



Edupreneurs: Probing Qualities and Realities among Elementary Educator Entrepreneurs

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study employed narrative research design. There were five informants who shared their stories as edupreneurs. Findings revealed that they had a humble beginning in making a difference into the lives of the learners. As they engaged into school business, they saw the needs of the learners towards growth and development. Thus, they coupled it with skills that involved discipline, goal oriented, and willingness to try innovations. However, as private owners of schools, they faced numerous challenges. They struggled with finances because of the number of enrollees. They coped with innovating their marketing strategies by embracing inquiry-based learning and collaborative learning. As well, they used the social media to inform their stakeholders. An intervention plan was designed to increase the enrolment turn-out.

INTRODUCTION

Edupreneur is a blended term which means educational entrepreneurs. These are individuals who set the new dynamics of teaching. They possess the value of being an educator as well as entrepreneurs. Most likely, these are owners of private schools in the Philippines who played a crucial part in molding the capabilities of Filipino children.

In the same manner, in Sweden, edupreneurial market pointed out a policy reform that support the existence of private companies that solved problems relative to school crisis as business possibilities (Ideland et al., 2021). In the contexts of India, an individual who wish to venture the field of education as a business may have a good orientation towards decision-making which may lead to the development of the enterprise (Vivek & Deepika, 2015).

At one hand, edupreneurs have been used as a leverage in a digital platform which aims to improve the educational technology infrastructures in South Africa (Nayeem, 2022). On the other hand, it is defined as the process of innovating to further improve the educational productivity, efficiency, and quality being practiced by the private institutions (Jayaraman & Praseeda, 2019).

In the Philippines, private institutions have been part of the prime movers of the educational system. They produced high-quality and competitive students. However, in the parlance of research there is few study conducted and published. Thus, the gap of the study. Edupreneurs are hands-on in their business. More importantly, they exhibited flexibility in adapting to change (Silin, 2022).

This study aims to fill the aforesaid gap. Similarly, this will open a new possibility for edupreneurs in the Municipality of Kabacan to innovate and cope with the trend of globalization. Through this, they can ensure that high-quality Filipino graduates can compete with other nationalities. It is in this premise that this study will be conducted.

Research Questions

1. How do the edupreneurs started their edu business?
2. What entrepreneurial skills and do educators possess in handling their business?
3. What challenges do education entrepreneurs face in handling their business? And,
4. How do education entrepreneurs cope with the challenges?
5. What pieces of advice can they share to educators who plan to engage in entrepreneurship?
6. What intervention can be proposed based on the findings of the study?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative-narrative research design. Qualitative research is an approach which is different from the quantitative perspectives. This study did not use any statistical tool in the analysis of the data. It was solely focused on the experiences of humans (Flick, 2004; Kloffer, 2008). However, this also explored the use of the pictures and texts (Maxwell, 2012; Hennink et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, the narrative research design allowed individuals to express their experiences. They were understood the way they constructed their stories. Similarly, it dealt with the kind of stories investigated (Bruce et al., 2016). It began with the experiences as told by the informants (Lewis, 2015). Most importantly, this has looked into the reconstruction of a person's experiences related to another social milieu (Clandinin, 2006).

Relative to this, this is a qualitative study as it did not seek any significant relationship. Thus, no variables were used in this study. Likewise, the narrative approach helped the researcher to find the skills of the edupreneurs in handling their own schools. In addition, their challenges and coping strategies, as well as their pieces of advice were dealt with closely in this endeavor.

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in the Municipality of Kabacan, Province of Cotabato. It is situated in the Third Congressional District.

The municipality of Kabacan, nestled in a suburban setting, boasts a diverse educational landscape comprising both private and public schools, each contributing uniquely to the educational fabric of the community, however, this study focused on five private institutions owned and managed by educational entrepreneurs.

Within this dynamic educational landscape, educational entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in driving innovation and progress. They navigate the complexities of the educational system, seeking out opportunities to enhance teaching methods, address the diverse needs of students, and foster collaboration between private and public institutions. Through their dedication and vision, these entrepreneurs contribute to the ongoing evolution of education in Maplewood, ensuring that all students have access to quality learning experiences that prepare them for the demands of an ever-changing world.

Research Instrument

The researcher used different instruments in gathering the data. First, interview guide questions were used during the interview of the informants. Second, the recorder which was used to record their responses during the interview. Third, the consent-to-participate form which was part of the ethical standards in the conduct of the research. They were asked to affix their signature which signified their full participation in the study.

Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was used in the selection of the informants (Etikan et al., 2016). More specifically, this applied the criterion-based sampling (Gentles et al., 2015) wherein the following criteria was the basis in the selection:

1. Owner-administrator of a private elementary school in Kabacan;
2. Has been serving as edupreneur for at least 3 years; and
3. A hands-on school administrator

The research respondents for this study represent a diverse spectrum of educational institutions that significantly shape the educational landscape of Kabacan. These schools, Dominador Diaz Clemente Academy Montessori, ABC Educational Development Center, Asian Colleges and Technological Institute Inc., Early Childhood Learning Center, and Good Shepherd Learning Center are esteemed establishments known for their commitment to excellence and dedication to nurturing the minds of young learners.

Early Childhood Learning Center (ECLC) stands as a beacon of academic achievement and holistic development. With a rich history dating back to 1988, ECLC has consistently upheld rigorous academic standards while fostering a nurturing environment that encourages personal growth and character development.

ABC Educational Learning Center (ABC-ELC) represents a modern approach to education, characterized by innovation and creativity. Through interdisciplinary approaches, ABC-ELC equips students with the skills and mindset needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Dominador Diaz Clemente Academy Montessori (DDCA Montessori) is a pillar of diversity and inclusivity within the community. With a commitment to providing a supportive learning environment for all students, DDCA fosters a culture of respect and understanding. Through a wide range of academic and extracurricular programs, DDCA empowers students to explore their passions and interests while preparing them for future success.

Good Shepherd Learning Center (GSLC) is dedicated to laying a good foundation for young learners. Nestled within a serene scape, GSLC provides a nurturing environment where students can grow academically, socially, and emotionally.

Asian Colleges and Technological Institute Inc. follows principles of providing a comprehensive learning experience and has continuously evolved to meet the changing needs of the educational landscape since it was founded in 2007.

Through their participation in the study, the representatives of these esteemed educational institutions will offer valuable insights into the promotion of their schools and the broader educational dynamics within Kabacan. Their dedication to excellence and commitment to nurturing the next generation of leaders exemplify the spirit of educational entrepreneurship that drives innovation and progress within the community.

Data Gathering Procedure

It is the duty of the researcher to follow the procedures in conducting this study. A letter was first sent to the edupreneurs in the Municipality of Kabacan, explaining the purpose of the study. After this process, the researcher proceeded to the preparation of the informed-consent-to-participate form and other necessary documents.

In the same vein, the interview guide questions were developed. This was validated by the pool of experts. Prior to the interview, they first tried to ask the same questions to the colleagues and tried to find out what should be improved, especially during the question-and-answer portion. In this regard, the readiness of the researcher was assured.

During the interview, the researcher made sure that any destruction should be avoided such as noise that may hamper the quality of the audio. The interview protocol was observed, considering the highest regard of ethical standards. Meanwhile, the recorded interview was transcribed and translated to English. The researcher extended thanks and gratitude to the informants because of the time and effort they spent. More so, the data underwent member check. This will be done by the researcher's colleagues. This is to impose that the data is within the contexts of the research questions.

Thus, the essence of reciprocity was not taken for granted. A token was given to them. Conversely, the transcribed data was sent to the data analyst. Themes were generated from their responses. Each of the themes were discussed and supported by their narratives. Subsequently, the analysis and interpretation of the data were sent back to the informants for confirmation.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018) was done in analyzing the data, using the MAXQDA. This software was useful in the formation of themes based on the responses of the informants (Marjaei et al., 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this chapter, different perspectives are laid down through the narratives of the informants. These provided a wider concept of edupreneurs in the local setting.

The Beginning

This study underscores the skills, challenges, coping strategies, and the pieces of advice of edupreneurs in handling a business. The first informant shared the humble beginning of the school in Kabacan in 2005. She started with a few but trusted teachers and staffs and a few numbers of learners. At one hand, the second informant revealed that the school opened in 2007. It was the year which marked the starting journey of ACTI as an academic institution. According to her,

"We started with 22 high school, 33 in college, 37 in technical department, with the total number of 266 students were enrolled in ACTI." (Informant 2)

Informant 3 narrated that it was in February of 2000 that the school opened its doors to learners. In fact, it was her who served as the directress with a lone teacher with a few numbers of learners who were actually children of their children.

"I was the CASA directress together with 1 teacher, we only have 6 (2 of them were my daughters) learners only in pre-school." (Informant 3)

Meanwhile, informant 4 shared that it was her mother who was the first school directress with 44 students. As she stated in the interview:

"We did all the task, from the management to teaching to cleaning." (Informant 4)

When interviewed about the reasons of investing to education, they responded that:

"Because I came from a family of educators, it is really close to my heart to commit myself in giving quality education to students and through this I am also serving God." (Informant 1)

"We chose this business because aside from helping the learners, we consider also the willingness of our stakeholders to put a school. We select school because it was guaranteed that always have a students/learners." (Informant 2)

"I was amazed with the Montessori way of teaching a child in which I observed and experience in a Montessori school in Manila that was owned by my cousin. I really wanted to enroll my daughters in a setting like that, so I decided to put up a Montessori school here in Kabacan." (Informant 3)

"My mother said, "I will put up a school for my Apo's" (sons of Teacher Ping), aside from that, I don't have a work that time and my mother pitied me so much for I'm a degree holder, so she decided to put up a school for my sons and for me to have a school to manage." (Informant 4)

More so, they provided the justification of running a school business which is managed by a family. Different views were provided by each of the informants. They mentioned that:

"All have of the direct management/board members have come from my family (5-6). We prefer family than others to have because there is trust and authenticity and a/l of us have the same commitment and goal." (Informant 1)

"The school is own by the family; we have our functions called it the core group. We have our president that is also part of the family." (Informant 2)

"My husband and I, together with my sister in-law and mother in-law, for they owned the place in Sunset Avenue, where we used as our building. We share a common interest and perspective." (Informant 3)

"Just the two of us – we don't have enough finances to pay for the salary of the teachers." (Informant 4)

Edupreneurial Skills of Educators

The first research question provides the edupreneurial skills of educators. Informant 1 enumerated that there is a need for passion for education and being goal-oriented. For informant 2, these are discipline, understand the value of self-care, willingness to try things-innovations, always have a plan, and honesty. Conversely, informant 3 indicated three important skills. These are empathy, strong desire to succeed, and having a positive mindset. At one hand, informant 4 identified herself as disciplinarian and honest. On the other hand, informant 5 underlined the following: financial literate, academic minded, business minded, resourceful, quality multitask, time conscious, and possesses the 3 secrets of a one-minute manager (one minute goal setting, one minute praising, one minute reprimand).

During the interview, these skills were justified by the informants. Informant 1 said that:

"Passion for Education - because I love what I am doing if fuels me to give my effort, time and energy for quality education of the students. Goal Oriented – it keeps me driven to accomplish my vision and mission for the school." (Informant 1)

More importantly, informant 2 explained that:

"I think these qualities strengthen the operation of the school and it gives more power to build a strong foundation of the school. It gives a high and satisfactory services to our stakeholders and other clients of the school. Specifically, our students/pupils and teachers." (Informant 2)

Furthermore, informant 3 shared that:

"All of the given qualities help me in strengthening the operation of the school. Since I have a positive mind set and a strong desire to succeed, I really have to do the best that I can to achieve my goals. Being empathetic I can say that I have a good relationship with my clientele." (Informant 3)

The importance of being a disciplinarian was given emphasis by informant 4. According to her:

"Since I am a disciplinarian, they follow the rules, policies of the school so that the objectives/goals will be met." (Informant 4)

Informant 5 accentuated that:

"Implementing by leading and setting good example to the pupils, teachers and parents." (Informant 5)

Correspondingly, each of them encapsulates the most important skills that an edupreneur should possess. In the interview conducted, informant 1 narrated that:

"Communication Skills – (non-verbal, verbal, listening, writing and interpersonal communication). Allow others and myself to understand information accurately and quickly, also to develop relationships and understand each other and build trust." (Informant 1)

Innovativeness is the key for informant 2. She pointed out that:

"I think the most important is be innovative, because we know that every generation is changing, so always be ready of all the changes and give what is needed in the society." (Informant 2)

There are 3 skills that informant 3 provided in the interview. She further explained that:

"Investments, Management and entrepreneur, since I was a child, I was trained to manage our own sari-sari store business, this where I got my knowledge of entrepreneurship plus my investment to which I am willing to devote my resources for my school business and my management skills." (Informant 3)

Her profession as a Social Worker paved the way of having the skills in running a school business. This is the narrated story of informant 4.

"Both, Guidance counselling leads/guides me in dealing with learners and parents and my commitment to my work as teachers influenced by my profession as a Social Worker." (Informant 4)

Finally, informant 5 shared that it is important in the following aspects:

Developing a school physically and academically

Implementing new trends of teaching

Selecting and hiring brilliant licensed teachers

This implies, that these skills often drive to identify and address gaps in education system. Thus, they need to introduce new methodologies, technologies, and resources that can enhance student engagement outcomes. In addition, they are responsive to the changing needs and preferences of learners. In this regard, they embraced emerging technologies and pedagogical approaches. Their mindset as a disciplinarian and business minded individuals strengthens the needs to improve their business in general. They need to develop the well-being of the learners which enabled them to become responsive to the ever-changing world.

Further, it insinuates that a business mindset promotes effective financial management. It involves budgeting, tacking expenses, and maximizing revenue streams. Monitoring financial performance and making data-drive decisions, administrators can ensure the financial sustainability of the school, allocate resource efficiently, and invest in quality educational programs and infrastructure.

It is important to note that while business mindset can bring several benefits to running a school business, it should always be balanced with the mission and values of education. On the contrary, being a disciplinarian in running a school business involves establishing and enforcing rules that maintain a safe and orderly environment. Eventually, this may promote a culture of respect and accountability (Pashiardis & Brauckmann, 2019; Larey et al., 2021).

Challenges faced by edupreneurs in handling a business

The second research question accentuates the challenges faced by edupreneurs in handling a school business. It is within the aspect of finances that these school owners are struggling with. Nonetheless, they are not subsidized by the government especially if they are into preparatory and elementary levels. Because of this predicament, the number of enrollees were affected.

This is supported by the statement of informant 2. She reiterated that:

“I think the lack of enrollees, because as we all know that this is a private school – they have that mindset that if it is a private school the tuition fees is high, so they will not enroll their children.” (Informant 2)

Normally, private school teachers do not stay longer in the institution. With the competitive salary being offered in the government institutions, they tend to leave. Their best teachers preferred to transfer and the continuity of this problem is a common eyesight. As a matter of fact, these schools cannot compete with the offerings of the government. In line with this, informant 5 confirmed that:

“Hired teachers do not stay long in private school because they tend to seek for greener pasture.” (Informant 5)

This is also the complaint of Informant 3. She belabored that:

“Faculty turnover is the most difficult challenge in managing a private school, because we know that in a private school, we cannot compete with the salary and benefits provided by the government DepEd. We have no control over whether or not our faculty will shift to the government for more stable tenure.”

Moreover, this explains that private school often face stiff competition from other schools in the area most specially the public schools. If there is an oversaturation of schools perceived better educational opportunities it can lead to a low turnout of enrollees. Typically, they have tuition feed and other expenses which can make them less accessible for certain families.

Opposite to this, private schools rely on attracting and retaining qualified and experienced teachers to provide quality education. However, low salaries may make it challenging to attract highly skilled educators and retain them over the long term. Competing with public schools that offer higher salaries can be particularly difficult which leads to a limited pool of qualified teachers to choose from.

To support this, James et al. (2022) revealed that economic conditions can affect parents' ability to afford private school tuition feed. During periods of economic downturn, families may opt for more affordable educational options such as public schools, resulting in lower enrolment rates for private schools (Mukudi, 2004). Meanwhile, low teacher salaries in private schools contributes to a negative perception of the institution among potential employees and the broader community. Schools offering inadequate compensation may be viewed as less desirable places to work. In turn, this affects the school's ability to attract and retain talented teachers and potentially impacting reputation (Edwards Jr et al., 2019).

Coping strategies of edupreneurs

In light of the foregoing challenges, the edupreneurs provided with coping strategies. They innovated in different facets. For example, the adopted augment reality, inquiry-based learning, blended learning, and social media for collaborative learning. Adding to these, they put smart TV in each classroom and continue to upgrade their curriculum. In the same vein, they sent teachers to seminars and updated their books.

In the interview, these coping strategies integrated the values which mirror the edupreneurs capabilities to embrace change. As they mentioned:

“These innovations are applied in the classroom to encourage creativity and achievement thus attracting more learners. We adapt change, and in doing so, we imply that we will inevitably makes mistakes or miss deadlines, but it’s acceptable to fail. Failure is acceptable as long as we learn from it and try again.” (Informant 1)

“We always present to the learners our best practices.

The Back to basic program

The Dictiolearning program

The Enhance reading program” (Informant 2)

As a matter of fact, these strategies improved the delivery of learning which motivated the learners to develop their knowledge and skills in the institution.

“Due to the assurance that we are moving away from the traditional method of teaching and learning, these innovations motivate parents to enroll their kids. We teach our students that they should try and that it’s alright to fail as long as they learn from it and try again. This is one of the most important lessons we teach. We don’t have incorporate these tactics into every aspect of our teaching approach, even though it may seem like we are making a big step forward. By utilizing a variety of tactics, we indicate that we are adaptable enough to serve wide range of learners with diverse learning style.” (Informant 1)

“Parents who enrolled their children during summer reading class and was amazed with the improvement of their children will be encouraged to enroll their children on the next school year.” (Informant 5)

This implies that edupreneurs embraced innovations in running their schools. Private schools operate in competitive environment where parents have choices regarding their children’s education. Innovations provide a competitive advantage by differentiating a school from others. Interestingly, they can attract more enrolments by building a positive reputation and maintain a strong position in the market.

Hence, innovations can facilitate effective communication and engagement between the school, parents, and the community. Utilizing innovative platforms such as online portals, and social media these schools can keep parents informed about their child’s progress. This strengthens the partnership between the school and parents that leads to a more supportive and collaborative learning environment (Lubienski, 2003; Waruwu et al., 2020).

Pieces of Advice of edupreneurs

The last research question integrates the pieces of advice of the edupreneurs. One of the aspects that they want to be emulated from them is the essence of humbleness. Those who wish to engage in this type of business need to be a good communicator. One thing for sure is their ability to be face the challenges. As mentioned during the interview. It was narrated by the informant. She said:

“I think do not be scared to try everything.” (Informant 2)

She added that:

“There is no perfect strategy, but if you are strong and well disciplined, why not, because there is no wrong when we try something.”

For informant 3, the necessity to comply with the registrations.

“Follow requirements by SEC and DepEd, all in papers (proper way, so that there will be no problems in the future)”

It is also crucial to reach out the parents.

“Go beyond your service-reach out the parents, the community, the stakeholders. Conduct Parents’ orientation before every quarterly exam, for them to be guided for the exam coverages, payments and others.”

This suggests that edupreneurs are strong enough in facing the challenges that lie ahead of them. to those who wish to become like them, they should have to possess these values in order for them to succeed. Adding to that, it is important for private school owners to always reaching out the parents. Their trust and confidence matter in the continuity of the its operations.

Private schools rely on enrolling students to sustain their operations. Parents often play a significant role in recruiting new students by sharing positive experiences, advocating for the school within their social networks, and participating in open houses admission events. Their involvement in the recruitment and enrollment process contributes to the overall growth and sustainability of the school (Alderman et al., 2003; Yaacob et al., 2015).

Intervention Plan

Rationale

One of the biggest problems being faced by private schools is the enrollment turn outs. With the presence of other private school institutions in the community, competitions would be stiff. In this manner, parents send their children to school that offers quality and relevant education.

Through this intervention plan, the school owners or the edupreneurs can look into the possibilities of embracing these strategies. Nevertheless, they have to find ways that would enable them to have the number of enrollees that would sustain their operations. Of course, they always have to consider the salaries and wages of their employees.

Correspondingly, this intervention plan may widen their perspectives in the manner of running a school business. In turn, they can share it to the members of the family who would soon run the school. Below are some of the helpful strategies which are considered based on the findings of the study.

Objective

To increase the enrollment turnout of the school

Areas of Concern and Database	Objectives	Strategies	Activities	Time Frame	Persons' Involved	Performance Indicator
Increase the enrollment turnout of the school	To increase the enrollment turnout of the school	Market Analysis	Evaluation of demographic trends	Second Semester 2020-2021	Edupreneurs Partners	95%
		Marketing and outreach efforts	Utilization of various channels such as the social media			
		Build Strong Partnership	Exploration of opportunities by collaborating with community organizations			

IMPLICATIONS

This chapter presents the implications for practice, implications future research, and concluding remarks.

Implications for Practice

Edupreneurship encourages educators to embrace innovation and creativity in their practice. They are consistently seeking new and improved methods, technologies, and approaches to enhance the learning experience. Aside from that, they are willing to take the risks and explore unconventional ideas to solve educational challenges and meet the needs of students.

Correspondingly, they understand the importance of being flexible and adaptable in a rapidly changing educational landscape. It is within this context that they embrace new technologies, pedagogies, and learning environments in order to cater the diverse needs of the students. As such, they pivot their approaches and strategies based on feedback, emerging trend, and evolving educational research.

Moreover, edupreneurship encourages educators to develop an entrepreneurial mindset by initiative, resourcefulness, resilience, and a willingness to take calculated risks. Hence, they proactively identify opportunities for growth, implement innovative solutions, and seize possibilities for collaboration and partnerships. Finally, they view challenges as opportunities for learning and growth. They are driven by a strong sense of purpose and a passion for transforming education.

Implications for Future Research

As a researcher, I saw the importance of this study in different landscapes. In contexts of educational research, school owners can gain insights into market dynamics and trends in education sector. Research can provide information on changing parent preferences, emerging educational needs, and evolving market demands. By doing so, school owners can make informed decisions about the offerings, curriculum design, and educational innovations that align with market needs.

Edupreneurship involves integrating entrepreneurial practices and principles into the management and operations of a school. Future researchers can explore different business models and strategies adopted by successful edupreneurs. School owner can therefore leverage research findings to identify effective business models that ensure financial sustainability, improve efficiency, and maximize the impact of their educational offerings.

In terms of investments, the school owners have to make strategic investments in educational innovations, infrastructure, and marketing. Similarly, research can help assess the return of investment of these initiatives. This can be done by conducting cost-effectiveness analyses and evaluating impact of investments. Through this, the school owners can make informed decisions about resource allocation, budgeting, and financial planning.

Concluding Remarks

This study has opened my eyes about the realities of edupreneurship especially the experiences of the school owners. Facing different dilemmas was inevitable. These are always the partners of their quest for survivability.

Once upon a time I was a private school teacher. I saw that there were struggles on the number of enrollees. Though schools offer quality and relevant education, but the demographics cannot sustain the needs of their children in sending to private schools. They opted to send them to public schools.

However, I saw how the school owners innovate. These innovative strategies motivated many of the parents to continue sending their children to private schools. They saw the differences of how their children being given enough attention. Thus, their growth and development were at par with those who are in the star sections of the public schools.

At the end of the day, school owners cannot hold teachers who would want to search for a greener pasture. The salary was never that competitive with that of the public school. Many of their best teachers were lured to transfer. Thus, losing their advantages. One thing for sure that I love with the private school, the school owners have the heart towards the learners and teachers.

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