CHALLENGES FACED
BY SCHOOL HEADS IN LEADING SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the leadership skills and challenges faced by elementary school heads in leading school communities in Region XII SOCCSARGEN for the school year 2023-2024. This research utilized qualitative design to analyze the gathered data. Thematic analysis was used to determine whether the school heads address the challenges they are facing in leading school communities and prioritize fostering inclusive environments by promoting cultural competence among staff, implementing diversity-focused curricula and policies, and promoting respectful dialogue among learners and stakeholders Based on the results of the study, challenges encompass fostering inclusive environments, promoting equity, and engaging with diverse stakeholders. Despite the inherent complexities, school heads have the opportunity to make a profound impact by championing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives that empower all learners to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Keyword: - *Challenges, school heads, and leading communities.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

School heads play a key role in building relationships with parents and community members. This is especially important in school communities, where parents and community members may come from different backgrounds with different cultural values and beliefs. Both elementary school heads need to be able to develop and maintain relationships with parents and community members to build support for the school and its learners. The study has several implications for leadership development. First, leadership development programs need to prepare school heads for the challenges of leading school communities. This includes providing them with the skills and knowledge they need to be culturally competent, equity leaders, and collaborative leaders.

Abari-Ibolya and Baráth, (2010) it is important for leadership development programs to be culturally responsive. This means that the programs should be designed to meet the needs of school heads from different backgrounds and with different experiences. Leadership development programs need to be ongoing. This is because the challenges of leading diverse school communities are constantly changing. School heads need ongoing support and development to effectively lead their schools.

School heads need to be able to work effectively with a variety of stakeholders, including teachers, parents, community members, and policymakers. This can be challenging, as stakeholders may have different perspectives and priorities. Programs should provide heads with the knowledge, skills, and abilities they need to build relationships with all members of the school community, create a welcoming and inclusive school culture, and provide equitable educational opportunities for all learners by Avolio & Bass (2019).

Theres existing research gaps for the study was anchored in many challenges encountered by school heads in different educational contexts, such as urban versus rural schools or schools with diverse student populations. Understanding the nuanced complexities of these challenges and how leadership development initiatives can effectively address them is critical for enhancing the quality of educational leadership (Mulford 2008.) Therefore, this study was contextualized.

The researcher aimed to explore the leadership development skills and challenges faced by school heads in leading school communities. By conducting research, the study seeks to identify the specific challenges related to diversity that school heads encounter and investigate potential strategies to support their leadership effectiveness in educational settings Juneja (2014).

2. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized qualitative research design in gathering data on the challenges faced by the school heads in leading school communities. Qualitative data is suitable where variables have not yet been identified or a theory has not yet been built Morrow, (2007).

This study was conducted in public elementary school heads of Region XII - Soccsksargen. Guide questions and probing questions were used for the qualitative component which uses interview guide discussion to obtain data from the participants. The narrative interview guide questions were validated by the pool of experts in the advisory and examining committee during the 1st routing and 2nd routing. The results of the interviews for the qualitative data were analyzed primarily through thematic analysis because it corresponds to the goals of the research, which address the several outcomes, and implications of leadership development, skills, and challenges faced by school heads in leading diverse school communities both elementary and secondary education of the Department of Education. Thematic analysis is a widely used method of qualitative data analysis. It is a useful and accessible tool for qualitative researchers Kiger & Varpio (2020).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Themes and Core Ideas on how school heads address the challenges they are facing in leading diverse school communities

Prioritizing the inclusivity of leading diverse. Prioritizing the inclusivity of leading diverse teams is essential for fostering innovation, productivity, and a positive work culture. Inclusive leadership ensures that all voices are heard, valued, and respected, regardless of differences in background, identity, or perspective. By creating an environment where individuals feel included and empowered to contribute their unique insights, leaders can harness the full potential of their diverse teams.

During the narrative interview, one of the participants responded that:

Yes sir, good morning my answer to this question is "As a school head, addressing challenges in leading a diverse school community requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes inclusivity, communication, understanding, and proactive problem-solving. By implementing these strategies and fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect, I believe we can effectively address the challenges of leading a diverse school community and create a more equitable and supportive learning environment for all students and staff. **(Participant 1)**

Likewise, another participant also stated that:

"As a school leader, demonstrate a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in your own words and actions. Model respectful and inclusive behavior, hold yourself and others accountable for upholding these values and continuously strive to create a welcoming and supportive environment for all members of the school community". **(Participant 11)**

In addition, the participant stated that:

"Addressing challenges in leading diverse to involves implementing inclusive policies, promoting cultural competencies, and creating platforms for open dialogue. Emphasizing diversity in the curriculum, providing sensitivity, training, and actively engaging students, parents, and faculties, contribute to a more inclusive environment". **(Participant 5)**

This result implies that the leading school communities presents a unique set of challenges for school heads. Based on insights gleaned from in depth interview, several key areas emerge: **Understanding diverse needs it is** accommodating the varied learning styles, cultural backgrounds, and socioeconomic realities of learner requires a flexible and culturally responsive approach. During focus group discussions might reveal a need for professional development in these areas for school heads and **promoting inclusion it is** creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for all learners.

Little (2013) effective school heads are more than just managers; they are visionaries, architects of vibrant learning communities, and unwavering champions of educational excellence. By mastering the dual skills of inspirational leadership and strategic acumen, they guide their schools toward a future where every student is empowered to reach their full potential.

Table 1   Themes and Core Ideas on how school heads address the challenges they are facing in leading diverse school communities.

Generated Themes	Frequency of Response	Core Ideas
Prioritizing the inclusivity of leading diverse	General	• The school heads helped the teachers, parents, and stakeholders to promote diversity in the school community. • The school heads should encourage teachers, parents, and stakeholders to be effective inclusivity of diverse in the school.

Legend:

     50% and above   General (most of the participants agree on the idea)
     25% - 49% -   Typical (some of the participants agree on the idea)
     24% and below   Variant (few of the participants agree on the idea)

Themes and Core Ideas on interventions Addressing the challenges

Open communication. Open communication channels are open, individuals feel empowered to share ideas, concerns, and feedback freely, without fear of judgment or comeback. This open exchange of information creates a culture of openness and accountability, where everyone has a voice and feels valued as a contributing member of the team. Moreover, open communication enables leaders to stay connected with their teams, gaining valuable insights into employee morale, performance, and challenges.

Collaboration approach. Through a collaboration approach we can encourage individuals from different backgrounds to work together towards common goals, leaders can leverage the unique strengths of each team member to drive innovation, creativity, and problem-solving. Moreover, collaboration promotes mutual respect and understanding, breaking down barriers and fostering a culture of inclusion where everyone feels valued and empowered to contribute.

During the narrative interview, the participant stated that:

"Good communication is still the most effective way of addressing all kinds of situations. In situations where conflicts arise good communication plays a pivotal role in promoting understanding and harmony". *(Participant 10)*

One participant also emphasized that:

> *"Open communication and collaboration an effective coping mechanisms for addressing challenges as a school head, it promotes understanding, builds trust, encourages innovation, strengthens relationships, and enhances resilience within the school community. By prioritizing open communication and collaboration, we can effectively navigate through challenges and promote a positive and thriving educational environment". (**Participant 9**)*

The participant stated that:

> *"When faced with challenges, a collaboration approach helps distribute the burden and prevent individuals from feeling overwhelmed. Together, we can develop resilience and navigate through difficulties with a sense of collective responsibility and support. (**Participant 11**)*

Stone-Johnson (2012) states collaboration approaches encompass a range of principles, processes, and structures designed to facilitate cooperation, coordination, and shared decision-making among stakeholders. Understanding the underlying principles and practices of collaboration is essential for fostering effective partnerships, promoting innovation, and addressing complex societal challenges.
With the same challenges, other participants expressed that:

> *"As a principal, an effective coping mechanism for addressing challenges is to prioritize collaboration and open communication. I can collectively identify solutions and build a sense of community. This approach can promote and share responsibility for the school's success and helps address challenges with a collaborative and inclusive mindset". (**Participant 4**)*

The result implies that the insights inform best practices for leading school communities. This might involve recommendations for leadership development programs that emphasize cultural awareness and inclusivity. Additionally, the learnings could influence policy changes that promote resource allocation to support diverse learners needs and encourage community collaboration in creating a welcoming and inclusive school environment.

Marzano (2015) Effective communication skills have far-reaching implications for individuals, organizations, and societies. In the workplace, employees with strong communication skills are better equipped to perform their job duties, collaborate with colleagues, and advance their careers. Organizational success is often contingent upon effective communication practices, as they facilitate goal attainment, decision-making, and conflict resolution. In society, effective communication fosters social cohesion, facilitates democratic processes, and promotes cultural understanding and diversity.

Table 2   Themes and Core Ideas on Interventions Addressing Challenges.

Themes	Frequency of Response	Core Ideas
Open communication	General	The school heads helped the community improve the strengthening of relationships and communication.
Collaboration Approach	General	The school heads should encourage and promote teachers, and stakeholders to collaborate in the school diverse.

Legend:
       50% and above   General (most of the participants agree on the idea)
       25% - 49% -   Typical (some of the participants agree on the idea)
       24% and below   Variant (few of the participants agree on the idea)

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the foregoing findings, this study concludes that the leadership development skills faced by school heads in leading school communities. Higher levels of leadership skills and leadership development. The school heads

possess a diverse set of competencies, including cultural competence, effective communication, and collaboration, they must continuously refine and adapt their skills to address evolving challenges. These challenges encompass fostering inclusive environments, promoting equity, and engaging with diverse stakeholders. Despite the inherent complexities, school heads have the opportunity to make a profound impact by championing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives that empower all learners to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

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