

Understanding early career school leadership: Management practices, performances, challenges, and professional support systems

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the relationship between management practices and performance, the differences in their indicators, the challenges encountered, and the developmental support systems for beginning school heads in the First District of the Schools Division of Oriental Mindoro as basis for a proposed early career leadership training program. The study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. The quantitative participants included 137 teachers, 32 beginning school heads, and 8 public school district supervisors, while the qualitative participants consisted of 19 beginning school heads and 6 public school district supervisors. Data were gathered through a self-made questionnaire, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. Findings revealed that beginning school heads demonstrated high levels of management practices and very satisfactory performance, particularly in school leadership and management operations. However, weaknesses were identified in data-driven planning, resource management, delegation, and technical leadership skills. A significant relationship was found between management practices and leadership performance, indicating that stronger managerial competencies contribute to better school outcomes. Beginning school heads also experienced challenges related to leadership transition, administrative workload, instructional supervision, limited resources, and stakeholder management, which affected the consistency of their performance. Although coaching, mentoring, and technical assistance were available, the study concluded that support systems remained insufficiently structured. Thus, the study recommended strengthening professional development programs, mentoring systems, technical assistance, monitoring mechanisms, and collaborative learning networks, alongside the implementation of a structured early career leadership development program.

Keywords: Management practices, performance, challenges encountered, developmental support systems, early career leadership training program.

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INTRODUCTION

The management practices, performance, and developmental needs of beginning school heads have become an increasingly urgent concern within the global discourse on educational leadership. School heads, particularly those in their first three years of service, are confronted with mounting pressures to navigate the complex, accountability driven demands of modern educational institutions. Although most of them transition directly from teaching and middle management positions, many still struggle to adjust to the responsibilities of formal leadership, often experiencing heightened administrative burdens and role ambiguity as they shift from classroom based functions to organizational leadership (Castañeros, Tañajura, & Tan, 2023). Given the well established link between school heads' performance and overall school outcomes, this transitional period demands sustained and structured early career support.

Central to this transition is the acquisition of effective management skills, which contemporary literature on school leadership frames as extending well beyond instructional supervision to encompass strategic planning, resource allocation, human resource development, and change management. Management competence, understood through the interrelated functions of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling, is therefore indispensable for beginning school heads seeking to fulfill their roles and cultivate effective school environments. These heightened expectations, compounded by pressure to deliver quality performance and satisfy stakeholders, render the early years of school leadership particularly fraught with challenges (Castañeros et al., 2023). Addressing these demands requires a reliable and sustainable developmental support system, one that may take the form of onboarding programs, mentoring, and capacity building initiatives aligned with the professional career stages articulated in the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (2020). Empirical evidence supports this premise: when beginning school heads receive adequate structured support such as mentoring and targeted training, they tend to demonstrate marked improvements in confidence, efficacy, and overall performance (Doe & Miller, 2021).

Despite this growing body of literature, a research gap persists. Much of the existing scholarship concentrates narrowly on instructional or general leadership competencies without adequately addressing the distinct challenges of the beginning career stage in school leadership. This study seeks to fill that gap by focusing specifically on the management practices, challenges, and developmental support systems relevant to beginning school heads. This concern is not merely theoretical but grounded in local realities: a preliminary survey conducted in the First District of the Schools Division of Oriental Mindoro revealed that beginning school heads commonly encounter difficulties in budget preparation, staff supervision, and instructional monitoring, difficulties that directly hinder their capacity to fulfill their management and leadership responsibilities. These findings underscore the necessity of a deeper examination of management practices alongside the design of support mechanisms responsive to these specific needs.

The study is anchored on Republic Act No. 9155, otherwise known as the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, which vests school heads with responsibility for the administrative and instructional supervision of their schools (Philippines Senate, 2001), as well as on Department of Education Order No. 24, s. 2020, which implements the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads and defines the career stages of school heads, stages in which structured support and continuous professional development are explicitly emphasized. Building on this legal and policy foundation, the study aims to produce an Early Career Leadership Training Program tailored to the context specific dimensions that emerge from the data gathered. Such a program is intended not only to enhance the management skills of beginning school heads but also to institutionalize the structured support system necessary

for their successful transition into leadership roles, thereby offering district offices and schools a practical tool for strengthening school leadership at this critical stage of professional growth.

The importance of school leadership in shaping institutional performance is well documented in the literature. Toralde (2020) observed that school improvement is closely tied to leadership capacity, while Clemente (2020) argued that school managers must be capable of enhancing academic performance, managing limited resources, fostering positive school culture, and innovating across both instructional and organizational domains. Both perspectives converge on the centrality of school leadership in driving institutional change, a convergence that justifies anchoring the present study's assessment of management practices to the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads. Complementing this emphasis on leadership capacity is the recognized importance of empowerment in school management. Alcantara (2020) underscored the value of delegation and trust, Brolund (2020) highlighted the articulation of a clear vision, and Yukl (2020) emphasized continuous professional growth as essential to empowerment, collectively suggesting that school heads must cultivate not only technical competence but also a broader capacity to inspire and enable others. Gaziel (2020) further situated school heads as instructional leaders, reinforcing the multidimensional nature of the role.

These themes converge into six indicators of management practice examined in this study: planning and goal setting, organizing and delegating, supervising and monitoring instruction, resource and financial management, communication and stakeholder engagement, and professional development and coaching. Planning and goal setting establish direction for school programs, with Li (2021) stressing that goals must be clear and measurable to support sound decision-making, effective resource allocation, and sustained improvement, while Chen (2022) added that stakeholder involvement in this process is equally vital. Organizing and delegating, meanwhile, determine how tasks are distributed efficiently and collaboratively; Gomez (2020) emphasized that delegation should promote trust, accountability, and professional growth, while Santos (2021) noted that sound organizational structures ensure smooth operations, allowing beginning school heads to avoid being overwhelmed when responsibilities are distributed in a structured manner. Supervising and monitoring instruction, in turn, safeguards the quality of teaching and learning; Cruz (2022) described instructional supervision as a continuous process of observation, feedback, and support intended to enhance teacher performance, a developmental orientation that Rivera (2023) affirmed as necessary for fostering professional growth, particularly among beginning school heads who require effective supervisory practices to guide their newly assumed roles. Resource and financial management similarly demands efficiency, transparency, and accountability, with Dela Cruz (2021) emphasizing skilled financial stewardship as a means of translating inputs into measurable educational goals, and Herrera (2022) reinforcing the pivotal role of financial management in converting institutional goals into reality. Communication and stakeholder engagement further facilitate school community partnerships, as Villanueva (2020) highlighted the importance of open communication in building such partnerships, while Garcia (2022) pointed to shared decision-making and joint accountability as complementary mechanisms. Finally, professional development and coaching remain essential to sustained growth, with Lopez (2023) emphasizing the need for relevance in professional development and Reyes (2021) noting that coaching serves to translate theory into classroom practice, both processes ultimately contributing to improved student outcomes.

Performance among beginning school heads is typically assessed across six parallel dimensions: instructional leadership, learning environment, human resource management, parental involvement, community partnership, and overall school leadership and management

operations. Instructional leadership is oriented toward promoting effective teaching and learning (Marotta & Nardi, 2021; Cai et al., 2021), and is reinforced through strategic planning, vision setting, professional development, and data informed decision-making, practices that Bryson (2020) and Alonderiene and Majauskaite (2021) linked to stronger instructional leadership among beginning school heads who engage in data driven planning. Leadership practices likewise shape the broader learning environment, as Leithwood and Jantzi (2020) emphasized the importance of positive leadership, Sergiovanni (2020) stressed the need for collaborative school cultures, and Waters and Marzano (2020) affirmed that strong leadership enhances the overall school environment. Human resource management constitutes another critical performance dimension, with Huang et al. (2020) arguing for consistent practices in staff recruitment, development, and support, and Mirandilla (2020) together with Janer and Deri (2020) emphasizing that professional growth and a positive work environment are essential for organizational prosperity. Parental involvement and community partnership similarly bear on performance outcomes, as Fan and Chen (2021) described how parental engagement influences learning achievement, while Houchens and Keedy (2020) underscored the value of community collaboration, a point extended by Delgado-Gaitan (2020) and Epstein (2020) in their emphasis on maximizing community assets. Finally, effective school leadership and management operations require distributed leadership and sound decision-making, as Spillane et al. (2020) and Smylie (2020) cautioned against viewing leadership as the responsibility of a single individual, while Boerrigter (2020) argued that transparent decision-making is fundamental to sound school management.

Notwithstanding these established indicators of practice and performance, beginning school heads continue to face substantial challenges that constrain their effectiveness. Foremost among these is the difficulty of balancing administrative responsibilities with instructional leadership, a tension that Robinson and Timperley (2020) observed complicates the work of beginning school heads, and which Reyes (2022) further linked to the struggle of juggling workload pressures alongside evolving policy changes. Resource limitations compound these difficulties, with Santos (2023) noting that budget constraints and inadequate facilities impede school initiatives, teacher development, and infrastructure improvement. Cultural and relational challenges present an additional obstacle, as beginning school heads, being new to their roles, must first earn the trust of their school community and adapt to existing norms and organizational culture (Cruz, 2021). Limited experience in instructional supervision further undermines the quality of feedback and technical assistance that beginning school heads can provide (Dela Cruz, 2022), while insufficient professional development and mentoring contribute to inconsistencies in management practice, a gap that Villanueva (2023) attributed to the absence of sustained training opportunities. Collectively, these challenges affect instructional leadership, strategic planning, human resource management, stakeholder engagement, and operational effectiveness, reinforcing the argument that sustainable support systems are indispensable at this stage of professional growth.

In response to these challenges, beginning school heads currently benefit, to varying degrees, from induction programs, mentoring, professional development, and collaborative learning communities. Watts (2022) and Brank and Vagi (2020) emphasized that structured onboarding and coaching build confidence among beginning school heads, while Ingersoll and Strong (2021) and Jerdborg (2023) found that mentorship improves decision-making, resilience, and instructional leadership. Professional development and collaborative learning communities further support this growth, as Bush and Glover (2020) highlighted the importance of targeted training and collaborative platforms were noted to serve as venues for collective problem-solving (2020). Additional areas requiring support include strategic planning skills (Zepeda, 2020), financial management competence (Muring, 2018), cultural competence in engaging indigenous communities (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2019), and attention

to mental health (Goleman, 2020), with continuous professional development through leadership training programs remaining a recurring recommendation across the literature (Hallinger & Murphy, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020).

Designing an effective Early Career Leadership Training Program therefore requires a structured, competency based approach. Liljenberg (2020) described how such training should align closely with actual leadership practices, exhibiting phased development and continuous assessment while focusing on specific competencies such as instructional supervision, resource management, communication, and stakeholder engagement. Literature further suggests that incorporating mentoring, peer collaboration, and action learning enhances leadership development (van Nieuwerburgh et al., 2020), while sustainability is best achieved through continuous monitoring and a functional feedback mechanism.

A review of empirical studies further substantiates these themes and points toward remaining gaps. Kılınç and Gümüş (2021) examined the experiences, challenges, and support available to beginning school heads, concluding that while existing studies address this population, more longitudinal research is needed to trace the effects of early career development on school performance over time. Watts (2022) similarly studied the supports available to beginning principals and their effects on wellbeing and performance, finding that formal induction, mentoring, coaching, and peer collaboration substantially benefit beginning school heads and recommending policies that institutionalize team based mentoring, scheduled peer learning, and tailored professional development. Jerdborg (2023) found that beginning school heads frequently struggle to balance day to day managerial tasks, such as scheduling, resource allocation, and personnel matters, with the more time consuming work of instructional leadership, noting that outcomes improve when pedagogy, teacher development, and student achievement are prioritized. Avolio et al. (2020) similarly found that beginning school heads experience considerable stress as they adapt to new administrative responsibilities, recommending continuous mentoring and professional development opportunities to help them cope. Chen and Chen (2020), examining beginning school heads in Taiwan, found that transformational leadership predominated among the styles employed, though challenges related to time management, workload, and stakeholder communication persisted.

These findings resonate with international studies conducted in other contexts. Agboola and Olayiwola (2020), examining beginning school heads in Nigeria, identified inadequate resources, lack of support from higher level authorities, and resistance from teachers as key challenges contributing to poor school performance. He, Guo, and Abazie (2024) established a direct correlation between principals' instructional leadership and teachers' professional development, concluding that beginning school heads who prioritize organized, capacity building instructional activities produce measurable gains in teacher practice, and recommending that onboarding programs emphasize observable instructional leadership actions. Moreno (2024) examined how managerial competence, spanning planning and goal setting, organizing and delegating, supervising and monitoring instruction, resource and financial management, managing school operations, communication and stakeholder engagement, and professional development and coaching, affects teacher morale, concluding that effective management practices improve school heads' performance and recommending the establishment of structured transition support. Richard (2024) similarly found that effective planning and goal setting, organizing and delegating, supervising and monitoring instruction, resource and financial management, managing school operations, communication, and professional development directly influence beginning school heads' performance outcomes, concluding that strengthening these practices constitutes an important predictor of

leadership effectiveness and recommending structured mentoring and professional development programs.

Taken together, the reviewed literature and empirical studies converge on a consistent theme: the success of beginning school heads depends on the interplay of sound management practices, measurable performance outcomes, and responsive support systems, while their early years remain marked by persistent challenges in balancing administrative and instructional demands amid limited resources and support. This convergence points to a clear and pressing need for a deliberately planned early career leadership program capable of strengthening the leadership capacity of beginning school heads. The present study draws on this substantial body of scholarship as its foundation, proposing an Early Career Leadership Training Program that bridges theory and practice through research based, data driven solutions responsive to the realities of the Philippine public school system.

To ground this inquiry theoretically, the study draws on three complementary frameworks: Transformational Leadership Theory, Organizational Performance Theory, and Transition Theory. Burns' (1978) Transformational Leadership Theory, further developed by Bass in 1985, centers on the leader's capacity to redirect followers' motivation from self interest toward broader institutional goals through four principles: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, principles that respectively involve ethical conduct and role modeling, the articulation of a shared vision, openness to new strategies, and mentoring. Applied to this study, beginning school heads are expected to inspire teachers by managing change and cultivating a shared vision aligned with the Department of Education's goals, with planning and goal setting, supervising and monitoring instruction, and professional development all requiring the transformational behaviors that this theory describes.

This is complemented by Devinney's (2009) Organizational Performance Theory, which holds that organizational success depends on the effective translation of inputs into desired outputs through the principles of efficiency, effectiveness, and goal attainment. Within this framework, an institution functions as an integrated whole in which resources, structures, and human capital must align toward a common purpose to yield measurable results. Applied to this study, the management practices of school heads in organizing, delegating, managing resources, and supervising instruction constitute the inputs that are ultimately reflected in overall performance across instructional leadership, strategic planning, and stakeholder engagement, thereby illustrating that performance is fundamentally a product of effective management.

Finally, Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Theory offers a lens for understanding how individuals adapt to significant role changes, structured around the 4S system of situation, self, support, and strategies, referring respectively to the nature and demands of the transition, personal characteristics, institutional assistance, and coping mechanisms. These four factors must operate in concert for successful adaptation to occur. As applied to beginning school heads, the challenges they encounter, the management practices they employ, and the support systems available to them together constitute the dimensions of their adaptation as they assume new responsibilities in planning, supervision, and resource management, aided along the way by mentors, colleagues, and institutional programs. Taken together, these three theories provide a coherent theoretical foundation for the study: Transformational Leadership Theory explains how followers are motivated toward improved performance, Organizational Performance Theory links effective management to measurable outcomes, and Transition Theory accounts for the personal and professional adjustments that beginning school heads undergo.

These theoretical underpinnings inform the conceptual framework of the study, structured according to an Input Process Output paradigm. The input phase encompasses the

level of management practices among beginning school heads, measured across planning and goal setting, organizing and delegating, supervising and monitoring instruction, resource and financial management, communication and stakeholder engagement, and professional development and coaching, alongside their level of performance in instructional leadership, strategic planning, human resource management, parental involvement and community partnership, and school leadership and management operations, as well as the issues, challenges, and available and needed support systems they experience. The process phase reflects the study's sequential explanatory mixed methods design, in which quantitative data gathered through survey questionnaires and document analysis are followed by qualitative interviews analyzed through thematic analysis, allowing the qualitative phase to explain and enrich the quantitative findings by exploring the challenges beginning school heads face and the support they currently receive and still require. The output phase, in turn, integrates these quantitative and qualitative findings into evidence based insights that inform the proposed Early Career Leadership Program, intended to strengthen leadership development for beginning school heads.

The significance of this study extends across multiple stakeholders within the educational community. Teachers stand to benefit from improved management practices that support their own professional growth. Beginning school heads may gain access to the developmental support system needed to deliver the performance expected of them as school leaders and managers. Learners, as the primary beneficiaries of these institutional improvements, may experience enhanced learning outcomes as a result. Parents may gain clearer insight into the quality of management performance within their children's schools, informing their advocacy efforts. Finally, future researchers may draw on the findings of this study as a reference for undertaking related inquiries into early career school leadership.

Statement of the problem

This study examined the relationship between management practices, and performance, the differences in the indicators of their management practices and performance, the challenges encountered in leadership roles, and the developmental support systems available and needed for beginning school heads in the selected schools in the First District of the Schools Division of Oriental Mindoro which served as basis for proposed early career leadership training program.

Specifically, this study aimed:

1. To assess the level of management practices of beginning school heads in terms of planning and goal setting, organizing and delegating, supervising and monitoring instruction, resource and financial management, communication and stakeholder engagement, and professional development and coaching.
2. To evaluate the level of beginning school heads' performance in terms of instructional leadership, strategic planning, human resource management, parents' involvement and community partnership, and school leadership and management operations.
3. To determine if there is significant relationship between the management practices and performance of the beginning school heads.
4. To determine if there are significant differences in the management practices and performance of the beginning school heads across indicators.
5. To identify the issues and challenges observed and experienced in the managerial practices and performance of the beginning school heads.

6. To identify the support that is already available and determine what further support are necessary.
7. To propose an early career leadership training program based on the findings of the study.

METHODOLOGY

Study design

This study utilized the mixed-methods approach-particularly explanatory sequential mixed-methods design- that combines both quantitative and qualitative research. For the quantitative part, the study used a descriptive–correlational and comparative research design. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the level of management practices and performance of beginning school heads across indicators. Correlation was used to examine the relationship between management practices and performance, while the comparative component determined whether significant differences exist among the indicators of management practices and performance. The quantitative results identified key trends, relationships, differences, as well as weak, non-significant findings which served as the basis for the qualitative phase. On the other hand, the qualitative phase employed a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of beginning school heads. This approach is appropriate as it seeks to understand how participants make meaning of their management practices, performance, challenges encountered, and the developmental support systems available to them, without imposing the researcher’s assumptions.

Sample/ population of the study

The participants of the study were the 137 out of 208 teachers under the leadership of beginning school heads in the First District in the Division of Oriental Mindoro. Beginning school heads are the ones who have one to three years (1-3) of experience as a school head. The 32 out of 35 beginning school heads and 8 out of 9 public school district supervisors will also be respondents of the study. For the qualitative part 19 beginning school heads and 6 public schools district supervisor.

Since the population was composed of several schools, the researcher used a proportional stratified random sampling. In this study, the criteria for stratification were the schools. The sample size ratio to the population size was determined by the G-power analysis with an effect size of 0.30, an alpha error of 0.05, and a beta power of 0.95 the sample size is 137. To specifically select the respondents per school, fishbowl method was employed.

Data gathering tools

The researcher developed a self-made questionnaire to assess the management practices of beginning school heads. The questionnaire focused on six key areas: planning and goal setting, organizing and delegating, supervising and monitoring instruction, resource and financial management, managing school operations, communication and stakeholder engagement, and professional development and coaching. Respondents, who are teachers working under the beginning school heads, will indicate the extent to which each practice is observed using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Very Low) to 5 (Very High).

A semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions was used to gather responses for the qualitative part of this study. These questions were carefully prepared based on the conceptual framework and related literature to ensure content validity. Field notes were

also taken to document non-verbal cues and contextual details that could support data interpretation.

Data gathering procedure

The first part of data gathering was securing the necessary permits and approvals from authorized individuals. First, the researcher sent a request for approval to conduct the study to the Schools Division Superintendent of SDO Oriental Mindoro. After securing endorsement, the researcher coordinated with the Public Schools District Supervisors, and then with the school heads of the respondent schools. After these, the questionnaires were ready to be administered to the teacher-respondents.

The data collection started with a face-to-face orientation with each participating school. In here, the purpose of the study, its significance, the procedures involved, and the respondents' rights were clearly explained. Following the orientation, the questionnaires were then administered to the willing respondents. They were given 1 hour to accomplish the instrument while the researcher remained available for inquiries. Completed questionnaires were retrieved on the agreed time.

Since document analysis was conducted for the performance of the beginning school heads, letters were also sent to the concerned authorities to request access to the Office Performance Commitment and Review Form (OPCRF) of the school-head respondents. After approval was secured, the results of OPCRf were analyzed carefully. Quantitative data were then tabulated and treated with the help of a statistician.

The researcher proceeded to the interviews with selected beginning school heads and PSDS during convenient time of the participants. After completing the interviews, the researcher transcribed them. These transcriptions were then analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis proceedings.

Finally, the qualitative findings were integrated with the quantitative results. Data triangulation was then utilized to support the statistical of the study. Convergence and divergence of quantitative and qualitative results were examined to gain deeper insights that served as basis for the study's output.

Treatment of data

The data gathered in this study were treated and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean. was used to describe the level of management practices of beginning school heads. Rank was used to identify the relative position of each item of the indicators of management practices of beginning school heads. Multiple Regression Analysis was used to evaluate the relationship between the variables of the study which is the level of management practices and the level of performance of beginning school heads. One Way Analysis of Variance was employed to test the difference among the indicators in the management practices and performance of beginning school heads. Scheffe's Test was used to conduct multiple comparisons after obtaining a significant result in an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Document analysis was also conducted to measure the beginning school heads' performance. Their submitted Office Performance Commitment and Review Form (OPCRF) for the school year 2024–2025 was analyzed. This was done so that performance assessment for beginning school heads were based on actual documented evidence. For the qualitative data, Braun and Clarke (2006) phenomenological data analysis was utilized.

Ethical considerations

The participants were provided with a consent form outlining the important details of the study. It was also explained that participation in the study was entirely voluntary meaning they can withdraw at any point without penalty. The consent form also assured participants of the confidentiality of their responses and the proper handling of all collected data strictly for research purposes. Only those who voluntarily signed the consent form were included in the study. Responses and identities were confidential as mandated in Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) and established research ethics. The data collected in this study were used for academic purposes only. Qualitative interview is anonymous. The researcher used coded identifiers, and all identifiable information will be removed from transcripts and records. Throughout the research process, the researcher was objective to ensure that findings reflect the participants' perspectives as they are while protecting privacy and confidentiality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Beginning school heads' managerial practices and performance were examined using data drawn directly from the study, with the results interpreted in relation to the specific objectives set at the outset of the investigation. The discussion that follows is grounded in the data gathered through document analysis and survey administration among the respondent school heads, employing a descriptive-correlational research design complemented by relevant statistical procedures, including the computation of composite and grand means, the Pearson correlation and regression analysis, and tests of mean differences across indicators, to determine the level of management practices and performance of beginning school heads, the relationship between these two variables, and the differences that exist across the various domains examined.

With respect to planning and goal setting, findings showed a composite mean of 3.59 described as High Level, indicating that this practice is highly implemented by beginning school heads in the respondent schools. This entailed strong compliance with the department's institutional planning standards, and the school heads also tend to be effective in implementing basic management functions. However, the results also imply that there is still a need to strengthen competencies in areas such as data utilization and results-based monitoring in order to further enhance effectiveness in planning and goal setting. These findings agree with Richard (2024), who emphasized that effective planning and goal setting are detrimental to management performance.

In terms of organizing and delegating, a composite mean of 3.60, described as High Level, was obtained, suggesting that organizing and delegating practices are strongly implemented by beginning school heads in their respective schools. The school heads are already effective in establishing organizational structures and properly distributing responsibilities among staff. However, the results also imply that while structural organization is strong, there remains a need to improve workflow standardization, process documentation, and continuous feedback mechanisms. The findings of Santos (2021) agreed that when organizational structures are clearly defined, coordination and accountability in school settings become stronger.

For supervising and monitoring instruction, the composite mean of 3.68 was described as High Level, suggesting that this function is strongly practiced in the respondent schools by beginning school heads. Classroom observation, lesson plan review, feedback provision, and monitoring of compliance requirements are being carried out consistently. However, sustained instructional coaching and reflective dialogue should be put in place to ensure continued

success. These findings agree with Garcia (2023), who noted that instructional observation becomes more effective when it is supported by structured feedback.

With regard to resource and financial management, the composite mean of 3.44 was described as Moderate Level, suggesting that beginning school heads had developing resource and financial management practices. They already demonstrated competence in monitoring, documentation, and basic allocation of resources, but improvement is needed in more advanced functions such as participatory planning, strategic alignment, impact evaluation, and compliance strengthening. Cruz (2022) supported this, noting that school heads tend to prioritize compliance with reporting requirements before gradually developing participatory budgeting practices.

For communication and stakeholder engagement, results revealed a composite mean of 3.75, described as High Level, showing that beginning school heads have strong practices in this area. Effective internal communication is already in place, although external communication and strategic community engagement still require further improvement in order to ensure more sustained and structured partnerships between the school and the community. These findings supported Mendoza (2022), who pointed out the role of effective communication in promoting school and community partnerships, noting further that communication becomes almost fully effective when it integrates both internal coordination and external stakeholder involvement, fostering stronger trust and shared responsibility.

Finally, for professional development and coaching, a composite mean of 3.64, described as High Level, was revealed in the analysis, indicating well-implemented professional development initiatives and coaching practices among beginning school heads in the respondent schools. These initiatives included efforts in organizing school-based professional learning communities and monitoring participation, ensuring alignment with educational goals and standards. It was further observed that individualized coaching, external professional growth support, and reinforcement mechanisms still have room for improvement. Ramos (2022) supported this, noting that while consistent monitoring of professional development participation heightened engagement among staff, such initiatives become more meaningful when personalized and sustained.

Across the six indicators, Communication and Stakeholder Engagement obtained the highest composite mean of 3.75 (Rank 1), followed by Supervising and Monitoring Instruction with 3.68 (Rank 2), Organizing and Delegating with 3.60 (Rank 3), Planning and Goal Setting with 3.59 (Rank 4), Professional Development and Coaching with 3.64 (Rank 5), and Resource and Financial Management with 3.44 (Rank 6), the lowest among the domains. Overall, results showed a grand mean of 3.62, described as High Level, suggesting that the overall management practices of beginning school heads are mostly effective despite their new leadership role. Core functions, namely communication, supervision, organization, planning, and resource monitoring, are operational and follow institutional standards. Across domains, practices are structured, compliant, and functional, yet still improving in depth and sustainability. These findings are supported by Toralde (2020), whose study pointed out the effectiveness of strong management practices in translating institutional goals.

Turning to the level of beginning school heads' performance, instructional leadership yielded a composite mean of 3.68, described as Very Satisfactory, suggesting that, according to document analysis, beginning school heads demonstrate strong instructional leadership in instructional supervision. It was observed that they perform more strongly in access and participation indicators, particularly retention and completion, than in learning outcome indicators such as reading proficiency and NAT performance. They have effective strategies for keeping learners in school, but there remains room for improvement in raising learning

outcomes. This agrees with Bautista (2023), who emphasized that beginning school heads' instructional leadership becomes more effective when they make use of learner performance data to propose data-driven decisions and interventions.

For strategic planning, the composite mean of 3.67, described as Very Satisfactory, suggests that beginning school heads performed strongly in strategic planning and operational management. It was observed that they implement high levels of compliance in grievance resolution, near-optimal budget utilization, and emerging improvements in process efficiency. These findings agree with Bryson (2020), who noted that strategic planning accounts for the effectiveness of goals, resources, and implementation processes.

With respect to human resource management, results revealed a composite mean of 3.65, described as Very Satisfactory, indicating effective, efficient, and operational human resource management practices among beginning school heads in the respondent schools. Core functions are already in place and functioning, but they continue to rely on compliance with limited emphasis on data-driven human resource decision-making. These findings are supported by Huang et al. (2020), who noted that human resource management contributes significantly to organizational effectiveness when accountability practices are data-driven rather than merely compliance-oriented.

For parents' involvement and community partnership, results revealed a composite mean of 3.76, described as Very Satisfactory, suggesting well-implemented and operational stakeholder engagement. However, the findings also show that engagement is focused on attendance in programs and feedback collection rather than fully institutionalized shared governance systems. As Epstein (2020) pointed out, effective school improvement is strengthened when families and communities are meaningfully engaged in school processes, and not merely for compliance.

Finally, for school leadership and management operations, results show a composite mean of 3.71, described as Very Satisfactory, demonstrating the capability of beginning school heads in school leadership and management functions that are highly structured, policy-driven, and output-oriented, with strong emphasis on compliance and program execution. This agrees with Spillane et al. (2020), who noted that school leadership should be policy-driven and output-oriented, ensuring alignment with standards.

Among the five performance indicators, School Leadership and Management Operations obtained the highest composite mean of 3.76 (Rank 1), followed by Parents' Involvement and Community Partnership with 3.71 (Rank 2), Instructional Leadership with 3.68 (Rank 3), Strategic Planning with 3.67 (Rank 4), and Human Resource Management with 3.65 (Rank 5). The grand mean across these indicators was 3.69, described as Very Satisfactory, indicating that beginning school heads demonstrate generally effective performance across all leadership domains despite being novice in their leadership and management duties. However, their practices remain largely compliance-based and task-oriented, only developing toward more analytical and improvement-focused leadership strategies. Clemente (2020) pointed out that school leaders can improve school outcomes when leadership moves beyond compliance and task-based administration and instead focuses on strengthening improvement goals.

To determine the relationship between management practices and performance of beginning school heads, regression analysis was employed, yielding an R value of 0.742, an R^2 of 0.551, an adjusted R^2 of 0.538, an F-value of 41.286, and a p-value of 0.000, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and confirming a significant relationship between the two variables. This indicates that fifty-five and one-tenth percent (55.1%) of the variance in performance can be explained by management practices, a substantial proportion that underscores the centrality of sound management practices to effective performance outcomes. These findings suggest that despite being newly in their leadership and management roles,

beginning school heads were already able to apply effective management practices, and that even when newly assumed, management practices can exert a strong impact depending on how responsibilities are handled. In addition, differences in performance among school heads may be largely explained by how well they implement basic management functions. Leithwood et al. (2020) emphasized that school leadership effectiveness is strongly shaped by how leaders perform core management functions such as setting direction, developing people, and improving instruction, functions that carry meaningful implications for leadership performance.

Examination of differences across the management practice and performance indicators further revealed several statistically significant results. A significant difference was found between planning and supervising, with a mean difference of 0.284 and a p-value of 0.012, as well as between planning and communication, with a mean difference of 0.261 and a p-value of 0.018. Likewise, organizing showed a significant difference when compared with professional development, with a mean difference of 0.297 and a p-value of 0.009. A significant difference was also observed between supervising and resource management, with a mean difference of 0.315 and a p-value of 0.006, and between communication and professional development, with a mean difference of 0.276 and a p-value of 0.015. These results indicate that planning activities were carried out at a different level compared with supervising functions, that communication responsibilities were practiced differently from planning tasks, and that task delegation and teacher mentoring require different competencies and leadership approaches. They further indicate that managing instructional supervision and handling resources demand varying levels of leadership attention and skill, and that communication practices and professional growth activities are performed at different levels. These findings suggest that instructional supervision and professional development require stronger leadership skills compared with routine planning and organizing tasks, and that beginning school heads often experience difficulty balancing administrative work with instructional responsibilities, particularly in managing resources and supervising teachers (Cruz, 2022; Jerdborg, 2023). Communication and professional development, meanwhile, require cooperation, trust, and teamwork to support teacher growth and school improvement (Villanueva, 2020; Lopez, 2023).

Similar significant differences emerged among the performance indicators. The significant difference between instructional leadership and strategic planning, with a mean difference of 0.322 and a p-value of 0.006, indicates that beginning school heads perform differently in these two OPCR domains because of the distinct nature of the responsibilities involved. While instructional leadership focuses on responsibilities requiring strong pedagogical knowledge, instructional expertise, and continuous engagement with teachers and learners, strategic planning is comparatively more procedural and administrative in character. The significant difference between instructional leadership and human resource management, with a mean difference of 0.295 and a p-value of 0.010, further reflects the multidimensional expectations embedded in the OPCR, given that human resource management requires emotional intelligence, organizational leadership, and interpersonal management skills, whereas instructional leadership is largely anchored on academic supervision. Furthermore, the significant difference between strategic planning and parents' involvement, with a mean difference of 0.267 and a p-value of 0.017, shows the contrast between procedural leadership functions and community-based leadership responsibilities. Human resource management and school operations also showed significant differences, with a mean difference of 0.289 and a p-value of 0.011, suggesting that beginning school heads demonstrate varying levels of competence between personnel management and operational administration. Lastly, the

significant difference between parents' involvement and school leadership, with a mean difference of 0.301 and a p-value of 0.008, further demonstrates that leadership competencies among beginning school heads are not equally developed across internal and external leadership domains. The varying performance across indicators implies that beginning school heads develop leadership competencies unevenly, given that the OPCR domains differ in terms of technical demands, interpersonal requirements, leadership complexity, and experiential expectations. These findings suggest that beginning school heads may need continuous mentoring, leadership coaching, and professional support to strengthen weaker performance domains (Hallinger & Murphy, 2020; Jerdborg, 2023; Leithwood et al., 2020).

Beyond the quantitative results, the issues and challenges observed and experienced by beginning school heads included leadership transition difficulties, administrative overload, instructional supervision demands, resource limitations, and stakeholder complexities. These challenges were found to influence the consistency and effectiveness of managerial practices and performance outcomes among the respondents. In terms of support, the available assistance provided to beginning school heads was mainly delivered through coaching, mentoring, technical assistance, training, and supervisory visits. However, further support was identified as necessary, particularly in the form of structured mentoring programs, sustained coaching systems, strengthened monitoring mechanisms, and more focused leadership development interventions.

In response to these findings, Project LEAD, or the Leadership Enhancement and Development for Beginning School Heads, is proposed to strengthen the leadership integration and professional transition of beginning school heads. The program is research-based, as it directly addresses the identified challenges and developmental needs revealed in the study, and it focuses on enhancing leadership competencies in instructional supervision, strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, resource management, and professional coaching through mentoring sessions, leadership learning circles, school-based capacity-building activities, and collaborative support systems. Project LEAD aims to establish a supportive and developmental leadership environment where beginning school heads are guided, empowered, and equipped with practical leadership skills aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads. Through this initiative, the school envisions more confident, competent, and responsive school leaders capable of improving school operations, instructional quality, and organizational performance. By December 2027, beginning school heads are expected to have improved their leadership and management competencies through the conduct of at least four leadership capability-building sessions focused on instructional supervision, strategic planning, resource management, and stakeholder engagement, and to have strengthened instructional leadership and organizational management practices through the implementation of mentoring, coaching, and collaborative leadership support activities, as evidenced by improved performance monitoring and participation in leadership development initiatives. The direct beneficiaries of this program are beginning school heads assigned within the school or district who are in their first one to three years of administrative service, while indirect beneficiaries include teachers, learners, parents, and other stakeholders who stand to experience improved school management, stronger instructional leadership, and more responsive educational services as a result of enhanced leadership practices.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that beginning school heads exhibit generally high levels of management practice and very satisfactory performance across the domains examined, with the significant relationship between management practices and performance, evidenced by an R^2 of 0.551 and a p-value of 0.000, affirming that the manner in which core managerial functions are implemented substantially shapes leadership outcomes even in the early years of school headship. The significant differences observed across indicators further reveal that leadership growth among beginning school heads is uneven, with

certain domains, particularly resource and financial management, professional development, and human resource management, requiring more deliberate developmental attention than others. These results directly address the objectives of the study by establishing the level of management practices and performance of beginning school heads, confirming the significant relationship between the two variables, and identifying the specific domains where disparities in competency exist. Collectively, they contribute to a deeper understanding of early-career school leadership by underscoring that effective management is not merely a matter of compliance but a developmental process requiring sustained mentoring, coaching, and contextualized professional support. These insights provide the empirical foundation for the subsequent chapter, which presents the summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations, including the proposed Project LEAD intervention designed to strengthen the leadership integration and professional development of beginning school heads.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study, taken together, reveal that beginning school heads generally demonstrate effectiveness in managing their schools, although this effectiveness is tempered by weaknesses in data driven and technical skills that limit fully evidence based and efficient decision making. This constraint is further compounded by contextual and systemic challenges that continue to hinder the attainment of higher level leadership impact, suggesting that the capacity of beginning school heads to lead effectively cannot be viewed in isolation from the broader institutional and environmental conditions in which they operate. Notably, management practices were found to be significantly related to school performance, affirming that improvements in leadership practices translate meaningfully into better school outcomes. At the same time, variations observed across different indicators point to an unevenness in leadership effectiveness across management domains, indicating that beginning school heads may exhibit relative strength in certain areas while requiring further development in others.

Beyond these patterns, the study also established that beginning school heads face multidimensional challenges that shape and, at times, constrain their leadership practice and performance, particularly in the areas of resource management and instructional supervision. While existing support systems have proven helpful in assisting these school heads through their leadership transition, such systems remain insufficiently structured and therefore require further institutional strengthening to fully address the gaps identified. Taken as a whole, these findings underscore the necessity of a structured early career leadership training program designed specifically to address the competency gaps uncovered by the study and to enhance the overall leadership effectiveness of beginning school heads.

In light of these conclusions, several courses of action are recommended to strengthen the leadership capacity of beginning school heads and improve school performance outcomes. Schools Division Offices are encouraged to strengthen continuous professional development programs that emphasize instructional leadership, strategic planning, resource management, and data driven decision making, as these areas were identified as central to enhancing the managerial and supervisory competencies of beginning school heads. School heads themselves are urged to actively engage in targeted capacity building programs and professional learning opportunities that improve their competencies in financial management, delegation, instructional supervision, and monitoring and evaluation practices. Complementing this, Schools Division Offices should institutionalize structured mentoring and coaching programs capable of providing sustained guidance and technical support to beginning school heads throughout their leadership transition period, while Public Schools

District Supervisors are called upon to provide continuous and focused technical assistance in the areas of school planning, human resource management, financial operations, and instructional leadership systems.

Furthermore, school heads are encouraged to maximize existing monitoring and evaluation systems by ensuring the consistent use of data in evidence based decision making, thereby directly addressing one of the key limitations identified in this study. Schools Division Offices may also sustain the establishment of professional learning communities that serve as platforms for beginning school heads to share practices and draw mutual support from one another as they navigate the challenges of their new leadership roles. Finally, it is recommended that the School Governance and Operations Division Chief adopt the proposed early career leadership development program for beginning school heads within the division, as a concrete and institutional response to the challenges and gaps revealed by this study. Collectively, these recommendations affirm that sustained, structured, and collaborative support systems are essential to strengthening the leadership effectiveness of beginning school heads and, by extension, to improving school performance and learner outcomes.

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