

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AMONG NOVICE SCHOOL HEADS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the challenges and support needs of novice school heads within the broader framework of school leadership, with particular attention to the Philippine educational context. Globally, educational systems have placed increasing demands on school leaders, requiring them to balance administrative responsibilities, improve student outcomes, and ensure the overall well-being of school communities. Novice principals, however, often assume these complex roles with limited preparation and inadequate institutional support. Locally, additional constraints such as limited resources, complex school dynamics, and evolving policy expectations further complicate their leadership responsibilities.

Grounded in relevant literature and policy frameworks, including the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001 (Republic Act No. 9155), this research explores both the leadership and management functions of novice school heads—ranging from instructional supervision and teacher evaluation to resource allocation and stakeholder engagement. Empirical findings from prior studies (e.g., Sirait, 2020; Samah, 2021; Castañeros et al., 2023) reveal that new principals frequently struggle with low self-efficacy, isolation, and limited leadership knowledge, all of which can hinder their effectiveness in leading school improvement efforts.

Through a qualitative lens, this study aims to identify the specific challenges faced by novice school leaders and to examine existing and potential support mechanisms that could enhance their leadership capacity. By focusing on the lived experiences of these school heads, the research seeks to generate actionable insights for policy makers, training institutions, and school systems. Ultimately, the study contributes to the discourse on school leadership development and underscores the importance of comprehensive preparation and sustained support in enabling novice principals to succeed in their roles.

Keyword: - Novice School Heads, School Leadership, School Management, Instructional Supervision

1. INTRODUCTION

The global educational landscape highlights concern about the ability of school leaders to meet the increasing demands of education systems. Novice school heads face challenges such as balancing administrative tasks, improving student outcomes, and ensuring well-being, often with limited preparation and support. Locally, additional pressures like scarce resources and complex school dynamics intensify these struggles, making effective leadership crucial for maximizing school autonomy and performance.

School leadership encompasses both leadership responsibilities, such as setting goals and evaluating teachers, and management tasks, including resource allocation and teacher deployment (UNESCO, 2022; Vaillant, 2022). Effective school management involves establishing a structured organization while maintaining oversight of teachers and students (Day and Sammons, 2023; UNESCO, 2023). Furthermore, school leaders play a pivotal role in fostering community and family participation, which is critical for a school's success (UNICEF, 2023). In the Philippine context, the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001 (Republic Act No. 9155) underscores the importance of school heads as trained, accountable leaders responsible for institutionalized school improvement. Studies, such as Sirait (2020), highlight that the quality of school leadership directly impacts teacher performance and teaching skills, emphasizing the significant influence of leadership on educational outcomes. Moreover, number of studies have explored the complexities and challenges of school leadership, particularly among novice heads. According to Narina A. Samah (2021), the study of novice principals in Malaysia reveals that many of new principals encounter difficulties in areas such as instructional leadership, administrative tasks, and managing stakeholder relationships, often due to a lack of adequate preparation and support. discusses common snares that new principals face, including leadership challenges, instructional missteps, communication issues, and financial management faux pas. It emphasizes that many novice principals are unprepared for the multifaceted nature of their roles and offers strategies to navigate these challenges effectively.

Along with the system, many related studies have identified several challenges encountered by novice school heads in their leadership roles. A 2023 case study by Castañeros et al. highlighted several challenges faced by novice school heads, including difficulties in staff supervision, work-life balance, and managing school operations, often compounded by inadequate preparation and support. Studies highlight issues such as isolation, low self-efficacy, and limited leadership knowledge, which can hinder their effectiveness. In the Philippine context, novice principals also struggle with planning, collaboration, and adapting to evolving educational demands. These findings stress the need for comprehensive training and robust support systems to equip new school heads for effective leadership.

This study aims to fill the gap by examining the specific needs and challenges faced by novice school heads, as well as the support mechanisms that can aid them in their early years of leadership. By focusing on both the local context and the unique experiences of novice leaders, this research will contribute valuable insights into how school leadership can be developed more effectively. The findings will not only inform educational policies but also provide practical recommendations for schools and training institutions to better support novice school heads, ensuring that they are well-equipped to lead their schools successfully.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive-evaluative method to explore the experiences of novice academic heads in leading and managing their teachers. This approach is well-suited for examining current practices and their effectiveness, combining detailed descriptions with evaluative assessments to provide insights into leadership behaviors. Karimi and Khawaja (2023) emphasized the relevance of this method in educational leadership research, noting its capacity to capture the complexities of leadership roles through mixed methods and evaluative designs.

The study investigates the challenges, learning experiences, and realizations of novice academic heads, focusing on leadership performance in school management, staff supervision, instructional management, student performance, stakeholder engagement, and work-life balance. It also evaluates their instructional supervisory practices, including curriculum knowledge, teaching strategies, ICT integration, classroom management, and support for diverse learners.

Data collection involves the pre-distribution of surveys or questionnaires to respondents, with responses tabulated and analyzed statistically to align with the study's objectives. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and coping mechanisms of novice school heads.

2.2 Research Locale

This study encompasses all DepEd Elementary Teachers in Cluster 2 of Surigao del Sur, which includes the districts of Lianga, Barobo, Tagbina, Hinatuan, and Lingig. These districts are easily accessible by land vehicles and boats, offering a diverse geography that includes both mainland and island communities. Known for their scenic landscapes, these areas are popular among tourists, frequently featured in vlogs and widely recognized on social media platforms. The study was conducted in this region to explore the school leadership dynamics of novice school leaders in a context that blends both rural and coastal communities.



Figure -1 Map of the study

2.3 Research Respondents

The Elementary school teachers of DepEd Cluster 2 in the division of Surigao del Sur were the respondents on this study. Table 1 defined the distribution of respondents of the study. The respondents will be identified and chosen using the Complete Enumeration Method and distributed by district.

Table -1 Distribution of Respondents

District	Novice School Heads (0 -7 years of experience)			Over all Total
	TIC	Head Teacher	Principal	
Liang	0	2	1	3
Barobo 1	3	2	0	5
Barobo 2	3	0	3	6
Tagbina 1	2	8	2	12
Tagbina 2	2	2	0	4
Hinatuan South	2	4	2	8
Hinatuan North	6	0	0	6
Lingig 1	8	1	0	9
Lingig 2	4	0	1	5
Total	30	19	9	58

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of respondents across the five districts involved in the study. The respondents are novice school heads with zero to seven years of experience, with a total of 58 participants. Tagbina 1 district has the highest number of respondents of 12, followed by Lingig 1 with 9, Hinatuan South 8, Barobo and Hinatuan North have 6, Lingig 2 has 5, Tagbina 2 has 4 while Lianga has the lowest number which is 3. This distribution provides a comprehensive representation of the targeted group for the study.

2.4 Research Instrument

The survey questionnaire which is a researcher-made will be the main tool in gathering the needed data and information from the teachers. With this, the researcher will be able to craft a questionnaire which would answer the queries of this study. This questionnaire will be undergoing validation of experts before it will be used in the survey. Cronbach Alpha will be used to determine the reliability test of the questionnaire which is 87%. In validation purposes, researcher initially will be submitted a questionnaire. After approval, these will be distributed to other schools which were will not be identified respondents of this study. Suggestions or any necessary corrections shall be asked to ensure further improvement and validity of the instrument.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The table 2 presents the profile of the respondents as to sex, age, Educational Attainment, position, length of service, and the relevant trainings attended. As reflected on the table 2 below, the gender distribution shows a relatively balanced workforce, with males comprising 57% and females 43%, suggesting a modest male predominance in the educational leadership roles analyzed. The dominant age group falls within the 40–49 years

bracket with a highest percentage of 52%, followed by 30–39 years with 29%, which points to a workforce that is generally in the midcareer stage, potentially with a solid foundation of experience and leadership maturity.

Educational attainment data reveals that a majority hold at least a Baccalaureate Degree or have acquired graduate level units, with 34% having a baccalaureate and another 34% holding MAED units. This indicates a potential gap in advanced academic qualifications among the leadership, which may have implications for long-term academic development strategies and mentoring capacities.

Table -1 Profile of the Respondents

Indicator	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	33	57
	Female	25	43
	Total	58	100
Age	20-29 years old	1	2
	30-39 years old	17	29
	40-49 years old	30	52
	50-59 years old	10	17
	Total	58	100
Educational Attainment	BACCALAUREATE DEGREE	20	34
	MAED UNITS	20	34
	MAED CAR	12	21
	MAED FULL PLEDGE	2	3
	PhD/EdD CAR	2	3
	PhD/EdD FULL PLEDGE	2	3
	Total	58	100
Position	Teacher-in-charge	30	52
	Head Teacher	19	33
	Principal	9	16
	Total	58	100
Length of service	1-3 YEARS	27	47
	4-7 YEARS	31	53
	Total	58	100
Relevant Trainings	Division	35	60
	Regional	18	31
	National	4	7
	International	1	2
	Total	58	100

The data presented in Table 3 illustrates the extent of immersion management among novice school heads across seven key domains. Overall, the school leaders received a very high rating, with an overall mean score of 4.37, indicating strong performance in their roles. Each domain highlights specific strengths and weaknesses that provide insight into the leadership capacities of these new administrators. In the domain of School Management, the highest rated indicator was the ability to effectively allocate and utilize available resources with a weighted mean of 4.45, suggesting that resource management is a notable strength among novice heads. The lowest rated item in this category, though still rated very high, was the fostering of collaboration with the wider school community with a weighted mean of 4.34. This implies a minor gap in community engagement that may warrant attention.

Within Staff Supervision and Development, the most positively perceived competency was facilitating clear communication between leadership and staff with a weighted mean of 4.47. In contrast, assessing skill gaps and implementing capacity building initiatives received the lowest rating at 4.09, suggesting that strategic professional development may be an area for improvement despite the overall very high performance in this domain.

The Instructional Management and Supervision domain revealed the highest single score in the entire dataset, with the ability to monitor and evaluate instructional programs with a weighted mean of 4.60. This indicates a strong focus on teaching and learning outcomes. However, the development of localized and contextualized policies scored significantly lower weighted mean of 3.43, signaling a clear need for further training in adapting educational frameworks to suit specific school contexts a critical leadership competency.

In the area of Student Performance Management, the highest indicator was assigned to facilitating a well-balanced curriculum with a weighted mean of 4.43, while ensuring a safe and supportive learning environment received the lowest weighted mean at 4.31. These scores, though close, highlight the prioritization of curricular

innovation over policy implementation in ensuring student success. Stakeholders Management achieved the highest category mean of 4.73, with the most effective behavior being open communication with stakeholders with a weighted mean of 4.43. This result points to a strong ability of novice school heads to build partnerships and foster community support, which is essential for school development. However, engaging stakeholders through collaborative planning was the lowest rated within weighted mean of 4.21, indicating room to enhance participatory leadership practices.

The Dealing with Predecessor domain had the lowest overall category mean at 4.17. While acknowledging predecessor expectations was rated at 4.21, other aspects such as upholding established standards and fostering collaboration during transitions received lower scores, highlighting a potential weakness in succession management. Lastly, the Work Life Balance Perspective domain showed high awareness of professional boundaries, with the highest rating given to setting clear boundaries with a weighted mean of 4.36. However, the ability to delegate tasks to maintain work life balance had the lowest rating at 4.07, implying that while novice heads recognize the importance of balance, they may struggle with practical delegation.

Table -2 Extent of Immersion management of the Novice School Heads

Indicators	Mean	Adjectival Rating
School Management	4.38	Very High
Staff Supervisory	4.32	Very High
Instructional Management	4.20	Very High
Student Performance Management	4.38	Very High
Stakeholders Management	4.73	Very High
Dealing with Predecessors	4.17	High
Work life Balance Perspective	4.42	Very High
Over-all Mean	4.37	Very High

Based on the data presented in Table 4 above the Level of Instructional Supervisory of Novice School Heads, the analysis reveals meaningful insights into the strengths and areas for development among novice school administrators.

Table -3 Level of Instructional Supervisory of Novice School Heads

Indicators	Mean	Adjectival Rating
Provide knowledge of content within curriculum areas;	4.14	High
Evaluate the used of teaching strategies that enhance learner achievement in literacy and numeracy;	4.19	High
Monitor the utilization of ICT in teaching and learning process;	3.95	High
Assesses used of effective and non- effective verbal and non-verbal classroom strategies;	4.09	High
Maintain and support learning environment;	4.33	Very High
Designate teachers to adapt and implement strategies for disable, gifted and talented;	3.98	High
Check and monitor the deliberation of the lesson planning and strategies	4.14	High
Over-all Mean	4.117	High

The highest-rated indicator is the ability to maintain and support learning environment, with a mean score of 4.33, categorized as Very High. This finding aligns with recent international studies that emphasize the importance of school leadership in fostering supportive learning atmospheres, which directly contribute to improved student outcomes (OECD, 2023). This implies that novice school heads excel in creating and sustaining conducive educational environments, which are vital for effective teaching and learning.

Conversely, the lowest rated indicator, with a mean of 3.95, pertains to the ability to monitor the utilization of ICT in the teaching and learning process. This aligns with UNESCO's (2023) findings, which call for greater integration of ICT competencies in school leadership development programs, especially in a post-pandemic context where digital learning is more prevalent than ever. This implies that while novice heads may have foundational leadership skills, there is a pressing need for enhanced training in digital literacy and instructional technology

oversight. While still rated as High, it highlights a relative weakness in digital supervision skills. The overall mean score of 4.12, which also falls under the High category, indicates that novice school heads are generally competent in their supervisory roles. This consistency suggests that novice school heads are meeting expected performance standards across multiple domains of instructional supervision.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The findings present a profile of a relatively young and mid-career academic leadership workforce that is still developing in terms of experience, academic qualifications, and professional exposure. While the gender distribution is moderately balanced and the leadership is grounded in middle-management, the scarcity of advanced degrees and international development engagement reveals critical growth areas. This situation points to an education leadership system in transition, with strong potential but requiring strategic support to meet future challenges.

Novice school heads exhibit a high level of immersion in their managerial roles, excelling in instructional leadership, communication, and stakeholder engagement. However, the findings point to critical gaps in policy contextualization, succession planning, and strategic staff development. These areas, while not drastically underperforming, reflect underlying challenges in transitioning from management to visionary leadership. The results emphasize the importance of not only equipping new school leaders with foundational skills but also empowering them with adaptive strategies to respond to specific school contexts.

The findings implies that novice school heads are fulfilling their instructional supervisory responsibilities at a competent level, particularly in maintaining effective learning environments a critical factor in enhancing student achievement. However, the data also indicates a relative shortfall in ICT related supervision, which is increasingly vital in today's technology integrated education systems. This means that the leadership foundation of novice school heads is solid, there is a clear need for skill enhancement in specific, evolving areas of instructional supervision. The results underscore the importance of understanding the multifaceted nature of school leadership. The significant relationship between profile variables and immersion management effectiveness suggest that leadership competencies cannot be developed through a uniform approach. Instead, novice school heads bring with them diverse experiences and characteristics that directly affect their leadership performance.

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