

Using Solicited Audio Diaries to Capture the HE Educational Leader's Ad-Hoc Tasks

Sanna Lassen¹ 

¹*Aarhus University, Centre for Educational Development (CED), Trøjborgvej 82-84, 8000 Aarhus C.*

This article explores the qualitative method of audio diaries and assesses their effectiveness in capturing ad-hoc tasks in Higher Education (HE), drawing on a single-case study. There is a shortage of studies linking audio diaries to ad-hoc tasks within the research field. This article contributes new methodological insights by exploring and expanding on previous uses of audio diaries. The focus is on the ad-hoc tasks performed by educational leaders outside the managerial line. This role is often overlooked, as it does not fit within traditional management structures or ordinary collegiality. To highlight the uniqueness of the organisational role, it becomes essential to understand its function, which essentially involves ad-hoc tasks. Methodologically, it is challenging to capture ad-hoc tasks. Participants can have difficulties remembering the momentary work in a later interview, and the researcher cannot be present and observe every moment. In conclusion, exploring the audio diary shows that the method can effectively capture the ad-hoc tasks of educational leaders and, from a single case, provide in-depth information on the educational leader's navigation between professionalism and collegiality. However, it is essential for future research to provide clarity on definitions and instructions.

Keywords: Qualitative Methodology, Audio Diary, Ad-hoc tasks, Educational Leader, Higher Education

Introduction

This article explores the usefulness of the solicited audio diary method in capturing ad-hoc tasks. In methodological research, the audio diary method has become [...] 'more widely utilised in a variety of social science disciplines [...]' (Crozier & Cassell, 2016, p. 396). However, the global adoption of audio diaries as a prevalent research tool has led to a significant research gap. This gap is particularly evident in the lack of qualitative guidance on using audio diaries (Cao & Henderson, 2021b). A void this study aims to

fill. With that in mind, the study intends to fill out an element of this gap by critically reflecting on audio diaries in educational leadership research in HE. The article focuses on the *role* and *function* of educational leaders responsible for educational development in collaboration with colleagues and management but outside the management line. Being caught between two roles within the management hierarchy and typical collegiality often results in educational leaders being overlooked, leading to inadequate organisational structures, unrealistic expectations, heavy workloads, and a lack of competence development. As their responsibility involves connecting various perspectives and logic through ad-hoc tasks, it is crucial to investigate the content, scope, and relationships associated with the functions. Embedded in a larger-scale study, doing so will help better comprehend the role with the overall and future purpose of establishing suitable organisational structures and role development to support it. Based on the above, this article will explore how to grasp the HE educational leaders' many ad-hoc tasks by asking: *How can the audio diary method be used to capture the ad-hoc tasks of educational leaders, and what information is produced?* The article discusses the methodological interest through a single-case study. Analysing in this manner is sound and scholarly, as the topics at the centre of the article have yet to be addressed in previous methodological literature. Utilising a single case study allows for the generation of preliminary insights into handling ad-hoc tasks and analysing audio diary data. As such, the intention is not to project a complete study but to develop a possible path for collecting and analysing ad-hoc task data for future research. Thus, zooming in allows the researcher to gain in-depth knowledge about the method and the information produced before using it in a final analysis.

In summary, this article is methodologically significant as it explores the audio diary method connected to educational leaders' ad-hoc tasks. The method is part of a large-scale study focused on understanding the HE educational leader's organisational *role* and *function*, an area that is currently underexplored. The broader study aims to identify suitable organisational structures and role development to support educational leaders in the future. However, the article solely examines this focus to gain detailed knowledge about the link between the audio diary method and ad-hoc tasks. It does not compare it to other methods or address the future perspectives.

The article is structured into five sections. The opening section provides an overview of educational leadership, leading into the subsequent section, which details the study and the methodology employed. Section three summarises the analysis and findings from the single-case study. Section four presents the initial considerations arising from the single-case analysis. The final section offers critical reflections for future analysis.

Background – educational leadership and the educational leader role

Firstly, the framework that emphasises the importance of exploring educational leaders is highlighted, including a definition of the specific HE educational leader that is the object of the study.

For several decades, educational leadership has become a standard answer to quality demands in HE (Hofmeyer et al., 2015; Solbrekke & Stensaker, 2016; Stensaker et al., 2019). For example, educational leadership is understood as impacting the quality of student learning (Cardno, 2014) or is needed to support educational development in local collegial contexts (Mårtensson & Roxå, 2016). Broadly, the acknowledgement of this idea arises from the escalating challenges HE institutions confront within a swiftly changing educational landscape (Milburn, 2010). The academic realm is becoming increasingly characterised by complex political dynamics, and the implications, spanning economic factors and broader societal influence, are now more crucial than ever for HE institutions (Smith & Hughey, 2006). Management and leaders across all hierarchical levels are seen as a central solution for effectively addressing the heightened challenges (Ekman, 2022). Within this *framework*, one of the middle-level leadership roles (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020, p. 125) tends to be ignored. The role often contains titles such as programme leader, course coordinator, or study leader. Although they hold different titles, they share a common position outside line management without formal authority to lead.

On the other hand, they move beyond traditional collegiality, where they are expected to lead professional, collegial communities aligned with organisational strategies. Consequently, they are formally appointed to lead but possess distinct avenues for decision-making and influencing others compared to management with formal power. As a result, the role is neither management nor colleague (Lassen, 2020). On this basis,

the role can be *defined* as an academic staff member who additionally is formally appointed to take special organisational responsibility for coordinating and developing education/teaching – an educational leader role without formal managerial power (Lassen, 2020). Thus, the role can be caught in the middle between management and staff, which means caught between competing perspectives, imperatives, dynamics, and organisational structures (Marshall, 2012). The middle-levelness can create frustration regarding management focusing on the value of research over education (Hofmeyer et al., 2015), or it is a challenge to create a joint commitment to the study programme among colleagues because there is a tradition for the 'private practitioner' (Solbrekke & Stensaker, 2016). In continuation, and despite the distinctive position, the educational leader's role is poorly described in organisational documents or through statements delineating expected performance (Cardno, 2014). In addition, knowledge about developing the role's competencies and role onboarding is sparse (Bolander Laksov & Tomson, 2017, p. 508; Shah et al., 2019, p. 530). On that note, we have limited knowledge about the organisational function and contributions of the role of the educational leader.

The audio diary method – the purpose, the objective, and the strategy

The analysis's methodological considerations and foundation will be presented in the following. First, the significance of investigating ad-hoc tasks to the educational leader role, as outlined in the introduction, is expounded upon, after which the audio diary method will be explained. An outline of the methodological design will follow. Because the audio diary is part of a broader research project, the other methods will, in short, be presented only to explain and provide the reader with contextual insights, including showcasing the different epistemological advantages the methods each produce. Since the entire larger-scale research project is founded on systems theory, the theoretical framework will briefly be unfolded to explain the construction of the audio diary design. Then, the choice of a single-case method is unfolded. Finally, the analysis strategy is presented to explore what information the audio diary produces.

The purpose: Audio diary and the educational leader's ad-hoc tasks

The focus on the audio diary method was revealed when testing the larger-scale research design. The project started with a pilot study to provide insights and improve future research methodologies (Smith, 2019) before scaling up the study.

Five leaders in the field participated in a pilot study. They highlighted the diverse ad-hoc tasks they handle outside of formal meetings. These responsibilities could arise suddenly and encompass tasks such as managing email correspondence, interacting with students, overseeing curriculum and teaching matters, addressing colleagues' concerns, providing management input, and handling administrative duties. The pilot study thus emphasised the need to improve the research design to thoroughly document these impromptu tasks, as the opening design only contained observations and interviews. Formal meetings were at the centre of the observations, where interviews should gather retrospective information from different role perspectives. However, the process did not account for capturing non-formalised tasks in real-time. The lack of a real-time capture method underscored the need for a more effective way to document these spontaneous tasks. Audio diaries seemed an adequate method to use and explore grasping these ad-hoc tasks as they appear.

The objective: Audio diary - usefulness and challenges

In general, the method is often understood as a research strategy for longitudinal designs (e.g., Crozier & Cassell, 2016; Verma, 2021) that reveal a person's experiences and changes over time or aspects of a person's life (Bartlett & Milligan, 2020). In summary, it unfolds 'records of life' (Dangeni & MacDiarmid, 2021, p. 44). It could be feelings, events, or personal matters (Williamson et al., 2015). The method is mainly used in psychology or health studies but appears within HE educational studies (e.g., Cao & Henderson, 2021a; Jefferies & Hyde, 2009; Yoon, 2017). Topics related to students (e.g., Groves, 2021; Mittelmeier et al., 2021; Neve et al., 2017; Seale, 2009) and academic staff (Brereton, 2021; Henderson, 2021; Uştuk & De Costa, 2021) are typically subjects to the application of audio diaries in HE education research. In searching for literature addressing the topics of this article, the method in leadership and management research (Boyd et al., 2004) is sparse, and the author has not been able to locate research

specifically using diaries concerning educational leadership. Additionally, it has not been possible to find studies focusing on ad-hoc tasks as the method mostly '[...]' is concerned with examining memory as a 'post-hoc' representational practice of making sense of the past' (Keightley et al., 2012, p. 511). These limitations create a lack of *specific* methodological modes to guide this study. Although expanding and moving beyond the more common use of the methods, *general* approaches in the field will guide to some extent. The audio diary method generally involves observing information from everyday activities at a micro-level, meaning gathering information 'in the moment' (Bartlett & Milligan, 2020, p. 15). The approach reflects what characterises ad-hoc tasks being '[...]' done or formed only because a situation has made it necessary and is not planned in advance' (Collins Dictionary, 2023). The purpose and usefulness of testing the audio diaries concerning educational leadership will thus pursue '[...]' its power to record the routine and forgettable '[...]' (Groves, 2021, p. 175). The method can, opposite interviews, provide information in an '[...]' uninterrupted manner' (Keightley et al., 2012, p. 518) from the daily practices where the researcher cannot be present and where recall biases may occur for the informant (Bartlett & Milligan, 2020) in retrospective methods (Williamson et al., 2015). Hence, the tasks are impermanent and done in the passing, maybe too much of a routine to notice or too many to remember. Besides the obvious benefits, the use must consider methodological downsides in form and content. The most common challenges talking about form are time and diary workload, participant motivation, retention (Henderson, 2021), and respondent fatigue (Furness & Garrud, 2010). Focussing on content, the quality, and the quantity of data can be in jeopardy as the data collection process is out of the researcher's hands (Groves, 2021). In addition, ethical concerns can occur regarding personal and private content (Cao & Henderson, 2021b). This study's definition of the audio diary method resonates most adequately with the term *solicited diary* (Bartlett & Milligan, 2020; Cao, 2021). It is a form produced '[...]' at the researcher's request, by an informant or informants' (Bell, 1998, p. 72) in contrast to unsolicited, where 'no one has asked the diarist to keep the diary' (Bartlett & Milligan, 2020). As a researcher, I have requested the production of audio diaries based on a specific scientific interest. Furthermore, this method is generally utilised alongside other approaches (Williamson et al., 2015), e.g., it may be integrated into an embedded design (Mittelmeier et al., 2021). This approach applies in the current study, where the audio diary method is one element

alongside observations and interviews that explore the educational leader's role and function.

The strategy: The methodological design and analytical framework

Although this article focuses on how the audio diary can capture ad-hoc tasks and the information it produces, contextual insights are necessary to further understand the rationale for using it alongside other methods. The following will show that each method provides a different perspective on the functions of educational leaders in various settings, creating a comprehensive understanding of their roles.

Two main points created the basis for choosing different methods to understand the role and function of the educational leader. First, an embedded design can contribute to understanding a complex and often non-linear phenomenon in HE (Mittelmeier et al., 2021). Secondly, based on epistemological interests, ' [...]testing findings through other methods will contribute to being able to contradict or confirm assumptions' (Lee & Brosziewski, 2007, p. 259).

The data collection process was planned as follows:

Observation 1	Observation 2	Audio Diary	Observation 3	Observation 4	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
Meeting type 1	Meeting type 2	Self-reported function	Meeting type 3	Meeting type 4	Educational leader	Colleague	Personnel leader

Table 1. Overview of data collection.

Observations focus on formal meetings to observe the educational leader's formal collaboration with colleagues and/or management. The observations are organisational initiated, and the researcher participates in the periphery. Contrary to observations of formal meetings, the audio diary focuses on the educational leader's present ad-hoc tasks to observe tasks that come in on an ongoing basis. The researcher is absent but has created guidelines for recording information. Interviews are conducted with various stakeholders, including educational leaders, personnel managers, and colleagues, to gather retrospective insights from diverse organisational perspectives. These semi-structured interviews, facilitated by the researcher, are outside the typical routines of the educational leaders involved.

The research project is cross-faculty and has 15 participants, three from each of the five faculties in a large university in Denmark. The faculties consist of several larger

or smaller departments. The data collection was finished in the spring semester of 2024. All participants are educational leaders who meet the previously outlined definition. Their participation is voluntary, and the data is stored following GDPR. Participants were recommended and selected through internal colleagues. The colleagues have not been informed about the final selection of participants.

An overview of the analysis strategy

This section begins with a table displaying the categories of analysis, providing the reader with an overview of the entire analysis strategy. The findings from the table '[...]' offers a detailed understanding of participation [...]' (Groves, 2021, p. 182). The categories build upon the research question: *How can the audio diary method be used to capture the ad-hoc tasks of educational leaders, and what information is produced?* To answer the question, six categories control the analysis: 1. The educational leader definition. 2. The ad-hoc task definition. 3. The definition of the mode used to grasp the ad-hoc tasks and how to perform them. 4. The theoretical framework from which the recorded information guidelines stem. 5. The research method. 6. The analysis strategy. The first three categories are addressed above. The last three categories will be unfolded below, following the table headlines.

Research field	Tenor	Mode	Theoretical framework	Research method	Analysis strategy
The role of the educational leader	Ad-hoc tasks	Solicited audio diary	The educational leader function	Single-case approach	Functional analysis
Definition: An academic staff member who additionally is formally appointed to take special organisational responsibility for coordinating and developing education/teaching – an educational leader role without formal managerial power.	Definition: Tasks that are done or formed only because a situation has made it necessary and are not planned, such as routines or forgettable (Groves, 2021).	Definition: They are gathering information in the moment and grasping the immediacy of the ad-hoc tasks of the educational leader. The embedded design: Fifteen participants recorded their ad-hoc tasks on a mobile memo over a 14-day period or, if more relevant,	Questions: What is the task about? How much time do you spend on the task? Where does the task come from? Whom does the task relate to? How do you solve the task in practice? Why do you solve it this way?	Definition: The detailed study of a single example. Purpose: An analytical methodology designed to support the researcher's learning process is characterised by the researcher's transition from unfamiliarity with data to a state of informed knowledge.	Definition: '[...]' the unit of a difference between a problem and its different equivalent solutions to the problem' (Knudsen, 2014, p. 21).

		selected 14 ad-hoc tasks.	What experiences do you draw on? What is the task solution expected to contribute to?		
--	--	---------------------------	--	--	--

Table 2: *The analysis strategy.*

The theoretical framework and the diary design

The investigation of ad-hoc tasks through audio diaries is aligned with the theoretical framework utilised in the overarching project, inspired by the work of the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (e.g., Luhmann, 2000). The theory focuses on social systems where all systems operate based on a distinction between the system and its environment. This epistemological approach was selected due to systems theory, encompassing organisational systems, where the concepts of role and function are clearly defined. The concepts resonate with the overall research ambition to explore a role and its organisational function (Lassen, 2020). To maintain epistemological consistency (Frankel, 2012), the audio diary design within the larger-scale research project aligns with systems theory.

A semi-structured guide was developed to respond to the research critique of the audio diary method's lack of qualitative guidance. The guidelines were formulated based on fundamental concepts within the theoretical framework, harmonising with the functional focus and the educational environment within which the educational leader operates.

The prompt for the solicited audio diary was constructed in the following way.

What is the task about?	How much time do you spend on the task?	Where does the task come from?	Who does the task relate to?	How do you solve the task in practice?	Why do you solve it this way?	What experiences do you draw on?	What is the task solution expected to contribute to?
-------------------------	---	--------------------------------	------------------------------	--	-------------------------------	----------------------------------	--

Table 3. *Diary entry prompt inspired by the systems theoretical framework.*

The aim was to allow the participant to balance directing attention and allowing flexibility to explore their thoughts and experiences (Verma, 2021).

First, the questions were built around three analytical dimensions defining the concept of meaning: the object, time, and social dimensions. In systems theory, social systems cannot be understood as devoid of meaning, including negations (Luhmann, 2000). The production of meaning proceeds through information and thus appears as information processing (Luhmann, 2000). The object dimension addresses themes in

communication and refers to a *what question*: What is the communication theme, and what is left out? The time dimension is oriented towards interpreting the present based on the differences between the past and future. This applies to time invested and the difference between experiences and expectations (Koselleck, 2007, p. 30). Usually, the time dimension can be examined through a *when question*. However, the diary guideline divided the dimension into three questions to guide the participants in including experiences and expectations. The social dimension is about different ways of understanding the communication. Often, an object can mean something very different to the parties involved. The *who question* becomes relevant here.

Additionally, the guide instructed participants to consider the parties directly involved in the task and its initiator. The considerations were supported by asking a *where question*, which allowed for the possibility that the task initiator may not be directly known but can, e.g., be identified more broadly as top management or referring to educational quality. The two last questions address the educational leader's function and how it operates. From a functional perspective, education is directed toward intentional communication to change individuals' skills and social connections (Luhmann, 2006), which becomes the object of the educational leader. Focus is directed toward the educational leader's intentional choices, such as why one chooses this or that and rejects others. The functional perspective was grasped through a *why question*, the intentions behind why doing this or not doing that. Finally, information about concrete operations was enabled through a *how question*. Educational practice comprises two essential components: planning the curriculum and conveying its contents. In other words, how do we want to teach with what content, and how do we handle the teaching practice itself in the current 'now'? Applied to the educational leaders: How do they operate and thus handle incoming educational tasks?

Based on the above theoretical inspiration, the guideline contained eight questions for the participants to answer using a maximum of ten minutes per record. The questions provided the participant with a semi-structured directing guide, allowing some flexibility (Verma, 2021).

The participants were asked to choose 14 ad-hoc or ad-hoc tasks within 14 days. Then, they were asked to record the ad-hoc tasks that might come up continuously in connection to their role as educational leaders on the mobile memo based on the

questions, send their answers to the researcher, and delete the memo. The instructions were communicated through a participant information letter.

Research method: A single-case study

The analysis is based on a single case study defined as 'the detailed study of a single example' (Flyvbjerg, 2015, p. 498, my translation). As the study expands the use of the audio diary method, I, as a researcher, am being explorative and engaged in a learning process. The learning process may require a single case study as it is through individual cases that one can progress from beginner to expert (Flyvbjerg, 2015, my translation). Hence, the single case can provide intimate familiarity with the data, which is helpful when transitioning from not knowing to gaining knowledge.

The analysis strategy

A functional analysis strategy is employed to answer the second part of the research question about what kind of information the method produces. The approach resonates with exploring the role and function of educational leaders. The functional method assumes that '[...] the phenomenon investigated already is a solution to a problem and therefore can be re-constructed through the difference between problem and solution' (Knudsen, 2014, p. 22, my translation). More specifically, a functionalistic approach understands roles as structuring for individuals where a mutual adaption occurs between systems, the coordination of activities, and functional specialisations (Højlund, 2014, my translation). Based on this, the analysis will explore which functional specialisations are attributed to the educational leader by observing which problems are solved by the educational leader's role.

Analysis and findings

To select a relevant single case, the initial examination of the diaries involved a straightforward tallying of the documented interactions for each participant (Groves, 2021), including completed or not completed diaries. The table shows that 11 diaries are completed (**green**), and four have not been completed (**red**). In summary, the study contains 71 diaries.

Additionally, the table explains why the audio diaries have or have not been completed. The completed diaries are further explored in relation to how the participants have completed their diaries. This table thereby consists of the factual data around the audio diaries.

Participants	Number of audio diary memos	Length	Completed/not completed and reasons
Participant 1	16	Between one and ten minutes.	Completed. Recorded within a 14-day period.
Participant 2	0		Not completed. Left for research in another country.
Participant 3	0		Not completed. Have the role but have no functional responsibility to report from.
Participant 4	9	Between four and 11 minutes.	Completed. Recorded within a 14-week period.
Participant 5	2	Between 13-15 minutes.	Completed. Recorded within a 14-day period.
Participant 6	0		Not completed. The participant decided not to record because it became too personal.
Participant 7	0		Completed. Used Excel to answer the questions from 10 ad-hoc tasks. Reported within a 14-day period.
Participant 8	7	Between one and four minutes.	Completed. Recorded within a 14-day period.
Participant 9	4	Between two and ten minutes.	Completed. Have not reported date and time.
Participant 10	0		Not completed. Lost the role during the data collection period due to organisational change.
Participant 11	1	Five minutes.	Completed. Recorded within a 14-day period. The data is documented solely through emails and diaries focusing exclusively on tasks associated with students.
Participant 12	2	Between eight and 15 minutes.	Completed. Recorded within two five-day periods.
Participant 13	4	Between two and three minutes.	Completed. Recorded within a 14-day period.
Participant 14	0		Completed. Used Excel to answer the questions from 22 ad-hoc tasks. Reported within a 16-week period.
Participant 15	26	Between two and three minutes.	Completed. Recorded within a 12-week period.

Table 4: *Facts: Number of audio diary memos completed and not completed and reasons. Participants are pseudonymised through numbers.*

The analysis – in-depth findings

To pursue the article's ambition of getting in-depth knowledge from a single case to learn about the audio diary methodology combined with ad-hoc tasks, Participant No. 8 has been chosen. The case is the most exemplary diary. It is recorded within 14 days as required and includes diaries at lengths within ten minutes. The analysis will serve as a reference point for future examination of the other diaries and deviations observed. From there, it sets the stage for the forthcoming discussion of the entire diary dataset. Moreover, this discussion creates a basis for future methodological dialogues while analysing the data generated from the large-scale research project.

The analysis will consist of three steps inspired by the work of Andersen and Keiding. (Andersen, 1999, 2014; Keiding, 2005). 1) A descriptive understanding. 2) A thematic understanding. 3) A theoretical understanding.

The *first analysis step* is to listen to and transcribe Participant No. 8's seven memos. The diary questions distribute the descriptive information. The *second analysis step* produces two main themes that excel from this: *professionalism* (red) and *collegiality* (blue). Memos 1, 2, and 5 will serve as exemplary illustrations. The three memos revolve around the same task over five days. The author has translated direct quotations from Danish to English. The translation builds on creating meaning.

Questions	Memo 1. Answers	Memo 3. Answers	Memo 5. Answers
What is the task about?	As an educational leader, I am responsible for implementing lectures . A lecturer has repeatedly exceeded the deadline .	Again, reach out to the lecturer to complete the lectures.	Once again, the lecturer did not complete the lecture because the technique did not work.
How much time do you spend on the task?	It is an ad-hoc task spread over time. A text message here and an email there. Around five to ten minutes.	A meeting lasting 30 minutes.	15 minutes.
Where does the task come from?	It comes from me. I must finish the lecture series , which is part of organising the courses.	It probably comes from myself or outside or what to say. I do not know where it comes from. It is about getting the course finished.	As before.
Who does the task relate to?	It is a matter between the lecturer, me, and the associated team teachers who rely on the product.	As before.	As before.
How do you solve the task in practice?	I had to contact the lecturer via emails, phone calls, and text messages and coordinate with the study secretary.	I called the person and wrote a text message. The person came by my office. We talked about content , and the person went to the study secretary. However, I received an email saying the video upload was unsuccessful due to technical issues. Consequently, I contacted the technical support. They said they would look into it. I am now awaiting further correspondence to ensure the task is completed.	I have been writing back and forth with the lecturer and writing to the support for help.
Why do you solve it this way?	I would have preferred to stop by the person's office, but we are in two different buildings, so I must manage it in other ways. I want to make personal contact by phone because we have a mutual sympathy and interest in each other. Here, I can talk and kindly put pressure on . I solve this simply by nudging because I have no formal management control to say that the person must . I cannot make	I solved it this way because it is the fastest and easiest way.	As two before mentioned reasons.

	reprisals. I, therefore, want the person to do it voluntarily without too much conflict. I do not wish to have a conflict. Because I need the cooperation to be constructive the next time, I must use that person, and I choose to nudge many times.		
What experiences do you draw on?	My experience with the person is that, despite good intentions and ideas, nudging is needed quite a bit to deliver. So, there must be constant reminders to get things done.	I have experience in video editing. However, it did not work out.	As before.
What is the task solution expected to contribute to?	Finish the series of lectures, as they must be available as videos. I have promised all the students and team teachers that the videos will be ready by the start of the course. It has been 14 days, and, as I said, I am missing the last video despite dialogue over the spring and autumn. So, it is used to complete the course.	As before.	As before.

Table 5: Descriptive audio diary information. Participant No. 8. Memos 1,2 and 5. Translated into English by the researcher to generate meaning.

In its point of departure, the educational leader becomes a solution to professional problems. Everything, not only in the highlighted memos, rotates around creating, securing, and taking responsibility for academic quality and stability. This perspective resonates with the function of the educational system with intentions of student change and learning, which also becomes the core concern for the educational leader. However, academic quality and stability depend on colleagues performing professionally and producing academic quality on time. The educational leader is thus left with a system-dependent collegial environment. In other words, the *problem* is academic, but the *solution* becomes collegial. Collegiality is described as the opposite of formal management, which can effectuate reprisals, which is why the educational leader instead must focus on professional content, kindly pressure and nudging, creating voluntary connections, and avoiding personal accusations that may lead to conflicts. For the educational leader, collegiality can be understood as encouraging and stimulating peers to accept professional argumentations, making one's premises the foundation for the peer's subsequent actions. Theoretically, moving on to the *third analysis step*, this can be understood as a motivation/connection problem on '[...] how to increase the likelihood of the communication being accepted and used as a basis for further communication' (Knudsen, 2014, p. 26, my translation). Hence, the educational leader's functional

specialisations involve handling academic traits in a collegial way that goes through motivation because motivating colleagues is establishing the professional '[...] justification, their background, their authority-giving agency - or more generalised: that which they are not, but on which they depend' (Knudsen, 2005, p. 6). Navigating this paradox means that professionalism and collegiality neither become a dichotomy nor complementary but interdependent. The tension is the same, but the approach is different, which leaves us with an alternative lens that makes us see things differently. We cannot avoid the distinction, but we can unfold it in another way – not avoiding, not bridging through compromises and mutual understandings – but unfolding professionalism and collegiality conditioning each other. The educational leader unfolds the paradox, making decisions to motivate colleagues to solve academic problems. The educational leader can be understood as an organisational solution to academic quality problems by functioning as a coupling point between professionalism and collegiality through collegial motivation. To sum up, the educational leader thus seems to be an organisational equivalent of academic quality assurance alongside other organisational solutions to handling academic quality.

Initial considerations

This article asked *how the audio diary method can capture educational leaders' ad-hoc tasks and what information is produced*. The study is a methodological discussion and refers to one type of qualitative data collected through audio diaries embedded in a more extensive study of observations and interviews. The audio diary becomes one path to gaining knowledge about the organisational contributions of the educational leader role and functions through everyday ad-hoc tasks. As the researcher has not been able to locate research directly using the audio diary method to grasp ad-hoc tasks within educational leadership, the use is explorative. It expands on previous uses of audio diaries. A single-case study is selected to acquaint with capturing ad-hoc tasks using the audio diary method and familiarise with analysing the data, going from not knowing to gaining knowledge.

The discussion will begin by reviewing the analysis strategy. The first analysis category is met while the participant is part of a larger research project and is carefully selected according to the educational leader definition. Secondly, the memos detail

impromptu tasks carried out by the educational leader. The researcher is confident that the solicited audio diary method effectively captured these unexpected tasks. This confidence stems from comparing the definition of impromptu tasks used in this article with the information obtained from the audio diaries. The information reveals the management of unplanned tasks and emphasises the importance of the small, everyday activities that constitute daily routines, often overlooked by others. These seemingly insignificant tasks contribute to a complex and comprehensive work-life filled with reflections and decisions that must be made. The diary has demonstrated its value as a methodological tool for gathering impromptu tasks through the eight solicited questions. The guide offers flexibility by producing ad-hoc tasks that the educational leader encounters. This approach allows the researcher to gain insights into the everyday moments, offering an understanding of the concrete practices and reflections of the educational leader.

The analysis of a single-case study provides an in-depth knowledge of the information obtained from the diaries, ultimately concluding and drawing attention to the fact that educational leaders must manage paradoxes. Corresponding with the theoretical framework, finding a difference or a paradox is not interesting per se, but dealing with which difference is paramount to distinguishing it from what could also be the case (Luhmann, 1993). In this case, the paradox contains the difference between professionalism and collegiality. Knowing that collegial motivation and connection are a part of the educational leader's functional specialisations provides a basis for further exploration of how the educational leader's professionalism can unfold collegially.

In summary, the article posits that the audio diary method can capture the ad-hoc tasks of educational leaders effectively. The valuable information produced is about how the educational leader role functions, as was intended. This ambition has primarily been reached by being epistemologically consistent in developing guidance based on systems theory, countering the lack of qualitative guidance on using an audio diary. Finally, using the audio diary to grasp the educational leader's ad-hoc tasks in a strict epistemological way provides a more profound understanding and access to well-rounded information (Mittelmeier et al., 2021) where different methods can be used to test findings, enabling the contradiction or confirmation of assumptions in the broader project.

Critical reflections for future analysis

This last section will critically discuss the use of audio diaries in general for future research and analysis. Although a single-case study has provided valuable knowledge about grasping ad-hoc tasks using the audio diary and analysing the data, several considerations are needed to analyse the whole dataset within the larger-scale research study.

In designing the study, the researcher carefully reflected on how the diary recordings could successfully be played out in practice, not being too extensive in terms of time. Following the theoretical framework, eight concise questions were produced to guide the instructions for the diary recordings. A flexible approach of 14 days or 14 ad-hoc tasks was chosen. A maximum of ten minutes for each recorded diary was selected to ensure manageability for participants and the researcher, avoiding the creation of an overly extensive dataset. The diary was deliberately nested in the qualitative study after the two first observations so the participant and the researcher could get acquainted. The first meetings, as expected, led to questions regarding the diaries, where the researcher explained the purpose and the scope. The explanations were valuable for the participants' understanding and created positive resonance when doing the recordings. As such, the diaries were placed adequately. Soon, the complexity of everyday life occurred.

Even though all participants were informed about the research setup and what it contained, four participants could not complete their diaries for reasons shown in Table 4. The incompletions left the researcher with several questions. The three most significant questions will be addressed in the following: Are the completed diaries of a certain quality in relation to the aim of using the diary? Is a diary unethical because a professional setting becomes too private? Are the diaries creating a representative and qualitative dataset when four participants have not completed them for various reasons?

The *first* question regarding the quality of the diaries pertains to the analytical criteria and branches into two topics concerning immediacy and the diary format. *Firstly*, the aspect of 'grasping immediacy' can be explored. Although the incompletions do not seem to stem from respondent fatigue (Groves, 2021), the diaries are not consistently completed in the actual moment of the tasks. There is a variation from a delay of two days to several weeks. One element of the delay is that the participants are frequently busy individuals. It is simply not feasible for them to complete the diary immediately after a situation has occurred. Another element is that several tasks generate new tasks,

influencing the ability to answer *how* educational leaders practically resolve tasks. The guideline puts the expectation on hold, requiring that the diaries be completed not in the moment but when the task is actually done. The recording delay contains the potential risk of forgetting important details or reflections, which calls for a more precise definition of an ad-hoc task and more realistic instructions for the diary.

Another aspect of data quality is the format of the diary. Two participants answered the questions in Excel, which left the researcher puzzled. On the one hand, it provides the project with a comprehensive overview of ad-hoc tasks, who is involved, and what or whom the solution will benefit. On the other hand, there is a scarcity of specific details and reflections regarding why the task is solved in a particular way or the experiences drawn upon by the educational leader. This lack of information provides little insight into the complexity of the role. Against the analysis criteria, the criteria have been met but are also facing the same problems around immediacy as in the recorded diaries. Simultaneously, there appears to be a subtle lack of closeness that the criteria have not addressed.

The *second* question from this reflection is whether the data generated through diaries has ethical implications. The question reflects whether a diary, as a method for educational leaders, blurs the line between professional and private. Is there too much closeness or intimacy in a diary when exploring a role in a professional setting? The issue mainly occurred because one of the participants refused to record the diaries, arguing that they were too personal. Even though data is collected according to GDPR and pseudonymised, it becomes essential for diary researchers to consider whether they view the diary as an objective, accurate record or a subjective, personalised representation of the phenomenon (Henderson, 2021). The interest and contribution must be even more precise, creating transparency around the data so that they do not appear random and unfounded (Keiding, 2005).

Third, whether the diaries are of a certain quality by creating a representative dataset is discussable, pointing to the fact that not all diaries are completed. However, according to perspectives on qualitative methods and their standard criteria, quality is about methodological reflections (Tanggaard & Brinkmann, 2025), transparency and being epistemologically consistent by explicating choices (Frankel, 2012) rather than counting. Based on these criteria, reflections on the incompleting diaries could

alternatively be understood as data rather than a lack of representation. The unfinished diaries provide insight into educational leaders' daily organisational hurdles. This knowledge can enhance our understanding of their responsibilities. When conducting future research and transcribing recordings, high-quality standards in the research methodology must be upheld. We should contemplate how the lack of completed diaries might impact the value of the data we collect and whether having a more significant number of diaries would lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the role and function of educational leaders.

Considering several methodological factors and critically reflecting before using diaries in future research is essential. In summary, the quality of the study hinges on a clear and detailed definition of immediacy within the chosen research context. The diary prompt should align with this definition. Additionally, a well-defined methodology that addresses epistemological interest and contribution and ethical considerations regarding the data of interest is imperative. For instance, is the focus on factual information or personal reflections where closeness reflects quality? Researchers must be explicit about their epistemological intentions to ascertain the quality and relevance of the information.

Furthermore, the issue of qualitative standards should be deliberated. Lastly, using audio diaries prompts a discussion about whether the information obtained could have been garnered through interviews or observations. It is suggested that employing various methods is not just about the information they yield but about unfolding as many functional nuances as possible, where different methods interact and contribute to contradicting or confirming assumptions. That being said, the incorporation of the audio diary method within a broader research framework has '[...] the potential to offer unique insights into participants' worlds in HE research through flexible engagement with multiple facets of their experiences' (Mittelmeier et al., 2021, p. 18).

In conclusion, the article contributes to using the audio diary method in HE research by introducing ad-hoc tasks of educational leaders as a new area in the field. The methodological expanded and explorative approach has yielded new insights by pioneering the first guidance for exploring ad-hoc tasks. However, further research is necessary to ascertain the quality and relevance of the information generated in diverse contexts.

References

- Andersen, N. Å. (1999). *Diskursive analysestrategier: Foucault, Koselleck, Laclau, Luhmann*. Nyt fra Samfundsvidenskaberne.
- Andersen, N. Å. (2014). Den semantiske analysestrategi og samtidsdiagnostik. In G. Harste & M. Knudsen (Eds.), *Systemteoretiske analyser. At anvende Luhmann* (pp. 41-72). Nyt fra Samfundsvidenskaberne.
- Bartlett, R., & Milligan, C. (2020). *Diary method: Research methods*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Bell, L. (1998). Public and private meanings in diaries: Researching family and childcare. *Feminist dilemmas in qualitative research: Public knowledge and private lives*. London: Sage, 72, 72-86. <https://repository.mdx.ac.uk/item/82805>
- Bolander Laksov, K., & Tomson, T. (2017). Becoming an educational leader – exploring leadership in medical education. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 20(4), 506-516. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2015.1114152>
- Boyd, D., Egbu, C., Chinyio, E., Xiao, H., & Lee, C. (2004). Audio diary and debriefing for knowledge management in SMEs. ARCOM 20th Annual Conference, Edinburgh.
- Brereton, B. (2021). 'Both sides now': the meitheal method for professional development in higher education. *Teacher Development*, 25(1), 53-67. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2020.1834445>
- Cao, X. (2021). Researcher-participant 'win-win' in diary research. In X. Cao & E. F. Henderson (Eds.), *Exploring Diary Methods in Higher Education Research: Opportunities, Choices and Challenges* (pp. 73-86). Routledge.
- Cao, X., & Henderson, E. F. (2021a). *Exploring diary methods in higher education research: Opportunities, choices and challenges*. Routledge.
- Cao, X., & Henderson, E. F. (2021b). Introduction: The (re) naissance of diary method research in and beyond higher education studies. In X. Cao & E. F. Henderson (Eds.), *Exploring diary methods in higher education research* (pp. 1-11). Routledge.

- Cardno, C. (2014). The functions, attributes and challenges of academic leadership in New Zealand polytechnics. *International Journal of Educational Management*.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-11-2012-0131>
- Collins Dictionary. (2023). *Ad-hoc*
<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/ad-hoc>
- Crozier, S. E., & Cassell, C. M. (2016). Methodological considerations in the use of audio diaries in work psychology: Adding to the qualitative toolkit. *Journal of occupational and organizational psychology*, 89(2), 396-419.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12132>
- Dangeni, D. L. E., & MacDiarmid, C. (2021). Audio diaries. In X. Cao & E. F. Henderson (Eds.), *Exploring Diary Methods in Higher Education Research: Opportunities, Choices and Challenges* (pp. 44-57). Routledge.
- Ekman, S. (2022). *Giftig gæld og udpint velfærd: Om udpiningen af den offentlige sektor og gældens destruktive dynamik*. Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2015). Fem misforståelser om casestudier. In S. T. Brinkmann, Lene (Ed.), *Kvalitative metoder. En grundbog* (2 ed., pp. 497-520). Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Frankel, C. (2012). En iagttagelsesteoretisk analytik. In C. Nygaard (Ed.), *Samfundsvidenskabelige analysemetoder* (2. ed., pp. 171-195). Samfundslitteratur.
- Furness, P. J., & Garrud, P. (2010). Adaptation after facial surgery: Using the diary as a research tool. *Qualitative Health Research*, 20(2), 262-272.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732309357571>
- Gjerde, S., & Alvesson, M. (2020). Sandwiched: Exploring role and identity of middle managers in the genuine middle. *Human relations*, 73(1), 124-151.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/001872671882324>
- Groves, O. (2021). The Diary Method and Its Power to Record the Routine and Forgettable in the Language Lives of International Student. In X. Cao & E. F. Henderson (Eds.), *Exploring Diary Methods in Higher Education Research: Opportunities, Choices and Challenges* (pp. 175-189). Routledge.
- Henderson, E. F. (2021). How short is too short?: Exploring diary study duration from the perspective of researching conferences and other short-term phenomena in

- higher education and beyond. In X. Cao & E. F. Henderson (Eds.), *Exploring diary methods in higher education research* (pp. 29-43). Routledge.
- Hofmeyer, A., Sheingold, B. H., Klopper, H. C., & Warland, J. (2015). Leadership in learning and teaching in higher education: Perspectives of academics in non-formal leadership roles. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research*, 8(3), 181-192.
- Højlund, H. (2014). Roller i en systemteoretisk optik. In *Systemteoretiske analyser: At anvende Luhmann* (pp. 153-181). Nyt fra Samfundsvidenskaberne.
- Jefferies, A., & Hyde, R. (2009). Listening to the Learners' Voices in HE: How Do Students Reflect on Their Use of Technology for Learning? *Electronic Journal of E-learning*, 7(2), 119-126.
- Keiding, T. B. (2005). *Hvorfra min verden går: Et Lunmann-inspireret bidrag til didaktikken* Institut for Uddannelse, Læring og Filosofi, Aalborg Universitet].
- Keightley, E., Pickering, M., & Allett, N. (2012). Using self-interviews to research memory. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2011.632155>
- Knudsen, M. (2005). *Tilskrivning af mening til beslutningsprogrammer i sundhedsvæsenet* Scandinavian Academy of Management [NFF], Aarhus, Denmark. <https://docplayer.dk/19516296-Tilskrivning-af-mening-til-beslutningsprogrammer-i-sundhedsvaesenet.html>
- Knudsen, M. (2014). Metodisk overrasket: Om systemteori og funktionel metode. In G. Harste & M. Knudsen (Eds.), *Systemteoretiske analyser* (pp. 19-40). Nyt fra Samfundsvidenskaberne.
- Koselleck, R. (2007). *Begreber, tid og erfaring: En tekstsamling* (J. Busck, Trans.). Hans Reitzels Forlag. (Erfahrungsraum und Erwartungshorizont: Zwei historische Kategorien)
- Lassen, S. (2020). *Ressourcepersonens hyperorientering: En empirisk undersøgelse af ressourcepersonens rolle og funktion i den danske folkeskole* University of Southern Denmark]. Odense.
https://www.sdu.dk/da/forskning/phd/phd_skoler/phd_humaniora/ph,-d-,d,-d,-afhandlinger

- Lee, D. B., & Brosziewski, A. (2007). Participant Observation and System Theory: Theorizing the Ground. *Soziale Welt, Nomos Verlag, 58, Jahrg., H. 3, Systemtheorie und empirische Forschung, 255-269.*
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40878561>
- Luhmann, N. (1993). Observing re-entries. *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal, 16(2), 485-498.* <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.5840/gfpj199316227>
- Luhmann, N. (2000). *Sociale Systemer: Grundrids til en Almen Teori* (J. Cederstrøm, N. Mortensen, & J. Rasmussen, Trans.). Hans Reitzels Forlag. (Soziale Systeme)
- Marshall, S. G. (2012). Educational middle change leadership in New Zealand: the meat in the sandwich. *The International Journal of Educational Management, 26(6), 502-528.* <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513541211251361>
- Milburn, P. C. (2010). The role of programme directors as academic leaders. *Active learning in higher education, 11(2), 87-95.*
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/14697874103656>
- Mittelmeier, J., Rienties, B., Zhang, K. Y., & Jindal-Snape, D. (2021). Using diaries in mixed methods designs: Lessons from a cross-institutional research project on doctoral students' social transition experiences. In X. Cao & E. F. Henderson (Eds.), *Exploring diary methods in higher education research* (pp. 15-28). Routledge.
- Mårtensson, K., & Roxå, T. (2016). Leadership at a local level – Enhancing educational development. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 44(2), 247-262.* <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143214549977>
- Neve, H., Lloyd, H., & Collett, T. (2017). Understanding students' experiences of professionalism learning: a 'threshold' approach. *Teaching in Higher Education, 22(1), 92-108.* <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2016.1221810>
- Seale, J. (2009). Doing student voice work in higher education: An exploration of the value of participatory methods. *British Educational Research Journal, 36(6), 995-1015.* <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920903342038>
- Shah, H., Naffouje, S. A., & Ejaz, A. (2019). Providing Graduate Medical Education Orientation to Program Coordinators: A National Survey and Analysis. *Journal of Graduate Medical Education, 11(5), 530-534.*
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4300/JGME-D-18-01036.1>

- Smith, B. L., & Hughey, A. W. (2006). Leadership in higher education—its evolution and potential: A unique role facing critical challenges. *Industry and Higher Education*, 20(3), 157-163.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.5367/000000006777690972>
- Smith, C. A. (2019). The Uses of Pilot Studies in Sociology: a Processual Understanding of Preliminary Research. *The American Sociologist*, 50(4), 589-607. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12108-019-09419-y>
- Solbrekke, T. D., & Stensaker, B. (2016). Utdanningsledelse-Stimulering av et felles engasjement for studieprogrammene? *Uniped*, 39(2), 144-157.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1893-8981-2016-02-05>
- Stensaker, B., Elken, M., & Maassen, P. (2019). Studieprogramledelse – et spørsmål om organisering? *Uniped*, 42(1), 91-105. <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1893-8981-2019-01-07>
- Tanggaard, L., & Brinkmann, S. (2025). Kvalitet i kvalitative studier. In S. Brinkmann & L. Tanggaard (Eds.), *Kvalitative metoder. En grundbog* (2 ed., pp. 521-532). Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Uştuk, Ö., & De Costa, P. I. (2021). Reflection as meta-action: Lesson study and EFL teacher professional development. *TESOL Journal*, 12(1), e00531.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.531>
- Verma, A. (2021). Using audio-diaries for research and education: AMEE Guide No. 144. *Medical Teacher*, 43(12), 1346-1352.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2021.1972954>
- Williamson, I., Leeming, D., Lyttle, S., & Johnson, S. (2015). Evaluating the audio-diary method in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research Journal*.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-04-2014-0014>
- Yoon, I. (2017). *Confronting systems of oppression: Teaching and learning social justice through art with university students* [The University of Arizona].
-

About the Author:

Sanna Lassen is a postdoc at the Centre for Educational Development at Aarhus University. Sanna is the principal investigator of the ongoing EDULEAD research project focusing on educational leadership in higher education, specifically emphasising leaders outside the managerial line. The research also involves applying research findings to leadership courses to equip leaders with the necessary skills to encourage collegial collaborations based on data-informed insights. Sanna is theoretically inspired by systems theory, taking an organisational approach when exploring the leadership field.