

Voices Behind the Contributions: Stakeholders' Experiences with Homeroom PTA Fees

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Abstract. This study explored the lived experiences of stakeholders regarding homeroom PTA fee collection in Tubo-Tubo National High School, with a particular focus on parents, teachers, and PTA officers at Tubo-Tubo National High School. Guided by a qualitative phenomenological research design and analyzed using Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method, the study gathered data through semi-structured interviews and examined recurring patterns in stakeholders' experiences and perceptions. Findings revealed eight interrelated themes: (1) Systemic Role Ambiguity, (2) Implementation Rigidity and Psychological Distress, (3) Equity Paradox, (4) Affordability Crisis, (5) Systemic Discrimination, (6) Governance Failure, (7) Legitimacy Crisis, and (8) Structural Inequity Reinforcement. These themes illustrate how homeroom PTA fee collection, while intended to support school improvement and resource generation, often creates challenges related to role confusion, financial burden, inequitable access to educational opportunities, transparency concerns, and social exclusion. The findings further reveal that the existing PTA fee collection system may unintentionally reinforce socioeconomic inequalities and contradict the constitutional principle of free public education. The study highlights the need for income-sensitive fee assessment mechanisms, strengthened transparency and accountability measures, inclusive participation policies, clearer stakeholder roles, and enhanced governance capacity among PTA officers. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of developing equitable, transparent, and participatory school financing practices that support educational improvement while protecting the rights and welfare of all learners and stakeholders in the public school system.

Keywords: Homeroom PTA Fees; Stakeholder Experiences; Educational Equity; School Governance; Financial Transparency

Introduction

Studies consistently recognize Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) as vital institutional structures that enhance educational outcomes, strengthen school-community relations, and improve overall institutional effectiveness (Eden et al., 2024). Direct PTA support positively influences students' academic performance by encouraging greater parental involvement in school activities (Rudin et al., 2025). Parent-Teacher Associations also serve as essential forums where parents, teachers, and school administrators communicate and collaborate to address school concerns, strengthen home-school partnerships, and foster a sense of community (Mitre, 2024). Particularly in resource-constrained public schools, PTAs play a critical role in promoting transparency, accountability, and responsible governance (Belgado, 2026). Parental participation through PTAs helps bridge funding gaps and supports sustainable school development by mobilizing community resources (Abu Choir et al., 2025). Active PTA engagement further contributes to improved resource management and strengthens collaboration between schools and communities, ultimately supporting better educational quality (Munya et al., 2025).

Studies have consistently established that the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) serves as a vital partner in promoting transparency, accountability, and participatory governance in public schools. However, varying practices in fund management and gaps in financial literacy among officers often lead to challenges in maintaining



trust among stakeholders (Pabualan et al., 2026). Research demonstrates that School-Based Management (SBM) serves as a key strategy for enhancing education governance in the Philippines by promoting participatory decision-making and shared accountability among stakeholders (Alcalá & Quesea, 2025). By fostering transparency, enhancing collaborative practices and ensuring stakeholders' participation in almost all levels of decision-making, SBM cultivated the culture of innovation in DepEd schools. (Maca, 2019) Moreover, greater stakeholder participation, local decision-making, and resource flexibility under SBM contribute to improved educational outcomes, though challenges such as limited training for school heads and variable community support have been noted (Ang et al., 2025).

School-Based Management, a framework of governance, transfers the power and authority as well as the resources to the school level on the assumption that the school heads including teachers, key leaders in the community, and parents know the root and solution to the problem. In the Philippines, SBM was officially implemented as a governance framework of DepEd with the passage of RA 9155 in 2001 as legal cover (Abulencia, 2012). School-Based Management (SBM) is a governance reform that decentralizes decision-making and enables schools to take a more active role in improving educational quality and learner outcomes. In the Philippines, School-Based Management (SBM) has been institutionalized through the Department of Education's policies and supported by Republic Act No. 9155, which emphasizes shared governance and accountability in schools (Jamonir et al., 2026). This legal framework underscores the essential role of parents and community stakeholders in school governance, including their participation in financial contributions through homeroom PTA fees—a practice that intersects policy, culture, and socio-economic realities.

Effective PTA fund management goes beyond compliance with DepEd policies—it reflects the school community's collective commitment to ethical stewardship, openness, and collaboration. When transparency mechanisms are institutionalized and parents are empowered through participation and access to information, trust naturally strengthens (Pabualan et al., 2026). Research examining transparency and accountability in the management of Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE) within selected schools reveals a "Very High" level of transparency and accountability across indicators. Statistical analysis confirms a significant positive relationship between transparency and accountability, suggesting that open financial systems directly reinforce institutional answerability. However, participation remains the lowest-scoring indicator due to challenges in stakeholder financial literacy (Laug-laug & Namuag, 2026).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis has been used to understand what parents in small towns in the Philippines really think about the activities their children engage in at school. Three main themes emerge from such research: being seen but not acknowledged, having an educational role despite limitations, and wanting a real connection. These themes show that parental involvement is not just a list of things that can be seen—it is also an emotional and social experience (Cariaga, 2025). It is important for schools to recognize the existence of cultural variations in parent involvement because there are differences among parents with diverse backgrounds on when, why, and how they are involved in their children's education. Parenting is important in the Philippine society because family is viewed as a center to one's social world (Bartolome et al., 2017). In total, research grounded in the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory demonstrates that transformational leadership significantly reduces teachers' role stress... (Yong & Zhang, 2025).

Despite these efforts, several challenges continue to affect the successful implementation of SBM practices. Findings reveal that limited financial resources, heavy administrative workload, and insufficient training are among the most significant challenges affecting the implementation of SBM (Jamonir et al., 2026). Quantitative findings reveal significant barriers across the four SBM dimensions: conflicting work schedules, poor communication systems, limited authority in resource allocation, inadequate access to school data, lack of experiential learning tools, and weak monitoring systems. Qualitative analysis reinforces these findings, highlighting limited empowerment, a lack of transparency, and insufficient collaboration (Alcalá & Quesea, 2025). The most serious challenges identified include the lack of financial training among officers and incomplete documentation of receipts, while moderate concerns include limited banking systems and irregular parent contributions (Pabualan et al., 2026).

Despite this growing body of literature on school governance and parental involvement, stakeholders' lived experiences regarding the collection of homeroom PTA fees remain underrepresented in research, particularly



within the Philippine DepEd context. Despite the attempt to increase parental involvement in school, there is a gap in understanding it from stakeholders' perspectives (Bartolome & Mamat, 2020). Existing studies have largely focused on SBM implementation levels, academic outcomes, or governance structures, leaving a gap in understanding how parents, teachers, and PTA officers experience, interpret, and make meaning of their participation in homeroom PTA fee collection within their specific socio-cultural and economic environments. Furthermore, while prior research has examined transparency and accountability mechanisms, fewer studies have investigated the ethical concerns, emotional dimensions, and policy implications that emerge from stakeholders' lived experiences with financial contributions.

Low parental support has been identified among the challenges being confronted by teachers that affect the successful implementation of curriculum and learning. Studies recommend different strategies, which include benchmarking activities, organization of a quality management team, and parents' summit. These activities, if collaboratively undertaken by various stakeholders, will help address the challenges that would result in efficient SBM, leading to successful and quality education in the country (Jonathan & Ruth, 2022). In the Philippines, strong home support exists, but rural and low-income families face challenges with school engagement. Studies recommend institutional support to strengthen involvement across all domains and improve student outcomes (Gabutero et al., 2025).

This limitation constrains the development of contextually appropriate policies and practices that address the unique needs and concerns of stakeholders involved in homeroom PTA fee collection. Addressing this gap is important for advancing transparent school governance, informing policy interventions, and designing stakeholder-responsive guidelines for financial contributions in public schools. Integration of both quantitative and qualitative data confirms that structural and relational barriers jointly impede effective stakeholder participation. Based on these insights, studies propose Enhanced Programs, Projects, and Activities (PPAs) that include leadership capacity-building, curriculum co-creation workshops, transparency initiatives, and resource governance training to promote inclusive, participatory, and sustainable school governance (Alcalá & Quesea, 2025).

This study specifically addresses the following research questions: (1) How do parents, teachers, and PTA officers describe their experiences with homeroom PTA fee collection? (2) What meanings, challenges, and ethical concerns do stakeholders associate with these experiences? (3) How can stakeholders' experiences inform improvements in DepEd policy on homeroom PTA fees? Accordingly, the primary objective of this phenomenological study is to explore and describe the lived experiences of stakeholders—parents, teachers, and PTA officers—regarding the collection of homeroom PTA fees in DepEd public schools. The study also aims to uncover the meanings, motivations, challenges, and ethical implications embedded in their everyday experiences to inform policy recommendations for transparent, equitable, and participatory school financing practices.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of stakeholders regarding the collection of homeroom PTA fees in DepEd public schools. Phenomenology is a form of qualitative research that focuses on the study of an individual's lived experiences within the world (Neubauer et al., 2019). The qualitative method of phenomenology provides a theoretical tool for educational research as it allows researchers to engage in flexible activities that can describe and help to understand complex phenomena, such as various aspects of human social experience (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Descriptive phenomenology is a common methodology employed in social science research to investigate and describe people's lived experiences. It is both a philosophy and a scientific technique (Gumarang et al., 2021). This approach was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to capture and describe the essence of stakeholders' experiences with homeroom PTA fee collection without manipulating any variables or imposing preconceived notions. Transcendental phenomenology and hermeneutics are two philosophies and research methodologies central to qualitative research that seek to understand the essences and meanings of human experiences by focusing on philosophical, epistemological,

methodological, and linguistic principles (Aguas, 2022). In this design framework, the phenomenon under investigation was the stakeholders' experiences with homeroom PTA fee collection, while the emergent themes, meanings, challenges, and ethical concerns served as the outcomes of the phenomenological inquiry.

Research Participants

The participants of this study consisted of key stakeholders directly involved in the collection and management of homeroom PTA fees in Tubo-Tubo National High School. Purposive sampling was used to select participants based on documented patterns and established criteria (Aljibe et al., 2026). Inclusion criteria required participants to be: (1) parents with children currently enrolled in public schools who have experienced homeroom PTA fee collection; (2) teachers who have been involved in the collection or management of homeroom PTA fees; or (3) PTA officers who have served in their capacity for at least one school year. Individuals who had no direct experience with homeroom PTA fee collection or who declined voluntary participation were excluded from the study. Purposively selected participants from the different stakeholders like parents, teachers, and PTA officers underwent In-Depth Interviews and Focus Group Discussions using a semi-structured interview guide/protocol (Alcontin & Concepcion, 2024). Participants were selected based on established criteria, including having direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation (Baynosa et al., 2024). A total of fifteen (15) participants were purposively selected for this study, distributed as follows: Classification: Parents, $n = 5$; Teachers, $n = 5$; PTA Officers, $n = 5$; Total, $n = 15$. The sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation, wherein data collection continued until no new themes or insights emerged from subsequent interviews. This number aligns with phenomenological research conventions that recommend between 5 to 15 participants to achieve sufficient depth and richness of data.

Research Instrument

The semi-structured interview guide used in this study was adapted from existing qualitative research protocols (Trinidad et al., 2026), with some questions developed by the researcher based on the objectives of the study. The interview guide focused on the lived experiences, challenges, ethical concerns, and recommendations of the school principal regarding homeroom PTA fee collection in a DepEd public school. The interview guide was validated by a panel of experts in qualitative research, educational administration, and school governance to ensure its validity and appropriateness. Revisions were made based on their recommendations to improve the clarity and relevance of the questions. The instrument was further reviewed by the research adviser and yielded a validity index of 4.79. A pilot interview was conducted with a school administrator from another public school who was not included in the actual study to assess the effectiveness of the interview questions in eliciting meaningful responses. The validated interview guide served as the primary data-gathering instrument for collecting in-depth information related to the experiences and perspectives of the participant regarding homeroom PTA fee collection.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher sought permission from the school principal of the selected DepEd public school in Davao de Oro prior to conducting the study. A formal letter requesting approval to conduct the research was submitted to the school administration. Upon approval, the researcher coordinated directly with the school principal regarding the schedule and conduct of the interview. Data were collected through an in-depth, semi-structured interview with the school principal. The interview focused on the principal's experiences, perspectives, and practices regarding homeroom PTA fee collection. The interview data were analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological method, which involved identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, and developing an exhaustive description of the phenomenon (Aljibe et al., 2026). Prior to the interview, the participant was provided with an informed consent form explaining the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the study. The interview was conducted at a time and location convenient for the participant to ensure comfort and openness. The interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participant's consent. Field notes were also taken during and immediately after the interview to capture relevant observations and contextual information.

Results and Discussions

The analysis of the interview data revealed eight interrelated themes that illustrate stakeholders lived experiences with homeroom PTA fee collection at Tubo-Tubo National High School. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of parents, teachers, and PTA officers regarding homeroom PTA fee collection in DepEd, to understand the meanings, challenges, and ethical concerns stakeholders associate with these experiences, and how insights can help improve DepEd policies on homeroom PTA fees. Specifically, the themes include: (1) Systemic Role Ambiguity, (2) Implementation Rigidity and Psychological Distress, (3) Equity Paradox, (4) Affordability Crisis, (5) Systemic Discrimination, (6) Governance Failure, (7) Legitimacy Crisis, and (8) Structural Inequity Reinforcement. Together, these themes provide a nuanced picture of how PTA fee collection practices affect various stakeholders and shape educational equity in the Philippine public school system. To consolidate the findings, the table below presents a summary of the eight emergent themes derived from the participants' narratives, together with the corresponding codes that illustrate their lived experiences with homeroom PTA fee collection.

Table 1. Emergent Themes and Corresponding Codes on Stakeholders' Experiences with Homeroom PTA Fee Collection

Theme	Codes (with Descriptions)
Systemic Role Ambiguity	C1. Role diversity (Teachers, Parents, PTA officers)
Implementation Rigidity and Psychological Distress	C2. Collection process; C3. Communication; C4. Payment mechanisms; C5. Psychological burden
Equity Paradox	C6. Resource allocation; C7. Educational access; C8. Inequitable benefit distribution; C9. System sustainability
Affordability Crisis	C10. Financial burden assessment; C11. Socioeconomic disparity; C12. Cumulative fees
Systemic Discrimination	C13. Process rigidity; C14. Lack of predictability; C15. Social exclusion; C16. Discrimination practices
Governance Failure	C17. Fiduciary responsibility gap; C18. Accountability deficit; C19. Informed consent violation; C20. System vulnerability
Legitimacy Crisis	C21. Psychological harm; C22. Exploitation; C23. Coercion through shame; C24. Betrayal of free education promise
Structural Inequity Reinforcement	C25. Opportunity hoarding; C26. Class reinforcement; C27. Educational exclusion; C28. Merit vs. wealth

Theme 1: Systemic Role Ambiguity

Participants repeatedly described unclear boundaries and conflicting responsibilities across stakeholder groups in PTA fee management. These ambiguities prompted tensions and concerns about professional roles, which in turn affected stakeholders' experiences with the collection process.

"There are three stages in the collection process. First, initial announcement to the class and parents about the fees. Second, the collection period itself with a set deadline. Third, submission of collected fees to the PTA treasurer. But the challenge is monitoring - who hasn't paid yet and how we'll handle it since we can't deny grades because of non-payment." (Teacher 1)

"The key players are: The PTA president - leads the overall program. The PTA treasurer - manages funds. The secretary - documents transactions. The homeroom advisers - implement at classroom level. The school principal - oversees compliance. And actually, parents should be included as stakeholders, but often they're left out of decision-making." (Teacher 2)

Initially, the teachers felt challenged by the expectation to serve as collection agents while maintaining their primary role as educators. The senior teacher identified this as "exploitation of teachers - we're used as intermediaries for collection without proper compensation." Over time, this role ambiguity created tension in teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships, affecting the overall school climate.

This theme reflects unclear boundaries and conflicting responsibilities across stakeholder groups in PTA fee management. The multiple actors involved—teachers, PTA officers, school administrators, and parents—often operate without clear delineation of responsibilities, creating confusion and friction in the collection process.

The literature on organizational role stress suggests that role ambiguity contributes to teachers' psychological strain, reduced job satisfaction, and challenges in fulfilling their professional responsibilities. Yong and Zhang (2025) explained that transformational leadership helps lessen teachers' role stress by fostering supportive work environments, strengthening organizational commitment, and enhancing job satisfaction. Similarly, Ray and Guha (2025) found that role ambiguity and role conflict are common sources of stress among teachers, emphasizing that unclear expectations and excessive responsibilities negatively affect their well-being. The authors further highlighted the importance of institutional support, clearly defined roles, and stress management initiatives in promoting teachers' professional effectiveness and overall well-being.

A systematic review of teacher job satisfaction in China from 2021 to 2025 highlighted role differences for homeroom and subject teachers, noting that workload, hindrance stressors, and burnout are consistent strain factors, while leadership, professional learning communities, and social support serve as consistent drivers of satisfaction (Yumei & Yee, 2025). Our findings extend this by showing that teachers experience particular discomfort when asked to perform financial duties outside their pedagogical training.

Thus, systemic role ambiguity emerges as a foundational issue affecting all subsequent themes, as unclear responsibilities cascade into implementation problems, psychological distress, and governance failures.

Theme 2: Implementation Rigidity and Psychological Distress

A second strong theme centers on how inflexible, non-transparent collection processes create chronic stress and anxiety, particularly for economically disadvantaged families.

"The process for me: One, we receive letter from school about PTA fees due within certain date. Two, I immediately worry if I can afford the amount mentioned. Three, I try to scrape together money - from my allowance or sometimes borrow. Four, I pay because worried maybe child will be pressured or have school problems. Five, I cut back on other budget - food, utilities, personal needs - to pay school fees. Six, I also worry there might be additional fees not included in initial announcement, so I'm anxious entire school year. That's the typical experience - worry, sacrifice, stress." (Economically Disadvantaged Parent)

"From my view: Step one, receipt of letter - usually one week given to prepare, very heavy for someone like me... But honestly, the steps are chaotic for me because no predictability, no flexibility in payment options. Why can't it be installment? Why can't alternatives be offered? The rigid process is really stressful." (Economically Disadvantaged Parent)

Through the collection process, struggling families experience significant psychological burden. This theme captures how inflexible, non-transparent collection processes create chronic stress and anxiety, particularly for economically disadvantaged families.

The literature on financial stress and family well-being supports these findings. Research on socioeconomic inequalities in pandemic-induced psychosocial stress found that the highest stress levels were

reported regarding one's own financial situation, with stress significantly higher in low versus high income groups. Inequalities were also found regarding psychological well-being, with higher stress in low versus high income groups. The study emphasized that psychosocial support and preventive interventions should be target-group-specific, addressing the particular needs and circumstances of certain socioeconomic groups (Beese et al., 2024).

Research on household debt and children's mental health in China demonstrates that higher household debt is associated with an increase in children's depressive symptoms, primarily driven by housing debt and nonbank-sourced debt. These associations operate through reduced parent-child intimacy and increased parent-child conflict, highlighting the important implications for enhancing child welfare and promoting family financial stability (Huang et al., 2025).

Studies on precarious employment among low-income single mothers found that insufficient and irregular income worry them endlessly as the survival of their family is at stake. Moreover, worries about financial situations could also lead to other health concerns. Without proper employment contracts, families have no protection against unforeseen circumstances, and the findings emphasize the urgency of government intervention that is well planned and targeted (Nor, 2022).

This study extends this by showing that school-based fee collection can become a significant source of family stress, particularly when implemented rigidly without consideration for diverse economic circumstances. Hence, this theme underscores that implementation rigidity creates a cascade of psychological consequences that extend beyond the immediate financial burden to affect family relationships, student well-being, and the overall educational experience.

Theme 3: Equity Paradox

A third theme emphasizes the contradiction between PTA's stated purpose of school improvement and its effect of creating educational inequity.

"For me, the PTA is very important organization supporting school's educational mission. The purpose is very noble - to provide resources not covered by government funding. In our school, we use funds for educational materials, laboratory equipment, library books, school facilities improvement, and scholarships for deserving students... But at the same time, I understand the challenges this brings to families, especially poor ones. So it's a balancing act - wanting to improve the school but respecting families' financial limitations." (PTA President)

"Massive equity issues. First, those without money - they're effectively excluded from PTA-sponsored programs. For example, if there's an educational excursion sponsored by PTA, students who didn't pay can't join. This is double punishment - punished twice, academically and socially. Second, quality of education became dependent on family's socioeconomic status... Third, the PTA system reinforces a class system in school - there are 'haves' and 'have-nots' on campus. This is contrary to the constitutional mandate of public education for everyone." (Teacher 2)

The literature on educational equity emphasizes that public education should serve as a social equalizer. Research on the quest for educational equity in South Africa found that while significant progress has been made in addressing issues of race, class, and gender, a combination of factors has both reproduced and amplified old inequalities and disparities, particularly those of space and race, and introduced intense new socioeconomic inequalities. The study highlighted that stubborn legacy effects such as poverty in a context of a weakening economy, combined with complex arrangements that have left privilege largely intact, continue to challenge equity goals (Soudien, 2024).

Research on COVID-19 and education documented how school-based inequities operate, noting that education is both a process and a product strongly associated with intergenerational socioeconomic mobility through enhanced employment opportunities and income in adult life. The study emphasized that the overall consequences of educational disruptions are distributed in an inequitable manner along socioeconomic lines, with

the poorest children shouldering the greatest burden, exposing and exacerbating pre-existing inequalities in education (Hayre, 2023).

The literature indicates that family background plays an important role in shaping children's educational attainment, with socioeconomic status influencing how family resources are translated into educational opportunities. Qin et al. (2025) explained that families with greater economic and social resources are often able to provide educational support and access to learning opportunities, even when parents have lower levels of education. Conversely, families with well-educated parents may still face challenges in supporting their children's education when financial resources and social capital are limited. These findings suggest that educational outcomes are shaped not only by parents' educational attainment but also by the broader socioeconomic conditions that affect a family's capacity to invest in their children's education.

These findings reveal that the PTA system, despite good intentions, may inadvertently undermine the goal of educational equity by creating differential access to educational opportunities based on family economic status. Thus, this theme indicates that the equity paradox represents a fundamental tension in the current PTA model that requires systemic reform to address.

Theme 4: Affordability Crisis

A fourth theme centers on how the same fixed fee amount creates vastly different burdens across socioeconomic strata, resulting in differential educational access and opportunity.

"The P880 annual PTA fee is really heavy for us. To put it perspective, my daily wage is only P300-350. So P880 is almost a week of my work. And that's just PTA fee - there are textbook fees, uniform fees, activity fees. If I calculate all, total annual expenses for one student reaches P8,000 to P10,000. It's scary price for supposedly free public education. What I feel is pressure, guilt, anxiety. Pressure because payment is needed. Guilt because sometimes can't afford and I see disappointment in my child when there's no money for activities. Anxiety because I don't know if we can make it whole year." (Economically Disadvantaged Parent)

"The P880 annual amount is reasonable and affordable for our family. But I understand that for majority of population with lower income, this is significant burden. From equity perspective, single amount for everyone is problematic because different families have vastly different financial capacities. If P880 is small percentage of my annual income, for family with minimum wage earner, that's large already. I think amount should be scaled based on family income levels - sliding scale would be more equitable." (Middle-Class Parent)

This theme captures how the same fixed fee amount creates vastly different burdens across socioeconomic strata, resulting in differential educational access and opportunity.

The PTA Board Director explained: *"The recommended amount of P2,500 annually is reasonable if isolated. But the reality is accumulation of fees - PTA fees, textbook fees, uniform fees, activity fees, project fees. So P2,500 is 'additional' to already substantial expenses... My concern is there's no mechanism to monitor cumulative burden on families. Schools assess PTA fees independently without considering total financial burden on families. This is where the equity issue comes in."*

The literature on educational finance suggests that flat fees can place a greater financial burden on students from lower-income families, influencing their ability to access and sustain higher education. Bennett et al. (2023) highlighted that many students experienced increasing financial stress due to rising educational costs and economic uncertainty. Their findings indicate that financial challenges shape students' academic experiences and well-being, emphasizing the need for policies and support systems that address students' financial realities and promote equitable access to education.

The literature suggests that children from families with lower educational attainment and limited financial resources are more likely to experience school refusal. Tokumoto et al. (2026) found that parental education, household income, and socioeconomic deprivation collectively influence children's school attendance. The study emphasized that financial hardship and social disadvantage shape families' ability to support consistent school



participation, making school refusal more common among children from low socioeconomic backgrounds. These findings highlight the importance of early intervention and proactive support from policymakers and educational institutions to address the barriers faced by economically disadvantaged families.

Research on the UK government's introduction of Value Added Tax on private school fees highlighted that such policies may have significant consequences for socio-economic mobility: increased financial barriers for economically disadvantaged families, straining access to quality education; potential migration of students to state schools, overburdening public education resources and reinforcing social stratification. The analysis highlights the policy's dual nature, posing risks of widening educational inequalities while offering opportunities for transformative public investment. (Murong, 2025)

These findings confirm this pattern and extend it by documenting the psychological toll of affordability challenges on family well-being and student experiences. Hence, this theme highlights that the affordability crisis is not merely about the amount but about the cumulative burden and the absence of income-sensitive mechanisms in fee assessment.

Theme 5: Systemic Discrimination

Participants reported that non-payment status becomes the basis for implicit and explicit discrimination, dignity violations, and exclusion of vulnerable students.

"There's a huge equity issue here. Those without money don't have access to the same benefits that those with money get. For example, if there's a class outing or special materials purchased using PTA funds, students who didn't pay can't participate. That's real discrimination against poor families. There should be a way to include everyone regardless of ability to pay." (Teacher 1)

"Yes, many fairness issues. First, the obvious - no money, no access to certain activities and benefits. My child can't join field trips, contests, special programs because no money for participation fees. It's not fair that only rich students get educated through these experiences. Second, the implicit message - 'if you're poor, you're less valuable in school.' Third, classmate dynamics - knowing some classmates access more opportunities because they have money creates inferiority complex. Fourth, teacher treatment - sometimes I notice teachers more attentive to students who paid vs those struggling... Sixth, inequality reinforcement - the school reinforces class system instead of challenging it. If education's purpose is equity and social mobility, how can it be if the system itself perpetuates inequality?" (Economically Disadvantaged Parent)

This theme reflects how non-payment status becomes basis for implicit and explicit discrimination, dignity violations, and exclusion of vulnerable students.

The senior teacher identified the ethical dimension: *"Violation of dignity of poor families - public reminders about non-payment are shameful."*

The literature on educational discrimination emphasizes that exclusionary practices based on economic status violate principles of equal access and can cause lasting psychological harm to students. Research on the Advanced Placement program and educational inequality found that students from non-economically disadvantaged families, White and Asian students, and higher-achieving students are more likely to take advantage of additional AP courses when they are offered, thus widening existing gaps in course-taking. The study concluded that expanding access without additional incentives or support for disadvantaged students to succeed is unlikely to address educational inequality (Owen, 2024).

A qualitative study on realities of intersectional inequality among adolescents from Bogotá, Colombia found that adolescents experience multiple, intersecting forms of social inequality intensified by structural disadvantages. The "feeling inequality" theme highlighted how structural disadvantages were linked to emotional distress, reduced future expectations, and strained family dynamics. Despite these adversities, many participants demonstrated agency by using peer support networks and creative expression to cope with social injustice (Cariaga et al., 2026).

Research on cultural capital and perception of teacher-student relationships found that students' cultural capital affects their own understanding of teacher-student interactions. Fixed effects regressions showed a substantially positive effect of cultural capital on the perceived frequency of teachers praising and calling on students to answer questions across subjects. These findings pave the way for elucidating the entire causal chain of intergenerational social inequality via cultural capital, teacher bias, students' perception, and their educational outcomes (Olivos & Araki, 2023).

These findings document specific mechanisms through which this discrimination operates in the school context. Thus, this theme underscores that systemic discrimination creates a hostile educational environment for economically disadvantaged students, undermining the fundamental purpose of public education.

Theme 6: Governance Failure

Participants identified significant gaps in transparency, accountability, and professional financial controls within PTA operations.

"One time, we collected P880 per student, but the accounting wasn't transparent. We didn't know how the money was spent and there was no documentation. It was shocking because there were a lot of concerns from parents but no detailed explanation. This became an issue in the school and parents demanded accountability." (Teacher 1)

"Yes, and this is from my experience as department chair. We conducted a PTA funds audit two years ago. We found a significant discrepancy - reported collections didn't match actual bank deposits. There was P50,000+ with no documented source or destination. We reported it to the school principal, and it became controversial. The PTA treasurer claimed it was just an accounting error, but there were no supporting documents. It became an issue and faculty and parents demanded full transparency. My concern is - how many concerns are we unaware of because audits aren't regular." (Teacher 2)

"Yes, very specific situation. Two years ago, there was school renovation project approved by PTA. Budget allocation was P150,000. But when we requested liquidation documents - receipts, bills, contractor quotes - the treasurer submitted only incomplete documents. No itemized breakdown, no proof of actual payment, no comparison quotes. When we asked for clarification, the treasurer became defensive saying 'just trust and faith.' As auditor, 'trust' is not acceptable - must have proof. After some pushing, they submitted additional documents, but questions remained. We discovered overpricing of some items. Amount allocated was P150,000 but actual cost should be P110,000 only. Where the P40,000 discrepancy went was unclear." (PTA Board Director)

The literature on nonprofit governance emphasizes the importance of financial transparency and accountability for maintaining stakeholder trust. A qualitative study on challenges and strategies in the financial management of public elementary schools 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. The findings underscore the need for improved financial policies, increased transparency, and enhanced stakeholder engagement to ensure effective school financial management (Diaz & Accad, 2025).

The literature identifies several barriers that limit stakeholders' engagement in School-Based Management (SBM) programs, including limited empowerment, lack of transparency, ineffective communication, and insufficient collaboration among school stakeholders. Alcalá and Quesea (2025) emphasized that these challenges reduce meaningful participation in school decision-making and governance. The study highlighted the importance of strengthening leadership, promoting transparency, improving communication, and enhancing resource governance to foster more inclusive, participatory, and sustainable School-Based Management practices.

A systematic literature review on the role of financial information systems, internal audit, and investigative audit in enhancing public sector financial accountability found that challenges such as limited human

resource competence, weak internal control, and fraud risks remain obstacles. The results show that financial information systems serve as the technical foundation of transparency, but their effectiveness highly depends on user competence and organizational support. Internal audit functions as a preventive control mechanism that requires independence and institutional support, while investigative audit functions as a reactive protection instrument against fraud (Tamang et al., 2026).

These findings reveal that PTA operations often lack the professional controls necessary to ensure proper stewardship of collected funds. Hence, this theme indicates that governance failure represents a systemic weakness that undermines the legitimacy of PTA operations and erodes stakeholder confidence.

Theme 7: Legitimacy Crisis

Participants expressed concerns about the contradiction between the constitutional promise of "free public education" and the reality of mandatory fee-based access.

"Ethical concerns are significant. First, violation of 'free public education' concept - if there are mandatory fees, education isn't fully free." (Teacher 2)

"My main ethical concern is the question of voluntariness - PTA fee is supposed voluntary, but in practice parents feel it's mandatory because of social pressure. So voluntariness is already compromised. Second concern is exploitation of parents' goodwill - schools heavily rely on PTA funds for operations that are supposedly government responsibility. Third, dignity issue - public discourse about non-payment is sometimes embarrassing for students and families. Fourth, inequality gets reinforced - the system inadvertently creates two-tiered education system. Fifth, burden on teachers - we're asking them to do collection work not part of teaching profession." (PTA President)

"My ethical concerns are strong. First, the question if school has a right to collect from struggling families knowing difficult situation. If 'free' public education truly, why mandatory fees? Second, exploitation of students - using guilt or shame to force payment. Third, inequality institutionalized - system officially creates 'haves' and 'have-nots' in school. Fourth, violation of dignity - public reminders about non-payment are embarrassing... Seventh, betrayal of trust - government schools supposed to provide education, instead shifted responsibility to struggling parents." (Economically Disadvantaged Parent)

The literature on educational policy emphasizes that public education systems derive legitimacy from their commitment to universal, equitable access. Research on the state of K-12 education in Pakistan highlighted that despite the importance of public education, the system faces deeply rooted systemic challenges that hinder its ability to deliver equitable and quality education. Nearly 23 million children remain out of school, making it one of the highest rates globally. This crisis disproportionately affects girls and marginalized communities, particularly in rural areas where poverty, gender discrimination, and inadequate infrastructure limit access to education (Rao, 2025).

A study on the halted neo-liberalizing of public schools in South Korea and China investigated privatization reforms that were put under scrutiny and ultimately halted when public discontent about education inequalities was widely expressed. The research found profound entanglement between neoliberal forces and contextual specificities, with non-linear policy trajectories explained through deep-rooted ideologies, political systems, and legitimization derived from shared ideals of "benevolent governance" and social stability (You & Choi, 2023).

Analysis of education policies and their implementation in Punjab, Pakistan found that chronic policy inconsistency, driven by volatile political cycles, prevents long-term strategies from taking root. Weak monitoring and evaluation systems render it nearly impossible to track progress or make evidence-based adjustments, while deep-seated urban-rural disparities in funding and resources perpetuate cycles of inequality. The paper argues

that breaking this cycle requires a fundamental shift away from top-down reforms towards more adaptive and participatory strategies (Bukhari et al., 2025).

These findings reveal that fee-dependent operations create a fundamental contradiction that undermines this legitimacy. Thus, this theme highlights that the legitimacy crisis represents a threat to public trust in the education system and requires policy intervention to restore alignment between stated values and actual practices.

Theme 8: Structural Inequity Reinforcement

The final theme emphasizes how the current PTA system institutionalizes and perpetuates socioeconomic inequalities rather than serving as an equalizer.

"Significantly yes. The system is creating a two-tiered education experience. My children participate in PTA-sponsored activities, educational trips, additional learning resources. Their classmates from poor families can't afford participation so different experiences, different learning opportunities. Over four years, accumulation of differences is significant. The fairness issue is - if public education is supposed equal opportunity, why differentiation based on parents' ability to pay? Second, implicit discrimination - students who didn't pay sometimes treated differently, excluded from certain activities creating inferiority feeling. Third, opportunity hoarding - wealthy families' children getting more educational experiences thus better prepared for future opportunities. This is contrary to meritocracy principle that basis should be capability not economic status."
(Middle-Class Parent)

"Several ethical concerns. First, violation of equal opportunity principle - public education should be equal for all but PTA system creating unequal experiences. Second, reinforcement of class system - instead of school being equalizer, it's reinforcing economic disparities... Sixth, teaching values - what message sent to students about inclusivity, equity, fairness? If school system excluding poor students from opportunities, what's learning?"
(Middle-Class Parent)

The literature on social reproduction in education demonstrates how educational institutions can either challenge or reinforce existing social hierarchies. A literature review on social inequality and access to education identified five recurring themes: the impact of family socioeconomic status on school participation and attainment; gender disparities reflecting broader cultural and structural biases; the urban–rural divide in terms of resources and institutional quality; the role of state policies in mitigating inequalities; and the implications of social stratification for long-term social mobility. The analysis highlights that while education is often perceived as a pathway to equal opportunity, in practice it frequently reproduces existing social hierarchies (Hikmat, 2024).

Research on China's double reduction policy examined whether this policy eases educational inequality and promotes social mobility or reinforces social reproduction and intensifies social stratification. The study found that the policy appears not only as a burden-reduction mechanism, but more like a restriction that hinders the acquisition of necessary assistance by ordinary families while ensuring the availability of high-quality resources for elite families, thus marginalizing education resources, privatizing education, and perpetuating class privileges among elite families (Tang, 2023).

A comprehensive study on stratified cities and unequal education in metropolitan Bogotá examined how multidimensional social class interacts with residential and school segregation to produce differentiated educational trajectories. The findings revealed that while nearly all Elite students complete upper secondary education, only 75% of those in the Precariat do so. Territorial segregation independently amplifies inequalities: Precariat membership reduces graduation probability by 96% compared to the Elite, even after controlling for individual resources. A pattern of "double segregation"—wherein school segregation surpasses residential segregation among elite groups—reflects deliberate strategies of social distance maintenance through school choice (Ziegler & Giovine, 2026).

Research on education, social mobility and reproduction of inequalities in contemporary Argentina found that the education system contributes to processes of stratification and social mobility through covert social

selection mechanisms. The analysis showed that families' choice of private schools, particularly at the secondary level and especially among the lower classes and impoverished middle classes, is a response to the need to ensure continuous and successful school trajectories. Private education fulfils various functions: as a mechanism of social closure for consolidated sectors and as a preventive strategy for groups in transition seeking to ensure educational stability and better academic results (Ziegler & Giovine, 2026).

Our findings suggest that the current PTA system, despite intentions to support education, functions as a mechanism of social reproduction that advantages already-privileged families. Hence, this theme confirms that structural inequity reinforcement represents the cumulative effect of all previous themes, creating a system that contradicts the fundamental purpose of public education as a pathway to social mobility and equality.

Ethical Considerations

The study obtained ethical approval prior to data collection. The researchers ensured the protection of the legal and moral rights of all participants throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained after participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. To protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, pseudonyms or codes were used in place of their identities, and all interview recordings and transcripts were securely stored and handled only by the researchers.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of parents, teachers, and PTA officers regarding homeroom PTA fee collection in a DepEd public school. The findings revealed that stakeholders experienced role ambiguity, implementation challenges, financial burden, inequitable access to educational opportunities, governance concerns, and ethical issues associated with the collection of PTA fees. Participants described how these experiences influenced their perceptions of fairness, transparency, accountability, and participation in school governance. The study further found that while homeroom PTA fees provide valuable support for school programs and activities, stakeholders perceived that current collection practices may create financial and social barriers for economically disadvantaged families. Overall, the findings highlight the complexity of stakeholders' experiences and provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and meanings they associate with homeroom PTA fee collection in the context of public education. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that public schools strengthen transparency in the management of homeroom PTA fees by providing stakeholders with clear and accessible information on fee collection and fund utilization. Schools and PTA officers should also promote open communication to clarify stakeholder roles and responsibilities and address concerns related to fee collection. Efforts should be made to ensure that students are able to participate in school activities regardless of their family's financial capacity, thereby fostering an inclusive school environment. In addition, training for PTA officers on financial management and accountability may help improve stakeholder confidence and trust. Future researchers may conduct similar studies in other public schools or educational settings to further explore stakeholders' experiences and validate the findings across different contexts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that schools strengthen transparency and accountability in homeroom PTA fee collection, clearly define the roles of teachers, parents, PTA officers, and school administrators, and ensure that students are not excluded from school activities because of their family's financial capacity. PTA officers should receive appropriate training in financial management and documentation, while schools should establish clear and inclusive communication and payment procedures that consider stakeholders' different socioeconomic circumstances. DepEd may also consider strengthening guidelines and monitoring mechanisms for PTA-related contributions to promote equity, transparency, voluntary participation, and stakeholder trust in public schools.

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