

EXPLORING THE ISSUES AND CONCERNS SURROUNDING SCHOOL HEADS' LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR, WORK VALUES, AND PERFORMANCE: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore and understand the lived experiences, perceptions, and insights of school heads regarding their leadership behaviors, work values, and supervisory across the divisions of Maguindanao del Sur, Maguindanao del Norte, and the Special Geographic Area (SGA) under the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The qualitative nature of the study allowed for a deeper exploration of the contextual realities that shape leadership practices in post-pandemic, resource-limited, and conflict-affected educational settings. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the study gathered rich, narrative data from selected school leaders who have experienced the challenges and responsibilities of supervising teachers and managing schools in diverse and often marginalized communities. The participants were purposively selected based on their roles, length of service, and exposure to the unique challenges present in the region.

Data collection focused on understanding how leadership behaviors are enacted in context, how personal and organizational work values influence decision-making and relational dynamics, and how supervisory responsibilities are fulfilled amid administrative, social, and geographical constraints. Thematic analysis was utilized to identify recurring patterns, significant themes, and contextual insights that emerged from the participants' narratives. By emphasizing the voices of school heads, this qualitative design provided a nuanced understanding of how leadership is exercised and sustained in a complex educational environment, offering implications for policy formulation, leadership training, and capacity building in BARMM.

Keyword: - *Issues and Concerns, School Head's Leadership Behavior, Work Values, and Performance.*

1. INTRODUCTION

School leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping the culture, effectiveness, and outcomes of educational institutions. Among the key factors influencing school success are the leadership behaviors and work values of school heads, which significantly impact teacher motivation, instructional quality, and student achievement (Bush & Glover, 2022). In the context of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), where schools often face complex challenges such as geographical isolation, limited resources, and sociopolitical instability, the leadership of school heads becomes even more critical in ensuring educational continuity and quality. Leadership behavior, defined as the actions and decisions of school leaders that influence school operations, sets the tone for collaboration, innovation, and accountability (Leithwood, Sun, & Pollock, 2020).

Effective school heads demonstrate visionary, instructional, and transformational leadership traits that foster inclusive school environments and promote staff and student development. Equally important are work values, personal principles that guide ethical decision-making, commitment, and professional conduct (Super, 1980; Kwon et al., 2021). When aligned with leadership behavior, strong work values contribute to school heads' supervisory performance, which includes managing human and material resources, supporting teaching and learning, and ensuring policy implementation (Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2023).

Despite the critical role of school heads, there remains a need to understand the real-life issues and concerns they encounter in fulfilling their leadership roles, particularly in under-resourced or conflict-affected regions such as BARMM. Several studies highlight that leadership in such contexts is often burdened by competing demands, role ambiguity, political pressures, and inadequate professional development (Hallinger & Truong, 2022; Malingkas et al., 2023). These challenges may compromise both leadership behavior and supervisory effectiveness, ultimately affecting school performance and learner outcomes.

This study seeks to qualitatively explore the issues and concerns surrounding school heads' leadership behavior, work values, and supervisory performance in the divisions of Maguindanao del Sur, Maguindanao del Norte, and the Special Geographic Area. Through in-depth engagement with teachers who directly observe and interact with school leaders, this inquiry aims to uncover lived experiences, perceptions, and contextual factors that influence school leadership in BARMM. The findings are expected to contribute to policy refinement, leadership training, and school improvement strategies tailored to the unique realities of the region.

2. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative descriptive design guided the study, aiming to gather in-depth insights through the lived experiences and perspectives of participants. The research was conducted in selected elementary schools across the divisions of Maguindanao del Sur, Maguindanao del Norte, and the Special Geographic Area (SGA) of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). These areas were strategically chosen due to their administrative relevance and the researcher's proximity and familiarity with the context.

The study engaged teachers from the aforementioned divisions as participants, selected through convenience sampling. A total of 15 school heads were purposively selected as participants, aligning with Creswell's (2013) recommendation of 5 to 25 participants for phenomenological studies. Participants were selected based on their tenure, geographical assignment, and demonstrated leadership roles within their respective schools. Permission to conduct the study was formally obtained from district supervisors, and ethical considerations were strictly observed, including informed consent and the assurance of confidentiality and voluntary participation. Data collection involved face-to-face engagements, enabling participants to freely express their experiences and perceptions. Transcriptions were carefully prepared and coded, with emerging themes identified through thematic analysis. While some quantitative descriptions such as frequency counts supported the analysis, the core of the research rested on interpreting patterns and meanings within the narratives provided by the teachers.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Issues and Concerns on School Heads' Leadership Behavior, Work Values, and Performance

The challenges faced by school heads in their leadership behavior, work values, and performance are complex and multifaceted, often shaped by both internal and external factors. One of the most pressing concerns, as identified by informants, is strategic decision-making, particularly in the wake of the pandemic. School heads must navigate the complexities of addressing post-pandemic learning gaps while making decisions that balance immediate student needs with long-term academic goals. This often requires a delicate balancing act, where school leaders must not only address urgent issues but also position their schools for future success.

As one informant noted,

"School heads need to prioritize addressing learning gaps while ensuring their decisions align with both community needs and the broader educational objectives of the school system."

Another significant challenge revolves around teacher retention and recruitment, especially in remote or underserved areas. School heads struggle to retain qualified teachers due to geographic isolation, limited professional development opportunities, and better job prospects elsewhere.

As one school head shared,

"In remote areas, the shortage of teachers is exacerbated by the high turnover rate, often due to better opportunities elsewhere."

This issue impacts the consistency and quality of education, as schools in these areas often face difficulties in maintaining a stable, qualified teaching staff.

Equally important is the need for community and stakeholder engagement. School heads must foster trust and maintain positive relationships with parents, local leaders, and other community members. Effective communication and transparency are essential for ensuring that the school's goals align with the expectations of its stakeholders.

One informant emphasized,

"School heads must be proactive in addressing concerns and fostering a sense of ownership among community members to ensure long-term success."

This is a reminder of the significant role that community relations play in supporting a school's success.

In addition to external communication, effective communication within the school is also a critical issue. Informants highlighted how a lack of clear communication with teachers, staff, and parents can lead to confusion, reduced morale, and hindered leadership effectiveness. One respondent stated,

"Inadequate communication can lead to confusion, lack of direction, and reduced morale among teachers and students."

This underscores the importance of clear and transparent communication in aligning all stakeholders with the school's mission and ensuring smooth operational functioning.

School heads also face challenges related to their leadership styles and behavior, with many struggling to balance authority and collaboration. Micromanagement and autocratic leadership styles, in particular, were seen as detrimental to staff morale and professional growth.

One informant explained,

"Micromanagement leads to frustration and decreases motivation among teachers, ultimately affecting student outcomes."

The emphasis here is on the need for school leaders to adopt more empowering and collaborative leadership styles that foster trust and autonomy among their staff.

Moreover, many school heads are struggling to adapt to modern educational trends, particularly in terms of integrating technology into the learning environment. The lack of infrastructure, such as reliable internet and modern teaching tools, has made it difficult for some school leaders to implement technology-driven initiatives effectively.

As one informant pointed out,

"The lack of infrastructure makes it difficult to implement technology-driven initiatives effectively," highlighting the technological gap that school heads need to bridge to provide students with a relevant education in today's digital age.

Another critical area of concern is work values and ethics. School heads are expected to model ethical leadership, promote transparency in decision-making, and enforce policies consistently. Informants noted that concerns about a lack of transparency, ethical leadership, and accountability often hinder trust and collaboration within the school community.

One informant stressed, *"Leaders who exhibit integrity and consistency in their decisions create an environment where teachers and students feel valued and respected,"* highlighting the role of ethical leadership in fostering a positive school culture.

In terms of post-pandemic learning gaps, many school heads are grappling with the long-term effects of disrupted education. These gaps require targeted interventions and innovative strategies to bring students up to speed.

One school head explained, *"The challenge is not just recovering lost learning but also ensuring that students don't fall further behind as they transition back to in-person learning."* This reflects the urgency of addressing the academic gaps that were exacerbated by the pandemic, particularly in underprivileged areas.

School heads also face resource and financial constraints, which are especially pronounced in rural or underdeveloped regions. The lack of adequate funding and resources limits the ability of school heads to provide quality education.

One informant shared, *"The financial constraints make it difficult to provide adequate resources for teachers, students, and school facilities, which limits the ability to meet educational standards."* This is a reminder of the financial challenges that many school leaders must overcome to ensure their schools have the resources needed to succeed.

Finally, the lack of facilities and infrastructure was identified as a variant issue. Inadequate facilities, such as proper classrooms, sanitation, and technology, can severely affect the quality of education and the overall learning environment.

One informant noted, "*The lack of basic facilities, like proper classrooms and functional restrooms, affects student morale and hinders effective teaching,*" emphasizing the need for better physical infrastructure to support effective learning.

The issues and concerns faced by school heads in their leadership behavior, work values, and performance are complex and interconnected. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that considers not only the internal dynamics of the school but also the broader socio-economic and community context. School heads must navigate these challenges with a strategic focus on clear communication, ethical leadership, and adapting to modern educational needs to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of their schools.

Table 1. Issues and Concerns on School Heads' Leadership Behavior, Work Values, and Performance.

Emerging Themes	Frequency	Core Ideas
Strategic Decision-Making	General	<i>School heads face challenges in making strategic decisions, particularly post-pandemic.</i>
Teacher Retention and Recruitment	General	<i>Difficulty in retaining and recruiting qualified teachers, especially in remote areas.</i>
Community and Stakeholder Engagement	General	<i>Building trust and maintaining positive relationships with the community and stakeholders.</i>
Effective Communication	General	<i>Challenges in communication with teachers, staff, and parents, impacting leadership effectiveness.</i>
Leadership Styles and Behavior	General	<i>Micromanagement and autocratic leadership styles are seen as detrimental to staff morale.</i>
Adapting to Modern Educational Trends	Typical	<i>Lack of adaptability to modern educational practices and technologies.</i>
Work Values and Ethics	Typical	<i>Concerns regarding transparency, decision-making, and ethical leadership.</i>
Post-Pandemic Learning Gaps	Typical	<i>Addressing the educational gaps left by the pandemic, especially in academic achievement.</i>
Resource and Financial Constraints	Typical	<i>Lack of resources and insufficient funding, particularly in remote or underdeveloped areas.</i>
Lack of Facilities and Infrastructure	Variant	<i>Insufficient infrastructure and resources for effective teaching and learning.</i>
General	50% and above of the responses	
Typical	25% of the responses	
Variant	24% of the responses	

How School Heads Address Supervisory Challenges

The strategies employed by school heads to address supervisory challenges highlight a commitment to fostering a supportive, effective, and collaborative school environment. A central theme is open communication and collaboration, where school heads prioritize transparent and consistent communication with staff, students, and parents. By promoting an open line of communication, school leaders can address concerns promptly, align the school community on shared goals, and ensure that everyone is on the same page regarding school initiatives.

One informant emphasized, "*Clear and open communication fosters trust and understanding, helping everyone work together towards common objectives.*"

In addition to communication, professional development and training is another critical strategy employed by school heads. Ongoing development opportunities for both school leaders and teachers are essential for

navigating the challenges they face. School heads recognize the importance of enhancing their leadership skills and supporting their teachers' growth through targeted training.

As one respondent shared, "Continuous professional development equips us with the skills needed to adapt to the evolving educational landscape."

Another key strategy is delegation and empowerment, where school heads delegate tasks and provide autonomy to staff members. By doing so, they create a more positive and empowering working environment, where staff feel trusted and valued.

One informant noted, "Empowering teachers to take ownership of their tasks fosters a sense of responsibility and commitment, ultimately improving school performance."

Effective strategic time management also plays a pivotal role in addressing supervisory challenges. School heads are mindful of the need to manage their time efficiently, prioritize tasks, and set clear deadlines. Time management helps them focus on key tasks while ensuring that no important issues are overlooked.

A respondent highlighted, "Strategic time management ensures that we remain focused on what matters most, even when faced with numerous demands."

School heads also recognize the importance of conflict resolution and relationship building in maintaining a positive school environment. Mediation of conflicts and fostering strong relationships with teachers, students, and stakeholders are crucial to creating a harmonious atmosphere.

One informant explained, "Being proactive in resolving conflicts and strengthening relationships is key to maintaining a positive and productive work environment."

In addition to interpersonal strategies, data-driven decision making has become an essential tool for school heads. By using data to assess student achievement, teacher performance, and resource allocation, school leaders can make informed decisions that improve overall school performance.

A school head remarked, "Data provides valuable insights that guide our decisions, helping us to target areas that need improvement."

The role of mentoring and coaching is also emphasized, as school heads invest time in guiding and supporting their staff's professional growth. Through mentoring, school heads address classroom needs and provide individualized support for teachers.

One informant noted, "Mentoring is crucial for developing our teachers and providing them with the tools to succeed in their classrooms."

Building a positive school culture is another significant focus for school heads. By fostering a supportive, inclusive, and engaging environment, school heads can enhance both staff and student well-being, leading to improved educational outcomes.

As one respondent shared, "A positive school culture encourages collaboration and mutual respect, creating a thriving learning environment for both students and staff."

An important emerging theme is adaptive leadership, where school heads demonstrate flexibility and adaptability in their leadership style to meet the unique needs of their school community.

One school head shared, "Being adaptable allows me to respond effectively to the diverse challenges our school faces, ensuring that we remain effective even in times of change."

Finally, transparency and accountability are crucial elements of effective leadership. School heads must demonstrate transparency in their actions and hold themselves accountable for their decisions, which fosters trust and confidence within the school community.

A respondent emphasized, "Transparency and accountability ensure that our actions align with the values and goals of the school, building trust among stakeholders."

The strategies employed by school heads to address supervisory challenges are multifaceted and focus on creating an environment of collaboration, empowerment, and continuous improvement. By prioritizing communication, professional development, time management, and relationship building, school heads can effectively navigate the complexities of their roles and foster a positive and productive school environment.

Table 2. How School Heads Address Supervisory Challenges

Emerging Themes	Frequency	Core Ideas
Open Communication and Collaboration	General	School heads prioritize clear communication and collaboration with staff, students, and parents.
Professional Development and Training	General	Ongoing professional development is critical for both school heads and teachers to address challenges.
Delegation and Empowerment	General	Delegating tasks and providing autonomy to staff to foster a positive working environment.
Strategic Time Management	General	School heads emphasize efficient time management, clear priorities, and setting timescales.
Conflict Resolution and Relationship Building	General	Mediating conflicts and building strong relationships with teachers and stakeholders.
Data-Driven Decision Making	Typical	Using data to inform decisions on student achievement, teacher performance, and resource allocation.
Mentoring and Coaching	Typical	Providing mentoring and coaching to staff for professional growth and to address classroom needs.
Building a Positive School Culture	Typical	Fostering a supportive and positive school environment for both staff and students.
Adaptive Leadership	Variant	Flexibility and adaptability in leadership style to meet the needs of the school community.
Transparency and Accountability	Variant	School heads need to demonstrate transparency and accountability in their leadership actions.
General	50% and above of the responses	
Typical	25% of the responses	
Variant	24% of the responses	

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, several important conclusions can be drawn regarding the leadership behavior, work values, and supervisory performance of school heads in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). First, the study highlights that effective leadership in this region requires strategic and adaptive decision-making, particularly in addressing the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, managing academic gaps, and aligning school-level initiatives with national and regional education priorities. School heads are required to be visionary yet flexible, demonstrating an ability to respond to complex challenges such as integrating technology, enhancing pedagogical practices, and navigating sociopolitical dynamics in conflict-affected areas.

Moreover, the findings reveal that managing teachers and engaging communities are among the most critical challenges for school leaders. The recruitment and retention of qualified teachers remain persistent issues, especially in geographically isolated and underserved locations. At the same time, successful stakeholder and community engagement has proven essential for building trust, strengthening collaboration, and ensuring the relevance and sustainability of school programs. In addition, the study emphasizes that school heads who uphold strong ethical values such as integrity, transparency, and consistency are better positioned to establish a positive school culture and earn the trust of both teachers and students.

The leadership style of school heads significantly affects teacher morale and performance. The research reveals that authoritarian and micromanaging approaches tend to lower staff motivation, while participatory and empowering leadership fosters a sense of ownership, commitment, and professional growth. Central to these outcomes is the quality of communication. Clear, open, and consistent communication practices are essential for effective school governance. In contrast, poor communication often leads to misunderstanding, distrust, and misaligned goals.

Furthermore, the study identifies that limited access to resources and inadequate school infrastructure pose significant barriers to school improvement. These challenges are especially pronounced in marginalized and economically constrained communities. Despite these limitations, many school heads employ effective supervisory strategies such as professional development, mentoring, delegation, conflict resolution, and time management. These strategies are instrumental in improving teacher competence, strengthening school systems, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

Importantly, the growing use of data-informed decision-making is noted as an emerging but vital practice among school leaders. Those who use evidence to guide planning, monitoring, and evaluation tend to implement more effective and responsive interventions. Ultimately, school heads who demonstrate transparency, accountability, and flexibility tend to perform better in leading their schools. Their ability to engage teachers, foster collaborative relationships, and adapt leadership approaches to specific school contexts contributes significantly to improved school performance and learner outcomes.

The success of school leadership in BARM depends on a complex interplay of visionary thinking, ethical conduct, effective communication, collaborative strategies, and adaptive management. The findings suggest a strong need for targeted capacity-building programs, ongoing professional development, and systemic support to enhance the leadership capacities of school heads and ensure educational resilience and quality across the region.

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