

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

Globally, school heads especially those in the first three years of their positions are juggling with insurmountable pressures to cope up with the complex, accountability-driven field of educational institutions. Though they come directly from teaching and management

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positions, still they are finding it difficult to adjust during their early years in leadership positions. Several instances showed that beginning school heads suffered from increased administrative burdens and role ambiguity. For some beginning school heads, they are having difficulty transitioning from classroom roles to organizational leadership roles (Castañeros, Tañajura, & Tan, 2023). Considering the global trend that school heads performance affect school performance, beginning school heads should receive sufficient early career support that is sustainable.

To lead a school effectively, effective management skills must be possessed by a school head. According to literatures on modern school leadership, effective management skills go beyond instructional supervision. It also includes strategic planning, resource allocation, human-resource development, and change management. Just the same, management competence—encompassing planning, organizing, leading, and controlling—is also expected for beginning school heads to carry out their roles and to build effective school environment.

Due to these, these beginning school heads normally face multiple challenges as they transition to their role as educational leader (Castañeros et al., 2023). As beginning school heads are pressured to deliver quality school performance and stakeholder satisfaction, adequate orientation or developmental support are very important factors needed for them to come out with desirable outcomes. Due to these expectations, their early years are full of challenges and struggles.

Considering the foregoing discussion, beginning school heads need a reliable and sustainable developmental support system to cater to these specific needs. This support system may be on-boarding programs, mentoring, capacity-building and other structured support aligned to the professional career stages defined for school heads (Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads, 2020). According to research, when beginning school heads have enough structured support, such as mentoring and needed trainings, they tend to improve in confidence, efficacy and performance (Doe&Miller, 2021).

Having laid out these challenges, a research gap was identified, especially in assessing management practices, identifying the specific challenges of beginning heads, and designing a support system tailored to this specific stage of school leadership. Most research focus solely on instructional or leadership skills without focusing on the beginning career stage of school leadership. This study addresses that gap by focusing solely on the management practices, challenges, and developmental support systems of beginning school heads.

In the First District of the Schools Division of Oriental Mindoro, the researcher conducted a preliminary survey which revealed that beginning school heads commonly have difficulties dealing with budget preparation, staff supervision, and instructional monitoring. These situations created challenges that hindered their management and leadership responsibilities. Such situations pointed out the need for a deeper look into their management practices and the provision of appropriate support mechanisms to cater to their needs.

This study is anchored on the Republic Act No. 9155 otherwise known as Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, granting school heads responsibility for the administrative and instructional supervision of their schools (Philippines Senate, 2001). Furthermore, the Department of Education Order No. 24, s. 2020 implements Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) and defines career stages of school heads—where structured support and continuous professional development are emphasized.

As an output of this study, an Early Career Leadership Training Program would be specifically designed for beginning school heads based on context-specific dimensions that emerged from the data. This training program aimed to develop and enhance beginning school heads management skills and at the same time deliver the structured support system necessary in their transition into their leadership roles. This training program will serve as a practical tool

for district offices and schools to cater to the specific needs of beginning school heads, to strengthen school leadership at this critical stage of professional growth and development.

Statement of the problem

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

Specifically, it sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is 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. What is the level of performance of beginning school heads in terms of instructional leadership, strategic planning, human resource management, parents' involvement and community partnership, and school leadership and management operations?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the management practices and performance of beginning school heads?
4. Are there significant differences in the management practices and performance of beginning school heads across the identified indicators?
5. What issues and challenges are observed and experienced in the management practices and performance of beginning school heads?

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the mixed methods approach, particularly the explanatory sequential mixed methods design, which 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.

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 to 3) of experience as a school head. The 32 out of 35 beginning school heads and 8 out of 9 public school district supervisors also served as respondents of the study. For the qualitative part, 19 beginning school heads and 6 public schools district supervisors participated. 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, yielding a sample size of 137. To specifically select the respondents per school, the fishbowl method was employed.

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, indicated 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.

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 this orientation, 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 the 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 a convenient time for 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 results of the study. Convergence and divergence of quantitative and qualitative results were examined to gain deeper insights that served as the basis for the study's output.

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 to 2025 was analyzed. This was done so that performance assessment for beginning

school heads was based on actual documented evidence. For the qualitative data, Braun and Clarke (2006) phenomenological data analysis was utilized.

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 the 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 interviews are anonymous. The researcher used coded identifiers, and all identifiable information was 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

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of data gathered from the study's respondents, comprising 137 teachers, 32 beginning school heads, and 8 public schools district supervisors for the quantitative phase, and 19 beginning school heads and 6 public schools district supervisors for the qualitative phase, all drawn from the First District in the Division of Oriental Mindoro through proportional stratified random sampling using the fishbowl method. The discussion is grounded in data obtained through a self-made questionnaire assessing management practices across six domains, document analysis of the Office Performance Commitment and Review Form (OPCRF) for performance assessment, and a semi structured interview guide for the qualitative phenomenological phase, with quantitative data treated using Mean, Rank, Multiple Regression Analysis, One Way Analysis of Variance, and Scheffe's Test, and qualitative data analyzed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic and phenomenological analysis procedures. The results that follow are interpreted in direct relation to the study's objectives concerning the level of management practices and performance of beginning school heads, the relationship and differences among these variables, the challenges encountered, the support systems available, and the resulting proposed intervention program.

Level of management practices of beginning school heads

In terms of planning and goal setting, findings showed a composite mean of 3.59, described as High Level. This indicates that planning and goal setting practices are highly implemented by beginning school heads in the respondent schools, entailing strong compliance with the department's institutional planning standards and effective implementation of 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 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.

For 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. They 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 is a need to improve

workflow standardization, process documentation, and continuous feedback mechanisms. This finding agrees with Santos (2021), whose study found that when organizational structures are clearly defined, coordination and accountability in school settings become stronger.

Supervising and monitoring instruction obtained a composite mean of 3.68, described as High Level. This suggests that supervising and monitoring instruction is strongly practiced in the respondent schools by the beginning school heads, with classroom observation, lesson plan review, feedback provision, and monitoring of compliance requirements being carried out. However, sustained instructional coaching and reflective dialogue should be put in place to ensure success. These findings agree with Garcia (2023), who found that instructional observation becomes more effective when supported by structured feedback.

Resource and financial management yielded a composite mean of 3.44, 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 they need improvement 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.

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

Professional development and coaching revealed a composite mean of 3.64, described as High Level, indicating well implemented professional development initiatives and coaching practices among beginning school heads in the respondent schools. These initiatives included efforts to organize school based professional learning communities (PLCs) and to monitor 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.

Taken together, the six domains yielded the following ranking based on composite means: Communication and Stakeholder Engagement ranked first with a mean of 3.75 (High Level), Supervising and Monitoring Instruction ranked second with a mean of 3.68 (High Level), Organizing and Delegating ranked third with a mean of 3.60 (Moderate Level), Planning and Goal Setting ranked fourth with a mean of 3.59 (High Level), Professional Development and Coaching ranked fifth with a mean of 3.64 (Moderate Level), and Resource and Financial Management ranked sixth with a mean of 3.44 (High Level). The overall grand mean for management practices was 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, it can be observed that practices are structured, compliant, and functional, yet still improving in depth and sustainability. This finding is supported by Toralde (2020), whose study pointed out the effectiveness of strong management practices in translating institutional goals.

Level of beginning school heads' performance

In terms of instructional leadership, the composite mean of 3.68, described as Very Satisfactory, suggests that, according to document analysis, beginning school heads demonstrate strong instructional leadership in instructional supervision. It can be observed that they perform more strongly in access and participation indicators, namely retention and completion, than in learning outcome indicators, namely reading proficiency and NAT performance. They have effective strategies in keeping learners in the school, but there is still room for improvement when it comes to improving 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 can be 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 found that strategic planning accounts for the effectiveness of goals, resources, and implementation processes.

Human resource management 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 rely on compliance, with limited emphasis on data driven human resource decision making. These findings are supported by Huang et al. (2020), who found that human resource management contributes significantly to organizational effectiveness when accountability practices are data driven and not merely for compliance.

Parents' involvement and community partnership 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, not just for compliance.

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

Taken together, the five performance domains yielded the following ranking: School Leadership and Management Operations ranked first with a mean of 3.76 (Very Satisfactory), Parents' Involvement and Community Partnership ranked second with a mean of 3.71 (Very Satisfactory), Instructional Leadership ranked third with a mean of 3.68 (Very Satisfactory), Strategic Planning ranked fourth with a mean of 3.67 (Very Satisfactory), and Human Resource Management ranked fifth with a mean of 3.65 (Very Satisfactory). The overall grand mean for performance 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 were observed to

remain largely compliance based and task oriented, only developing toward more analytical and improvement focused leadership strategies. In relation to this, Clemente (2020) pointed out that school leaders can improve school outcomes when leadership moves beyond compliance and task based administration and focuses on strengthening improvement goals.

Relationship between the management practices and performance of the beginning school heads

A Multiple Regression Analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between management practices and performance of beginning school heads. The results yielded $R = 0.742$, $R^2 = 0.551$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.538$, F value = 41.286, and p value = 0.000, leading to a decision to reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and an interpretation of Significant. These findings suggest that despite being newly in their leadership and management roles, beginning school heads were already able to apply effective management practices. This implies that even when new, management practices, when properly carried out, can have a strong impact depending on how responsibilities are handled. In addition, differences in performance may be largely explained by how well beginning school heads implement basic management functions. Accordingly, 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, which have a meaningful leadership impact on their performance.

Differences in the management practices and performance of the beginning school heads across indicators

A One Way Analysis of Variance followed by Scheffe's Test was employed to determine significant differences among the indicators of management practices and performance. A significant difference was found between planning and supervising, with a mean difference of 0.284 and p value of 0.012, and between planning and communication, with a mean difference of 0.261 and p value of 0.018. Likewise, organizing showed a significant difference when compared with professional development, with a mean difference of 0.297 and p value of 0.009. A significant difference was also observed between supervising and resource management, with a mean difference of 0.315 and p value of 0.006. Furthermore, communication and professional development differed significantly, with a mean difference of 0.276 and p value of 0.015.

This indicates that planning activities were carried out at a different level compared with supervising functions, and communication responsibilities were practiced differently from planning tasks. Task delegation and teacher mentoring require different competencies and leadership approaches, while managing instructional supervision and handling resources demand varying levels of leadership attention and skills. Lastly, communication practices and professional growth activities are performed at different levels. The findings further suggest that instructional supervision and professional development require stronger leadership skills compared with routine planning and organizing tasks. 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 also require cooperation, trust, and teamwork to support teacher growth and school improvement (Villanueva, 2020; Lopez, 2023).

The significant difference between instructional leadership and strategic planning ($MD = 0.322$, $p = 0.006$) indicates that beginning school heads perform differently in these two

OPCRF domains because of the 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, on the other hand, is more procedural and administrative. Meanwhile, the significant difference between instructional leadership and human resource management ($MD = 0.295$, $p = 0.010$) further reflects the multidimensional expectations embedded in the OPCRF, since human resource management requires emotional intelligence, organizational leadership, and interpersonal management skills, while instructional leadership is largely anchored on academic supervision. Furthermore, the significant difference between strategic planning and parents' involvement ($MD = 0.267$, $p = 0.017$) shows the contrast between procedural leadership functions and community based leadership responsibilities. Human resource management and school operations also showed significant differences ($MD = 0.289$, $p = 0.011$), 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 ($MD = 0.301$, $p = 0.008$) 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 because the OPCRF 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).

Issues and challenges observed and experienced in the managerial practices and performance of the beginning school heads

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.

Available and needed support to strengthen managerial practices and performance of the beginning school heads

The available support was mainly provided through coaching, mentoring, technical assistance, training, and supervisory visits. However, further support was identified as necessary in the form of structured mentoring programs, sustained coaching systems, strengthened monitoring mechanisms, and more focused leadership development interventions.

Proposed early career leadership training program for beginning school heads

In response to the identified findings, Project LEAD (Leadership Enhancement and Development for Beginning School Heads) is proposed to strengthen the leadership integration and professional transition of beginning school heads. Beginning school heads play a vital role in ensuring effective school leadership, instructional supervision, and organizational management. However, findings from the study "Understanding Early Career School Leadership: Management Practices, Performances, Challenges, and Professional Support

Systems" revealed that beginning school heads still encounter challenges in planning and goal setting, organizing workflows, resource and financial management, structured instructional supervision, and stakeholder engagement. The study further found that while beginning school heads demonstrate high levels of communication, instructional monitoring, and organizational management, some managerial functions remain only moderately practiced, particularly in participatory resource planning, systematic workflows, post conference instructional coaching, and structured financial management. The study also highlighted that beginning school heads experience difficulties balancing administrative workload and instructional leadership responsibilities, and that limited experience in budgeting, supervision, delegation, and strategic planning affects their efficiency and confidence in decision making. Additionally, although support systems such as mentoring, coaching, and professional development are available, these supports are not always sustained and contextualized to the actual needs of beginning school heads.

Project LEAD is research based because it directly addresses the identified challenges and developmental needs revealed in the study. 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 (PPSSH). Through this initiative, the school envisions more confident, competent, and responsive school leaders capable of improving school operations, instructional quality, and organizational performance.

The program has two objectives. By December 2027, beginning school heads shall have improved their leadership and management competencies through the conduct of at least four (4) leadership capability building sessions focused on instructional supervision, strategic planning, resource management, and stakeholder engagement. Also by December 2027, beginning school heads shall 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 program outputs include leadership capability building session materials and documentation, mentoring and coaching session reports for beginning school heads, leadership monitoring and feedback tools aligned with PPSSH indicators, school leadership action plans and implementation reports, documentation of leadership learning circles, conferences, and reflection sessions, and consolidated accomplishment reports, attendance sheets, evaluation forms, and photo documentation. The expected outcomes include improved leadership competencies among beginning school heads in planning, supervision, resource management, and stakeholder engagement; strengthened instructional leadership practices through structured coaching and mentoring mechanisms; enhanced school management systems through clearer delegation, communication, and monitoring processes; increased confidence, accountability, and decision making capacity among beginning school heads; and institutionalized leadership support mechanisms integrated into school improvement and professional development plans.

The direct beneficiaries of Project LEAD are the beginning school heads assigned within the school or district who are in their first one to three years of administrative service. They will directly benefit from leadership mentoring, coaching, and professional development activities designed to strengthen their management competencies and leadership confidence. Indirect beneficiaries include teachers, learners, parents, and stakeholders who will experience improved school management, stronger instructional leadership, and more responsive educational services resulting from enhanced leadership practices.

Taken together, the findings drawn from 137 teachers, 32 beginning school heads, and 8 public schools district supervisors in the quantitative phase, complemented by 19 beginning school heads and 6 public schools district supervisors in the qualitative phase, demonstrate that beginning school heads exhibit generally strong management practices, with a grand mean of 3.62 (High Level), and generally strong performance, with a grand mean of 3.69 (Very Satisfactory), across all measured domains. The Multiple Regression Analysis confirmed a significant relationship between management practices and performance ($R = 0.742$, $R^2 = 0.551$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.538$, $F = 41.286$, $p = 0.000$), while the One Way Analysis of Variance with Scheffe's Test revealed statistically significant differences across multiple pairs of indicators within both the management practices and performance domains, pointing to uneven competency development among beginning school heads. These results directly address the study's objectives by establishing the level, relationship, and differences in management practices and performance, while the qualitative findings on issues, challenges, and available and needed support provided contextual depth that explained the patterns observed in the quantitative data. The convergence of both strands of evidence, through data triangulation, affirmed that while beginning school heads are already functioning effectively in their compliance based and task oriented responsibilities, targeted, sustained, and contextualized support remains necessary to help them transition toward more analytical, improvement focused, and data driven leadership. These findings contribute to the field by offering an evidence based understanding of early career school leadership within the Philippine basic education context and by providing the empirical foundation for Project LEAD, the proposed early career leadership training program. The next chapter presents the summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations drawn from this study, synthesizing the implications of these results for policy, practice, and future research on beginning school head development.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indicate that beginning school heads generally demonstrate effective management practices in leading their schools. However, limitations in data driven and technical competencies continue to hinder their ability to make fully evidence based and efficient decisions. Although they exhibit satisfactory leadership capabilities, their effectiveness remains influenced by contextual and systemic challenges that restrict their capacity to achieve greater leadership impact. The study further established that management practices are significantly associated with performance, suggesting that stronger leadership practices contribute to improved school outcomes. At the same time, the observed variations across different management indicators reveal that leadership effectiveness is not uniform across all domains, indicating areas that require further enhancement. Moreover, beginning school heads experience multidimensional challenges that influence both their management practices and overall performance, particularly in the areas of resource management and instructional supervision. While existing professional support systems provide valuable assistance, these mechanisms remain inadequately structured and require stronger institutional reinforcement to effectively support beginning school leaders. Collectively, these findings underscore the necessity of implementing a structured early career leadership training program to address identified competency gaps and strengthen leadership effectiveness.

In light of these conclusions, the study emphasizes the importance of strengthening continuous professional development initiatives that focus on instructional leadership, strategic planning, resource management, and data driven decision making to enhance the managerial

and supervisory competencies of beginning school heads. Beginning school heads are likewise encouraged to participate actively in targeted capacity building programs and professional learning opportunities that develop their competencies in financial management, delegation, instructional supervision, and monitoring and evaluation practices. Schools Division Offices should institutionalize comprehensive mentoring and coaching programs that provide sustained technical guidance throughout the leadership transition period, while Public Schools District Supervisors should deliver continuous technical assistance in school planning, human resource management, financial operations, and instructional leadership systems. Furthermore, beginning school heads should maximize monitoring and evaluation systems by consistently utilizing data to support evidence based decision making. Schools Division Offices are also encouraged to sustain professional learning communities that promote collaborative practice and serve as effective leadership support mechanisms. Finally, the School Governance and Operations Division Chief should adopt and implement the proposed early career leadership development program to strengthen the leadership capacity of beginning school heads, improve school performance, and ultimately enhance learner outcomes.

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