SCHOOL HEADS' CHALLENGES IN ENHANCING THEIR COMPETENCIES

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the school heads' challenges in enhancing their competencies. In this study, the researcher used a qualitative research methodology by conducting interviews among fifteen (15) school heads. This research was carried out among elementary and secondary school heads of Kidapawan City Division. The respondents of the study were the school heads within the Division of Kidapawan City, holding Principal I, II, and III positions in their respective elementary schools. Additionally, teachers who took part in the research to assess their leader's personality traits and competencies were selected from various schools within the same division. These teachers had been working under the leadership of specific heads for two years or more when providing ratings for their school heads. The qualitative data was evaluated using coding techniques. The researcher employed the theme analysis coding approach as one of the coding strategies in the analysis. Thematic analysis allows for the consolidation of data that exhibits comparable thematic patterns. The responses obtained from the interview processes and questionnaires were categorized in order to identify overall patterns in the perceptions of the respondents. Results of the study identified key themes that describe the challenges faced by school heads, including a lack of training, overlapping responsibilities, establishing relationships with teachers and stakeholders, and insufficient resources. To address these challenges, the coping strategies employed include prioritizing tasks, collaborating with stakeholders, and embracing continuous learning.

Keyword: - *School heads, challenges, and competencies.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Researchers emphasize the importance of school administrators' professional expertise and personal traits in driving their effectiveness as leaders (Friedman, 2020). Personality, particularly innovative behaviors, is highlighted as crucial for managerial success Berinšterová, Bozogáňová, & Pethö, (2023) while adverse traits can predict professional outcomes (Kalinnikova, 2019).

School heads must cultivate personality traits that enhance their effectiveness as educational leaders, as emphasized by recent research from Yildirim (2024). It's essential for administrators to continually acquire new skills to adapt to the evolving educational landscape. Achieving academic excellence requires leadership, strategic foresight, and skillful management of resources, especially human capital and organizational efficacy.

Delport, Jaarsveld, and Challens (2021) emphasize the significant influence of school principals' personality traits on crisis management, potentially correlating with authentic leadership. Damianou, Gdonteli, Kakkos, et., al (2022) asserts that personality strongly influences leadership style.

Töre and Naiboğlu (2022) suggest that understanding a leader's personality attributes can mitigate errors and enhance leadership effectiveness. Specialized training is deemed crucial to address the evolving roles of educational leaders, alongside scrutinizing personality traits that enhance leadership efficiency, as noted by Hayyo and Muhammad (2020).

Existing literature on educational leadership reveals a gap in understanding the interplay between personality traits, professional growth, and competence acquisition in school management. While studies have explored these aspects separately, comprehensive research is lacking on how they intersect to shape effective leadership in school administration.

This dissertation seeks to address this gap by conducting a detailed investigation into the complex dynamics that shape school heads' personality traits, professional growth trajectories, and skillsets.

By doing so, it aims to provide valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of educational leadership, thus offering practical implications for enhancing leadership effectiveness in modern school environments.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher used a qualitative research methodology by conducting interviews among fifteen (15) school heads. This research was carried out among elementary and secondary school heads of Kidapawan City Division.

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The qualitative data was evaluated using coding techniques. The researcher employed the theme analysis coding approach as one of the coding strategies in the analysis. Thematic analysis allows for the consolidation of data that exhibits comparable thematic patterns (Hangel & Schickore, 2017). The responses obtained from the interview processes and questionnaires were categorized in order to identify overall patterns in the perceptions of the respondents.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges confronting the school heads
in developing their competencies

Challenges encountered by school heads in enhancing their competencies were investigated through the collection of qualitative data for this study. Thematic analysis was employed to identify and describe the shared challenges experienced by school heads, resulting in the emergence of key themes. These challenges include a lack of training opportunities, overlapping responsibilities, establishing and nurturing relationships with teachers and stakeholders, as well as inadequate access to essential resources. Table 1 presents a summary of the core ideas underlying these themes along with the corresponding frequency of responses.

Lack of training and possession of essential skills.

The lack of training and essential skills among school heads is a prevalent issue highlighted in the study. School heads commonly face challenges in their roles as they are required to possess and apply necessary skills without prior training. Many school heads expressed their struggles with this aspect, particularly noting the absence of adequate training.

One school head shared their experience of transitioning into the role in 2015, emphasizing the significant challenge posed by the lack of training across various aspects of their work. Having previously served as a Teacher III designated as a Teacher In-Charge (TIC), the individual found themselves unprepared for tasks such as facilitating the preparation of the Annual Implementation Plan (AIP) and other reports due to their limited knowledge in these areas. Through daily experiential learning, the school head gradually acquired skills essential for the role.

> *2015 was the year when I immersed myself in school heads' responsibilities. As a neophyte, the major challenge was my lack of training in all aspects of the work. I was a Teacher III designated TIC that time. Before this designation, I spent my time inside the classroom with my learners. When I became a TIC, I was expected to facilitate the preparation of Annual Implementation Plan (AIP) and many other reports that I was not fully knowledgeable of. I remember learning something each day through experience. IDI-P2*

Furthermore, another participant recounted the impact of insufficient training upon assuming the position of a school head, reflecting on the constant need to address diverse problems and uncertainties. The participant expressed concerns regarding possessing the requisite skills to effectively tackle the array of challenges encountered on a daily basis.

> *While I know the skills to possess, I also questioned myself if I have all these skills as school head since everyday, you meet different types of problems and I just hope I have learned how these problems are to be tackled accordingly. IDI-P7*

Acknowledging the lack of necessary skills, the participants recognized the challenging predicament it placed them in, underscoring the importance of targeted training and professional development to enhance their capabilities as school leaders.

> *There are aspects in school management where training is really needed and the skills of doing it is really very crucial. So, I need to really learn more and get acquainted of it. IDI-P5*
> *I have to admit, there are work which I still need to learn. But of course, these things can be learned. IDI-P7*

Moreover, external factors can hinder school heads from seeking advancement to higher positions, despite their skills development. While experience in their current school environment may enhance leadership skills and motivate aspirations for career progression, practical constraints may limit opportunities for professional growth and recognition, as illustrated by one participant's experience with reclassification and Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points.

> *Being assigned in my current school trained me to work harder, that is, improved my leadership skill in the performance of my work. This led me to be receptive to the possibility of applying for a greater position in the future. However, at the moment, I am neither qualified to apply for a reclassification nor can be granted approval if I apply for PRC-CPD points in our SLAC sessions because of the small number of my teachers. IDI-P4*

Despite these challenges, school heads demonstrate a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities within the school context. To effectively navigate the multifaceted demands of the school environment, school heads must cultivate the competencies required to fulfill their roles and possess a comprehensive understanding of the responsibilities they bear (White-Smith, 2012).

Overlapping responsibilities. School heads also commonly face the challenge of overlapping responsibilities, as they are tasked with overseeing various facets of school management. Participants managing multiple roles highlighted the difficulties that arise when attempting to address competing demands within the school setting. One participant provided a detailed account of their experiences managing diverse school environments, shedding light on the intricate balance required to navigate overlapping responsibilities:

> *Every school has its specific challenges. I was assigned in an integrated school (13 teachers, complete elementary and high school), in a large school (34 teachers, junior and senior high school) and in a small school (5 teachers w/ multigrade classes). In an integrated school, the major challenge was time management. Both the elementary and high school departments had concerns, projects, programs, and activities that must be addressed, implemented, and accomplished. Since there was no assigned assistant principal that time, I was expected to spearhead and oversee all. One or two major concerns emerging in one department could sometimes lead me to not give time to the other department.IDI-P2*

Similar sentiments regarding the burden of workload and overlapping responsibilities were echoed by other school heads, illustrating the complexities inherent in managing diverse tasks within the school setting. These challenges underscore the importance of effective time management, delegation, and strategic prioritization to ensure the efficient operation of the school. School heads face a myriad of challenges in their roles, including the management of time and workload, administrative and financial responsibilities, overlapping program implementations, and the stress induced by these demands.

One participant highlighted the struggle of managing time effectively, especially when dealing with a substantial workload encompassing administrative and financial tasks, as well as the coordination of programs and activities within the Department of Education.

> *The challenges I encountered is how to manage my time in doing my work considering of the bulk of work specially in the administerial and financial management and overlapping of the implementation of programs, activities in our Department of Education.IDI-P1*

Another participant identified three primary challenges faced by school heads, namely handling paperwork and resource management through liquidation, decision-making processes, and fostering parental involvement.

I identified three major challenges or some responsibilities of a school manager. One is paper works or the management of resources through liquidation. That's one. Paper works or the management of resources through liquidation. Number two is decision making and the other one is parental involvement.IDI-P5

Participants also expressed the stress induced by the overlapping of activities and urgent report submissions, leading to time management difficulties and heightened stress levels.

The overlapping of activities, many reports need to be submitted urgently in which tends to have cramming on time management, caused stress in my part.IDI-P7

Moreover, the issue of time constraints was reiterated by several school heads, with the overlapping responsibilities of managing programs, submitting reports, handling financial tasks, and fulfilling obligations at district or division levels posing significant challenges. The multitude of roles and tasks assigned to school heads underscores the complexity of their positions and the need for effective strategies to address these demands.

...But due to the overlapping of program & activities, submission of reports and financial management and other related work of the school head in the district or even in the division level, now it becomes a great challenge to us school heads how we can manage to do of what is mandated to us. IDI-P5

Based on the results of the study, school heads encounter challenges due to overlapping responsibilities, which impact their ability to develop skills and fulfill their tasks effectively within schools. These challenges manifest in difficulties managing workloads, setting priorities, and acquiring the necessary competencies for successful leadership. The presence of overlapping responsibilities can also divert their focus from essential areas of school leadership.

Building relationships with stakeholders. In addition to managing overlapping responsibilities, school heads face the task of building relationships with various stakeholders, particularly teachers and other individuals involved in the educational community. The diverse personalities and characteristics of these stakeholders present a significant challenge for school heads in terms of mentoring, managing, and collaborating with them. One participant shared their experience:

I also encountered a challenge of dealing with teachers since they have different personalities. You cannot easily mentor them or provide technical assistance based on their performance because some may be offended with what you require from them.IDI-P4

Another participant echoed similar sentiments regarding the complexities of working with teachers as an instructional leader, highlighting the continuous challenge of promoting a culture of improvement across all school aspects. This involves ongoing efforts to enhance teaching practices, student outcomes, and organizational processes through professional development initiatives, progress monitoring, and the implementation of improvement strategies.

In dealing with teachers, as instructional leader, along the way, there is also a challenge expected. Promoting a culture of continuous improvement across all aspects of the school, including teaching practices, student outcomes, and organizational processes, requires ongoing effort and commitment. School managers must facilitate professional development, monitor progress, and implement strategies for improvement. IDI-P3

Interacting with stakeholders poses a significant challenge for school heads, as highlighted by participants in the study. Managing people, particularly faculty, staff, learners, parents, and other external stakeholders, presents a complex and demanding task. Participants also expressed the difficulties in navigating various stakeholder relationships and addressing the diverse needs and expectations of each group

Managing people is the most challenging. Faculty and staff are the main people to manage. Learners will be the next and the external factors like parents, and other stakeholders that affect the operation of the school.IDI-P6

> *I must not own the concerns of the management of resources. I must not own the problems of the parental involvement. But this is challenging for me. IDI-P1*

One participant emphasized the struggle of not only managing internal resources but also handling issues related to parental involvement, underscoring the multifaceted challenges faced by school heads in balancing these responsibilities.

> *Building positive relationships with parents, guardians, and the community is essential for the overall success of the school. However, managing communication, addressing concerns, and fostering meaningful engagement can be challenging, especially in diverse communities with varying expectations. Encouraging and maintaining positive relationships with parents, addressing parental concerns, and fostering a collaborative partnership between parents and the school. IDI-P3*

Moreover, the community context presents additional challenges for school management, further compounding the complexities faced by school heads in their roles. The dynamic nature of community interactions and external factors can impact the operational effectiveness of schools, requiring school leaders to navigate and address these challenges proactively.

> *I also want, I also face changes like the culture, the tradition of the community because school is an IP school so I have to abide on the traditions and the culture of our community and also one of the biggest challenges that I have encountered is the crisis during the pandemic time and the earthquake that we had experienced in 2019. So that's the challenges that I have encountered so far. IDI-P6*

The findings indicate that school leaders encounter difficulties in managing stakeholders, which is an integral part of their roles. Fullan (2001) highlights the significance of collaboration among schools, parents, and the community to foster student success. By actively involving parents and establishing partnerships with the community, school heads can cultivate a supportive and enriching learning environment that improves student learning outcomes and enhances overall school effectiveness.

Table 1. Themes and Core Ideas on Challenges confronting the school heads in developing their competencies.

Themes	Frequency	Core Ideas
Lack of training and possession of essential skills	General	✚ Lack to no training opportunities for new school heads ✚ Being assigned as school head without prior trainings and orientation ✚ Lack of required skills
Overlapping responsibilities	General	✚ Workload issues ✚ Time elements in implementing plans and managing the school operations
Building relationships with teachers and stakeholders	Typical	✚ Dealing with different attitudes and perspectives ✚ Dealing with diverse personalities
Lack of school resources	General	✚ Unaddressed school needs ✚ Lack of school learning and teaching resources

Legend: 51% and above-General; 25% to 50%-Typical; 24% and below-Variant

Lack of school resources. A lack of school resources can pose a significant challenge. Insufficient resources can make it challenging for school leaders to effectively manage the school and deliver education services. One school head mentioned the inadequacy of resources, particularly in terms of learning facilities.

> *the lack of school area because we only have 800 square meter. So we don't have enough area for sports activities and other related activities for the sports and we lack of tables and chairs for our pupils. We are really lacking in schools, in chairs and even in our teachers because we have disallowed tables and chairs for textbooks, we cannot buy them from MOE. IDI-P4*

This situation is primarily attributed to budget constraints within the school.

> *As to what I have said a while ago, those are challenges I have encountered also, but specifically, what plays a big impact is the financial management, where school will never be as progressive as to what is supposed to because of lack of budget. Everything will be affected by not having enough budget. That's why, even the personal money intended for family expenses will be used for school to sustain some other expenses also. IDI-P3*

The study underscores the struggles school administrators face due to resource shortages. Effective school management requires careful budgeting and resourcefulness to overcome these challenges. With limited budgets, school leaders must make difficult decisions to prioritize essential needs with the available resources. Insufficient financial support from government sources or budgetary restrictions at the local level can restrict the school's ability to address all needs adequately. By addressing these financial constraints and enhancing budget management practices, schools can strive towards creating a more conducive learning environment for both students and staff. Prioritizing resource allocation and exploring innovative solutions can help mitigate the impact of budget limitations on educational outcomes.

Coping Mechanisms of the School Heads to Address the Challenges Encountered

School heads have implemented coping mechanisms to tackle the challenges they face. Table 2 outlines the themes, their frequencies, and core ideas. The identified themes include prioritizing, collaborating with stakeholders, and embracing continuous learning.

Prioritizing: School heads acknowledge the challenge of juggling multiple tasks simultaneously, leading to difficulties in addressing all responsibilities. To cope with this issue, they emphasize the importance of prioritizing tasks effectively. They emphasized the importance of setting priorities and maintaining a structured schedule:

> *manage my time by having a to-do-list and prioritizing what to be prioritized and by doing so I am progressing and learning a lot as time passes by and hoping to be more effective and become dynamic leader of my school. IDI-P1*

Another school head shared similar coping strategies for handling workload and conflicting activities:

> *I have to agree with the teachers on what to do next after an activity and what activity can be postpone and what to focus on. Getting ideas form them about vacant period for the activity is part of the effort of prioritizing.*
>
> *Also, I consult my teachers on what should be the priority activity in school and what can be postpone for the next schedule. IDI-P6*

In addition to prioritizing tasks, utilizing time-efficient techniques is crucial:

> *What are their needs and their concerns in their classroom like in the teachers' materials. So that's really my priority, the teachers' materials. And at the same time, there are teachers who spent a lot in DLL because they know that there are ways to do it, like using the template of multi-grain because they know how to use the DLL. IDI-P5*

Prioritization plays a vital role in enabling school heads to manage resources effectively, make informed decisions, and address immediate needs within the school environment. In this study, school heads are employing prioritization to manage time constraints associated with various activities and programs they need to oversee. School leaders have the heavy responsibilities on school development along with their wide range of skills (Otto & Lumapenet, 2022).

Collaborating with stakeholders. Another effective coping mechanism utilized by school heads is collaborating with stakeholders. By engaging with the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and the School Governing Council (SGC), school leaders seek support to address challenges related to school relationships, program implementation, and other pertinent issues.

> *I just dare to also monitor the program to still collaborate with the PTA in terms of doing that one. Because the school head and teachers know the real needs of the school. But we must not own the problem and we are going to allow these communities and these partners to*

> *address their problems. That is why I am strengthening my SGC today so that every sector has a representative in the council. IDI-P4*

> *we tap our Parents Teachers Association and as well as the ahhh…Teachers Association in the school, to have a fundraising, noooh…, in order to, you know. In order to have a bud---budget for the implementation of other programs and projects. IDI-P6*

Another school head shared that when problem arise in school is it good to consult teachers and ensure to establish good working relationship with them, so everyone take the role in solving the problem.

> *We need to collaborate not only with stakeholders but also with teachers, our internal stakeholders. Their voices really matters and so there is need to have good communication with the teachers if we wanted also to establish good relationships. IDI-P3*

Another participant emphasized the need to collaborate and to have linkages.

> *These challenges define the leadership skills of a leader to manage the organization he is supervising or leading. Building connections/linkages are very important skills a leader must possess. IDI-P1*

Collaborating with stakeholders is fundamental for effective school leadership, fostering shared decision-making and creating a culture of partnership, innovation, and continuous improvement. By promoting collaboration, school leaders can leverage collective expertise and resources to address challenges, drive initiatives, and achieve common goals (Day, 2020). Further, stakeholders were known to be supportive on school developments (Bangcas, Lumapenet & Peralta, 2022).

Embracing learning. Embracing a culture of continuous learning is essential for school leaders to overcome knowledge gaps and tackle challenges effectively. For instance, one school head views her role as a continuous learning journey:

> *When I became a TIC, I was expected to facilitate the preparation of Annual Implementation Plan (AIP) and many other reports that I was not fully knowledgeable of. I remember learning something each day through experience. IDI-P3*

> *I am progressing and learning a lot as time passes by and hoping to be more effective and become dynamic leader of my school. IDI-P1*

> *Establish rules to follow that is true to all following the standards set by the department if it is Deped. IDI-P2*

By learning, one can improve leadership skill – this the belief of the participants of the study.

> *I do believe that the school could really grow and improve, because you're going to do. With the tasks that we have to do everyday, we will really have a room for improvement. IDI-P4*

In addition, school heads need to be knowledgeable about mandates and guidelines.

> *Dealing with people is not an easy task. This requires maximum consideration. Establish rules to follow that is true to all following the standards set by the department if it is Deped. IDI-P3*

Other participants also shared that they are very eager to also learn on their own.

> *I do self-learning and learning from experiences. IDI-P5*

Embracing a culture of continuous learning is vital for effective school leadership, enabling school heads to adapt to new challenges, enhance their skills, and glean valuable insights from various experiences. Learning serves as a powerful tool for addressing training deficiencies and navigating unfamiliar situations within the educational landscape. This is manifested in the study conducted by Buday and Lumapenet (2023) that the school administrators are skilled in terms of instructional supervision; organizational and personal management; planning, assessing and reporting; school plant, resources, and facilities; personal, social growth and professional development; and school, community linkages and public relation.

Table 2. Themes and Core Ideas on Coping Mechanisms of the School Heads to Address the Challenges
         Encountered.

Themes	Frequency	Core Ideas
Prioritizing	General	✦ Having to do list and setting priority activities ✦ Managing time accordingly
Collaborating with stakeholders	General	✦ Getting PTA and SCG support ✦ Working hand in hand with teachers and stakeholders
Embracing learning	Typical	✦ Learning from others ✦ Self-learning

Legend: 51% and above-General; 25% to 50%-Typical; 24% and below-Variant

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study suggests that there are factors influencing the competencies of school heads that warrant further exploration. The qualitative analysis identified several challenges faced by school heads, including inadequate training, overlapping responsibilities, establishing rapport with teachers and stakeholders, and a lack of resources. Coping mechanisms such as prioritization, collaboration with stakeholders, and a commitment to continuous learning emerged as effective strategies to address these challenges.

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