate while being separated geographically because they function as though they were in the same space.

Table 2. illustrates the challenges on supervisory functions of the respondents in terms of monitoring and evaluation. It shows that respondents obtained a highest mean of 3.03 on statement "evaluating pupils' and teachers' performance through virtual approach" with its descriptive rating of "agree" and interpreted as "moderately challenged." This means that majority of the respondents facilitates evaluating pupils' and teachers' performance through virtual

approach. This indicates that the majority of respondents were equipped with the knowledge and skills when it comes to assessing the performance of students and teachers using a virtual method.

On the other hand, respondents obtained a lowest mean of 2.74 on statement "disseminating results of school improvement plan through virtual," with its descriptive rating of "agree" and interpreted as "moderately challenged." This means that most of the respondents facilitates disseminating results of school improvement plan through virtual. It indicates that the majority of respondents found sharing the results of the school development plan via virtual platform.

Table 2. Challenges in Supervisory Functions of the Respondents in terms of Monitoring and Evaluation

Statements In my supervisory function, I encountered challenges in…	Mean	Descriptive Rating	Verbal Interpretation
1. evaluating pupils' and teachers' performance through virtual approach	3.03	Agree	Moderately Challenged
2. monitoring progress in the implementation of learning modules through online	2.97	Agree	Moderately Challenged
3. assessing extent of program implementation through online	2.94	Agree	Moderately Challenged
4. monitoring school improvement plan through virtual mode	2.90	Agree	Moderately Challenged

5. disseminating results of school improvement plan through virtual	2.74	Agree	Moderately Challenged
Average Mean	**2.92**	**Agree**	**Moderately Challenged**

Legend: 3.25-4.00 Strongly Agree (SA) = Highly Challenged   2.50-3.24 Agree (A) = Moderately Challenged
1.75-2.49 Disagree (D) = Less Challenged   1.00-1.74 Strongly Disagree (SD) = Not Challenged

Hence, respondents obtained an average mean of 2.92 with its descriptive rating of "agree" and interpreted as "moderately challenged." This means that the supervisory functions of school heads in terms of monitoring and evaluation are facilitated through online platform.

Table 3. illustrates the challenges on supervisory functions of the respondents in terms of teachers' development. It shows that respondents obtained a highest mean of 2.98 on statement "teachers to conduct educational research on teaching strategies" with its descriptive rating of "agree" and interpreted as "moderately challenged." This means that majority of the respondents conduct educational research on teaching strategies. It indicates that the majority of respondents found doing educational research on teaching practices form essential part of their functions.

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Table 3. Challenges in Supervisory Functions of the Respondent in terms of Teachers' Development

Statements In my supervisory function, I encountered challenges in/with…	Mean	Descriptive Rating	Verbal Interpretation
1. teachers to conduct educational research on teaching strategies	2.98	Agree	Moderately Challenged
2. teachers' training through zoom/virtual	2.80	Agree	Moderately Challenged
3. facilitating School Learning Action Cell for staff development through zoom/virtual process	2.76	Agree	Moderately Challenged
4. teachers' career promotion	2.67	Agree	Moderately Challenged
5. coaching and mentoring teachers	2.60	Agree	Moderately Challenged
Average Weighted Mean	**2.76**	**Agree**	**Moderately Challenged**

Legend: 3.25-4.00 Strongly Agree (SA) = Highly Challenged   2.50-3.24 Agree (A) = Moderately Challenged
1.75-2.49 Disagree (D) = Less Challenged   1.00-1.74 Strongly Disagree (SD) = Not Challenged

On the other hand, respondents obtained a lowest mean of 2.60 on statement "coaching and mentoring teachers," with its descriptive rating of "agree" and interpreted as "moderately challenged." This means that most of the respondents facilitates coaching and mentoring teachers regularly. Hence, respondents obtained an average mean of 2.76 with its descriptive rating of "agree" and interpreted as "moderately challenged." This means that supervisory functions of school heads in terms of teachers' development were facilitated regularly.

Table 4. illustrates the challenges on supervisory functions of the respondents in terms of technical assistance. It shows that respondents obtained a highest mean of 2.69 on statement "discovering areas of strengths and weaknesses of the teachers" with its descriptive rating of "agree" and interpreted as "moderately challenged. This means that majority of the respondents considers discovering areas of strengths and weaknesses of the teachers facilitatively. This indicates that the majority of respondents found identifying the

teachers' strengths and faults to be moderatelydifficult.

Table 4. Challenges in Supervisory Functions of the Respondents in terms of Technical Assistance

Statements In my supervisory function, I encountered challenges in/with…	Mean	Descriptive Rating	Verbal Interpretation
1. discovering areas of strengths and weaknesses of the teachers	2.69	Agree	Moderately Challenged
2. the individual coaching of teachers	2.55	Agree	Moderately Challenged
3. the Learning Action Cell (LAC) Sessions	2.54	Agree	Moderately Challenged
4. giving feedback to teachers	2.51	Agree	Moderately Challenged
5. the individual mentoring for teachers	2.48	Disagree	Less Challenged
Average Mean	**2.55**	**Agree**	**Moderately Challenged**

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Legend: 3.25-4.00 Strongly Agree (SA) = Highly Challenged   2.50-3.24 Agree (A) = Moderately Challenged
          1.75-2.49 Disagree (D) = Less Challenged   1.00-1.74 Strongly Disagree (SD) = Not Challenged

On the other hand, respondents obtained a lowest mean of 2.48 on statement "the individual mentoring for teachers," with its descriptive rating of "disagree" and interpreted as "less challenged." This means that most of the respondents facilitates individual mentoring for teachers expeditiously. This indicates that most respondents found individual teacher mentorship to be essentially important in their professional growth.

Hence, respondents obtained an average mean of 2.55 with its descriptive rating of "agree" and interpreted as "moderately challenged." This means that supervisory functions of school heads in terms of technical assistance were facilitated regularly.

Jarrell (2019) demonstrated how strategies used in virtual workspaces can reduce obstacles and challenges to knowledge sharing in a virtual environment by fostering the growth of strong team relationships, utilizing a variety of technologies and platforms, and being transparent with and encouraging team members.

Understanding how information is exchanged among team members and the many forces that motivate information sharing in virtual workspaces may aid in promoting social change.

Table 5. illustrates the summary on the challenges in supervisory functions encountered by respondents. It revealed that respondents obtained a highest mean of 2.90 which is described as "agree" and interpreted as "moderately challenged" on supervisory functions in terms of virtual conference/meetings. This indicates that school leaders facilitate virtual conference/meeting frequently than monitoring and evaluation, teacher's development and technical assistance. This implies that virtual conference/meeting was a greater issue for school leaders than monitoring and evaluation, teacher's development and technical assistance.

On the other hand, a lowest mean of 2.55 which is described as "agree" and interpreted as "moderately challenged" on supervisory functions in terms of technical assistance. This means that respondents facilitating technical assistance was easier for respondents.

Table 5. Summary on the Challenges in Supervisory Functions Encountered by Respondents

Variables	Mean	Descriptive Rating	Verbal Interpretation
Virtual Conference/Meetings	2.90	Agree	Moderately Challenged
Monitoring and Evaluation	2.92	Agree	Moderately Challenged
Teachers' Development	2.76	Agree	Moderately Challenged
Technical Assistance	2.55	Agree	Moderately Challenged
Over-all Mean	**2.78**	**Agree**	**Moderately Challenged**

Legend: 3.25-4.00 Strongly Agree (SA) = Highly Challenged   2.50-3.24 Agree (A) = Moderately Challenged
          1.75-2.49 Disagree (D) = Less Challenged   1.00-1.74 Strongly Disagree (SD) = Not Challenged

To sum it up, respondents obtained an over-all mean of 2.78 with its descriptive rating of "agree" and interpreted as "moderately challenged." This means that supervisory functions of school heads enhanced.

Cortellazzo, Bruni, and Zampieri (2019) affirm the significance of leaders in fostering a digital culture. Their role involves building connections with numerous stakeholders dispersed across different locations and prioritizing collaborative processes in challenging situations, all while addressing urgent ethical concerns.

Moreover, trust and transparency are vital for facilitating successful communication, information sharing, and commitment follow-through. These aspects are usually most effectively established and maintained through in-person interactions. However, the current inability to physically bring external and internal stakeholders together poses additional challenges for decision-making and increases the likelihood of conflicts. In the current setting, organizations confront a critical challenge as leaders must effectively engage virtually with stakeholders and internal team members during key decision-making processes to enhance trust and confidence in the workforce.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were derived:

1. The challenges on supervisory functions of the respondents in terms of virtual conferences/meetings, monitoring and evaluation, teachers' development, and technical assistance were moderate.

2. The supervisory functions of respondents are related to instructional leadership challenges.

3. Officials from the Department of Education may enhance the minimum requirements for hiring school leaders to include educational credentials, technological expertise, and administrative and supervisory leadership skills in school-based management.

4. School Heads may comprehensively revisit, internalize and practice the duties and functions as mandated under R.A. 9155 otherwise known as Governance in Basic Education.

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