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Leading strategically toward innovation: The role of visionary school leaders in the 21st century

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ABSTRACT

This research was designed to measure strategy leadership practices and the barriers facing administrators for schools located within the District of San Francisco, Cebu for the 2025 School Year – 2026 to establish a Strategic Leadership Development Plan. The study utilized the Descriptive-Correlational method for collecting data from 28 administrators via survey using an adapted questionnaire. The data analysis identified an overall trend of "Outstanding" performance for all practices (M = 4.465), with the top three areas of performance being Managing School Operations and Resources (M = 4.607), Developing Self & Others (M = 4.536) and Developing Vision (M = 4.527) were determined to be rated as outstanding; communication, strategic planning, decision making, building connections, and leading strategically were also rated as outstanding. The overall level of the challenges identified was rated as "Moderately Challenging" (M = 3.298) with Managing Systems and Processes being rated as the highest challenge (M = 3.512) followed by Promoting Quality Teaching & Learning (M = 3.321). The primary issues identified were conditions related to limited resources, multiple responsibilities and stakeholder participation in the development of program and processes. Overall, no significant correlation was evident between the identified strategy leadership practices and the challenges being experienced by the administrators (r = 0.143, p = 0.467). There were no statistically significant differences across the respondents' demographics except for the age group for the effectiveness of strategy leadership practices. In conclusion, the findings of this study indicated that the heads of the schools involved demonstrated significant strategy leadership while experiencing moderately challenging barriers to strategy leadership. The recommendation are for further capacity building programs, resource support/talent and support for engaging stakeholders in school development activities, etc.

Keywords: Strategic leadership, school leaders, leadership challenges, school management, instructional leadership, innovation in education.

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INTRODUCTION

School leaders in the 21st century are expected to perform responsibilities that extend beyond the traditional administration and management of educational institutions. They are increasingly required to provide strategic direction and lead their schools through continuous innovation in response to technological advancement, globalization, evolving educational environments, and changing expectations for teaching and learning. Teachers and administrators must consequently contribute to developing educational systems characterized by creativity, critical thinking, adaptability, and responsiveness to emerging needs. Within this context, visionary leadership has become increasingly significant because it enables school leaders to establish a clear institutional direction, communicate shared aspirations among stakeholders, create opportunities for collaboration, and encourage innovative practices that contribute to sustained school improvement.

Despite the increasing emphasis on vision driven leadership and strategic thinking in educational administration, conceptual and practical gaps remain concerning how school leaders translate their visions into sustainable and innovative institutional practices. Much of the existing literature on educational leadership emphasizes general leadership traits, competencies, management practices, and measures of effectiveness rather than examining the strategic processes through which leaders introduce, implement, evaluate, and institutionalize innovation. Research indicates that although principals may generate innovative ideas capable of improving their schools, they frequently encounter difficulty transforming these ideas into enduring organizational practices because the necessary structures and systems for implementation and institutionalization are not always present (Gonzales, Garza, & Leon Zaragoza, 2024; Widodo et al., 2023). Resistance to change, inadequate professional development, and insufficient organizational resources further constrain the institutionalization of innovative practices in schools (Navickaitė & Janiūnaitė, 2023; Valdés Sánchez & Gutiérrez Esteban, 2023). These findings suggest that generating a compelling vision is only one aspect of successful leadership because innovation also requires strategic mechanisms that convert vision into coordinated and sustainable action.

The Philippine educational context further demonstrates the importance of examining how visionary leadership operates under varying institutional conditions. Research suggests that the application of visionary leadership differs among Philippine schools because of variations in administrative capacity, environmental conditions, resource availability, governance arrangements, and leaders' ability to implement educational policies. These conditions influence the capacity of school leaders to develop, communicate, and implement a shared vision for school improvement (Chua Reyes et al., 2022). Educational administrators also employ adaptive strategies to address complex institutional needs during periods of reform, indicating that leadership practices must remain responsive to changing organizational realities (Adams et al., 2023; Yusay & Hechanova, 2024). Such variations reveal an important gap in scholarly inquiry concerning the relationship between the strategic qualities of visionary leadership and the processes through which educational leaders design, implement, monitor, evaluate, and sustain innovative educational practices. Addressing this gap is essential to developing evidence based leadership frameworks capable of supporting school leaders as educational systems continue to experience rapid change (Duray, 2025).

Recent research further identifies visionary leadership and proficiency in information and communication technology as important contributors to educational reform. Leadership support for ICT integration can establish organizational conditions that encourage transformation and improve teaching and student learning (Ye et al., 2022). Visionary leadership supports the integration of technology into instruction, encourages the development and refinement of instructional practices, and strengthens teacher capacity, thereby

contributing to improved school quality (Suhendri et al., 2024; Schmitz et al., 2023). Visionary leaders likewise create opportunities for collaboration, creativity, and shared responsibility among stakeholders, establishing an organizational climate conducive to sustaining educational innovation (Mustiningsih et al., 2023; Widodo et al., 2023). These findings collectively demonstrate that technology alone does not generate educational transformation. Its effectiveness depends substantially on leadership that provides direction, develops capacity, mobilizes resources, and integrates technological initiatives with broader institutional objectives.

Within the Philippine educational landscape, visionary school leaders also occupy an important position in connecting educational policies with contemporary innovation and reform. Nevertheless, difficulties associated with maintaining stakeholder engagement, managing limited resources, and interpreting and implementing educational policies continue to constrain their leadership practices (Adams et al., 2023; Yusay & Hechanova, 2024). The literature therefore emphasizes the need to examine not merely whether educational leaders possess a vision, but how they strategically translate that vision into concrete actions that promote innovation and improve school performance. This distinction is central to understanding how visionary leadership contributes to creating schools that are responsive, adaptable, prospective, and capable of addressing the educational requirements of 21st century learners.

The theoretical foundation of this investigation integrates Visionary Leadership Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, Strategic Leadership Theory, and Complexity Leadership Theory. Visionary Leadership Theory conceptualizes leadership in terms of the ability to articulate a clear direction for the future and establish a pathway through which desired organizational change can be achieved (Nanus, 1992). Contemporary scholarship associates visionary leadership with organizational transformation, creative problem solving, and strategic innovation (Buss et al., 2023; Hermawan et al., 2024). Within schools, this perspective explains how leaders create meaning and direction by articulating an institutional future that can mobilize teachers and other stakeholders toward common objectives. Vision therefore functions not merely as an aspirational statement but as a strategic foundation for coordinating organizational priorities and encouraging innovation.

Transformational Leadership Theory, originally proposed by Burns (1978) and subsequently expanded by Bass and Riggio (2006), complements visionary leadership by explaining how leaders inspire followers to exceed conventional expectations and contribute actively to organizational transformation. Recent studies demonstrate the relevance of transformational leadership to teacher innovation, technology integration, and organizational effectiveness (Schmitz et al., 2023; Eseryel et al., 2021). School principals who demonstrate inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration can establish supportive conditions in which teachers are encouraged to experiment with and implement innovative instructional practices and technologies (Schmitz et al., 2023; Widodo et al., 2023). Visionary leadership similarly strengthens teacher motivation and engagement by creating a sense of meaning and shared purpose, thereby supporting teachers' willingness to innovate and improve instructional practice (Buss et al., 2023; Hermawan et al., 2024). Together, these theoretical perspectives explain how leaders establish direction while simultaneously cultivating the motivation and organizational commitment necessary to pursue that direction.

Strategic Leadership Theory extends this understanding by emphasizing how leaders anticipate challenges, make decisions with long term institutional consequences, and align organizational resources with established goals (House and Aditya, 1997; Rowe, 2001).

Strategic leadership is particularly important for educational innovation in systems characterized by governmental constraints, limited resources, and rapidly changing environments (Valdés Sánchez & Gutiérrez Esteban, 2023; Adams et al., 2023). Through strategic leadership practices, school leaders establish institutional direction by communicating a shared vision, developing strategic plans, empowering organizational members to innovate, allocating resources, and involving stakeholders in continuous improvement processes (Carvalho et al., 2021). Effective strategic leadership therefore provides the mechanisms through which visionary aspirations can be transformed into structured, implementable, and sustainable programs aligned with institutional objectives and educational reform (Adams et al., 2023; DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2020).

Complexity Leadership Theory provides an additional perspective by recognizing schools as complex adaptive systems in which leadership develops through interaction, cooperation, adaptation, and collective problem solving (Uhl Bien et al., 2007). Recent literature conceptualizes educational institutions as complex adaptive systems and consequently emphasizes that leadership must be sufficiently adaptive and distributed among organizational members to create and sustain innovative practices during periods of transition (Mustiningsih et al., 2023; Navickaitė & Janiūnaitė, 2023). This perspective is particularly relevant to contemporary schools because innovation rarely occurs through isolated administrative decisions. Instead, it emerges from interactions among leaders, teachers, learners, families, communities, policies, technologies, and institutional structures. The combined theoretical framework therefore explains how school leaders articulate a vision, inspire organizational members, strategically plan and mobilize resources for innovation, and adapt leadership practices to complex and changing educational environments.

The theoretical foundations of the study are reinforced by the Philippine legal and professional framework governing school leadership. Republic Act No. 9155, otherwise known as the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, establishes the responsibilities of school principals as instructional leaders and administrators who create environments conducive to student learning and educational improvement. Section 7 further requires school heads to develop school improvement plans and implement innovative programs, directly connecting their administrative authority with strategic leadership and innovation. These statutory responsibilities demonstrate that visionary and strategic leadership is not merely an optional leadership orientation within Philippine basic education but is embedded within the formal expectations placed upon school heads.

The Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads, established through DepEd Order No. 24, Series of 2020, further institutionalizes these leadership expectations. The standards identify domains, strands, and indicators intended to guide effective school leadership throughout the country. Domain 1, Leading Strategically, emphasizes the responsibility of school heads to develop and communicate shared vision and mission while promoting innovation and continuous improvement. The standards consequently provide an institutional framework for examining how school leaders develop visionary, strategic, and innovative decisions. Republic Act No. 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, likewise underscores the need for educational improvement and innovation to ensure that learners receive quality education appropriate to contemporary social and global conditions. It encourages schools and their leaders to adopt curricula, instructional approaches, and leadership practices that respond to global standards while remaining sensitive to local needs. Collectively, these policies reinforce the premise that school leaders are expected to employ strategic approaches that translate institutional vision into innovative practices capable of contributing to transformative education.

The capacity of leaders to create supportive organizational climates is particularly important in translating these expectations into practice. Research indicates that a positive

organizational climate and teacher empowerment foster the continued implementation of innovative practices even when schools encounter difficulties (Schmitz et al., 2023). Leadership that strengthens teacher engagement and resilience also contributes to the sustainability of school based innovation by increasing educators' commitment and adaptability (Valdés Sánchez & Gutiérrez Esteban, 2023). When teachers participate in developing the institutional vision, they are more likely to demonstrate ownership, collaboration, and commitment to innovative objectives (Buss et al., 2023; Mustiningsih et al., 2023). Thus, visionary leadership becomes more effective when institutional direction is collectively understood and when teachers perceive themselves as active contributors to innovation rather than merely recipients of administrative decisions.

Strategic planning and resource alignment provide another essential connection between leadership vision and sustainable innovation. Research has demonstrated that planning and determining how organizational resources can be aligned with institutional objectives are critical to the successful introduction of innovative practices. Schools whose leaders use foresight to coordinate priorities and mobilize available resources are better positioned to transform innovative concepts into organized, sustained, and scalable programs. Participatory planning, data informed decision making, and collaborative leadership practices further increase teacher engagement and enhance institutional capacity to respond constructively to educational reform (Valdés Sánchez & Gutiérrez Esteban, 2023; Adams et al., 2023). Strategic planning consequently functions as the operational bridge between the future envisioned by school leaders and the programs through which that future can be progressively realized.

Innovation management likewise requires leaders to develop organizational cultures that encourage creativity, experimentation, reflection, and continuous improvement. Studies identify staff development planning, continuous monitoring, and appropriate resource allocation as important components of the long term sustainability of educational innovation (Suhendri et al., 2024; Widodo et al., 2023). Effective innovation management therefore prevents improvement efforts from remaining isolated or temporary by integrating them into regular organizational processes. Research from southeast China similarly demonstrates that articulating a vision is insufficient when schools lack complementary systems capable of implementing it. When visionary leadership is combined with ICT readiness, appropriate training, and capacity building, school innovation and educational improvement become more attainable (Suhendri, 2024). Conversely, when resources for professional development and innovation are inadequate, the potential long term benefits of educational innovation may not be fully realized (Valdés Sánchez & Gutiérrez Esteban, 2020).

Stakeholder engagement represents another critical dimension of strategic educational leadership. Collaboration among teachers, parents, community members, and other stakeholders can strengthen trust and communication and consequently improve the implementation of innovative programs (Mustiningsih et al., 2023). Inclusive leadership practices further establish shared responsibility and commitment to innovation across the educational community. Effective stakeholder participation requires inclusive communication, meaningful involvement in decision making, transparency, and opportunities for shared leadership. These practices are especially important because the sustainability of educational innovation depends not only on administrative authority but also on continued support from the individuals and groups responsible for implementing, experiencing, and sustaining institutional change.

Despite these enabling conditions, school leaders continue to encounter substantial barriers to innovation. Resource scarcity remains one of the most persistent challenges because inadequate funding, infrastructure, and access to technology restrict schools' capacity to

implement and sustain innovative programs (Navickaitė & Janiūnaitė, 2023). Strategic resource management, including the establishment of partnerships and effective utilization of available resources, can nevertheless enable schools to maintain innovative initiatives despite financial constraints. These findings demonstrate that resource limitations do not operate independently of leadership. Rather, their effects may be moderated by the capacity of leaders to prioritize needs, mobilize support, build partnerships, and allocate available resources strategically.

Resistance to change among educators presents an additional implementation challenge. Uncertainty surrounding unfamiliar practices, limited participation in decision making, and concerns regarding possible failure can generate teacher resistance to innovation (Schmitz et al., 2023). This challenge underscores the importance of transformational leadership strategies that emphasize communication, motivation, participation, and trust building. Innovation is therefore more likely to become institutionalized when school leaders create opportunities for teachers to understand proposed changes, contribute to decisions, develop necessary competencies, and participate meaningfully in implementation.

Policy and bureaucratic constraints can similarly hinder school administrators from implementing innovative ideas. Literature indicates that centralized organizational systems can reduce institutional flexibility and lengthen decision making processes (Adams et al., 2023). Within the Philippine context, multiple responsibilities and overlapping mandates may also reduce the time and organizational attention school leaders can devote to strategic leadership and innovation. Leadership effectiveness is further affected by limitations in professional capacity, particularly in ICT integration, instructional leadership, strategic planning, and data informed decision making. Inadequate training may restrict leaders' ability to implement innovation successfully and use evidence effectively when making institutional decisions (Suhendri et al., 2024). Continuous professional development is consequently necessary for strengthening the competencies required to manage increasingly complex educational environments.

These challenges illustrate why innovation cannot be understood solely as the introduction of new technologies, programs, or instructional practices. Leadership for innovation requires an interconnected set of strategic processes involving vision development, planning, resource mobilization, teacher empowerment, professional capacity building, stakeholder engagement, change management, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Research shows that school leaders frequently confront resistance from staff, limited financial resources, inconsistent teacher readiness, policy restrictions, and varying stakeholder support when implementing innovative initiatives (Navickaitė & Janiūnaitė, 2023). Consequently, strategic leaders must combine clear institutional direction with change management practices, capacity development, and stakeholder engagement to ensure that their vision becomes operational in everyday educational practice.

Evidence from Philippine schools further indicates that visionary leadership is not implemented uniformly because schools differ in administrative capacity, policy implementation, available resources, and leadership preparation. These variations strengthen the need for further investigation into the planning, resource mobilization, implementation, and evaluation processes through which innovative educational environments can be sustained (Philippine Department of Education, Order No. 24, s. 2020). Although existing scholarship has established meaningful relationships among visionary leadership, transformational leadership, teacher innovation, ICT integration, organizational climate, and stakeholder collaboration, comparatively less attention has been given to the complete strategic process through which school leaders transform vision into sustained institutional innovation. The literature therefore reveals a need to examine leadership not simply as a collection of personal

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characteristics but as an integrated process connecting vision, strategy, organizational capacity, adaptation, and sustained implementation.

Taken together, the literature, theoretical perspectives, and Philippine policy framework establish visionary leadership as an essential component of strategic management and educational innovation. Vision provides institutional direction, transformational leadership mobilizes and empowers organizational members, strategic leadership converts aspirations into coordinated plans and resource decisions, and complexity leadership enables schools to adapt collectively within dynamic educational environments. At the same time, the effectiveness of these leadership processes is conditioned by teacher readiness, professional capacity, organizational climate, stakeholder participation, available resources, technological preparedness, and policy environments. The convergence of these perspectives demonstrates that sustainable innovation requires more than the presence of visionary ideas. It requires leaders who can strategically translate those ideas into collective, structured, adequately supported, continuously evaluated, and adaptable institutional practices. Accordingly, the study investigates the strategic methods through which visionary school leaders create, implement, and sustain innovative schools that are responsive to contemporary educational demands and capable of serving 21st century learners, while addressing the practical and scholarly gap concerning how leadership vision becomes sustained educational innovation.

Statement of the problem

This study aims to determine the level of strategic leadership and the challenges encountered in the 21st century educational context among elementary and secondary school heads in the District of San Francisco, San Francisco, Cebu, for the School Year 2025-2026, as a basis for a Strategic Leadership Development Plan.

To address the main problem, the following specific questions were formulated:

1. What is the demographic profile of the school administrators in terms of age, educational attainment, years of administrative experience, and level of school managed?
2. What is the level of strategic leadership practices demonstrated by school leaders in terms of vision development, communication, strategic planning, decision making, developing self and others, building connections, leading strategically, and managing school operations and resources?
3. What challenges do school leaders encounter in leading strategically toward innovation in the 21st-century educational context in terms of setting the direction of the school, management of systems and processes, promoting quality teaching and learning, nurturing oneself and others, and stakeholder engagement?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the level of strategic leadership and the challenges encountered in leading strategically?
5. Is there a significant difference in the level of strategic leadership and the challenges encountered when school leaders are grouped according to demographic profile?
6. Based on the findings, what Strategic Leadership Development Plan can be proposed?

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design to examine how visionary leaders lead strategically to innovate and improve schools in current times. This design incorporates both a descriptive or qualitative dimension, which relates to how teachers exhibit

different leadership styles and the challenges they face as leaders, and a correlational or quantitative dimension, which examines the correlation between leadership style and innovation as well as the correlation between leadership style and performance indicators in schools. This type of research is appropriate because it allows the researcher to gather and analyze numerical data so that current conditions can be described and possible correlations identified among variables. The overall flow of the study begins with the identification of the research problem and proceeds through instrument development, data gathering, and data analysis, culminating in findings that serve as the foundation for developing a Strategic Leadership Development Plan.

The study was conducted in the San Francisco District, supervising selected public elementary and secondary schools located at Latitude 10°09 North and Longitude 124°21 East. These schools were deemed appropriate for the study because they represent a variety of educational environments in which school leaders are engaged in multiple leadership styles and continually pursue innovation through the implementation of new initiatives. The district includes schools that differ in size and in the availability of materials and resources for students and learning, and it offers favorable conditions for the research because School Heads and Administrators work collaboratively to support the instructional process, oversee best practices, and manage and enhance both teacher effectiveness and student progress. The selected schools were further considered ideal for investigating strategic leadership practice because each member of the leadership team strives to develop the capacity of staff to produce results and adapt to the needs of educational reform initiatives. In researching both school leadership and innovation as they relate to improving schools and the overall development of education, this district provided an appropriate setting for understanding the connection between leadership and innovation. The research locale was further illustrated through a location map depicting the geographic position and boundaries of the schools included in the study.

The respondents of the study consisted of 28 public school heads within the target school district. As educational leaders, they are responsible for establishing the most positive direction for their schools through vision creation and effective strategic planning, as well as for demonstrating innovative leadership within and among their respective schools. Their responsibilities include supervising teachers, managing resources, promoting collaboration, and creating programs that support both academic excellence and continuous improvement. Because these school heads play a significant role in decision-making and school operations, they were considered capable of providing essential information to determine the extent of strategic leadership practices and the obstacles to leading schools toward innovation, and this data was intended to serve as a foundation for strategies and interventions to improve visionary leadership, strengthen innovation-driven initiatives, and encourage a culture of excellence and adaptability within twenty first century education. Of the 28 respondents, 22, or 78.57%, were school heads from elementary schools, while 6, or 21.43%, were school heads from secondary schools, for a total of 28 respondents representing 100.00% of the sample.

Data were collected using a structured survey questionnaire designed to gather critical information regarding the respondents' demographic profile, their level of strategic leadership practices, and the various challenges they face in leading schools through innovation. The instrument was organized into three primary sections. The first section collected the personal and professional profile of the school heads, specifically age, gender, education level, title or rank, and administrative experience in years, as these demographic characteristics help identify factors that may influence strategic decision-making and the ability to lead innovation within an organization. The second section evaluated the strategic leadership practices of school heads across four dimensions: creating and communicating vision, strategic planning and decision-making, innovation management, and stakeholder involvement, with the purpose of identifying

how well school leaders use visionary and strategic approaches to gain teachers' support, build a culture of collaboration, and foster a culture of innovation within the twenty first century educational environment. The third section addressed the challenges of leading strategically to implement innovation across five dimensions: limited resources, resistance to change, policies and bureaucratic constraints, capacity and competence gaps, and stakeholder engagement issues, providing insight into the obstacles to successful implementation of strategic and innovative leadership practices. To ensure validity, clarity, accuracy, and alignment with the purpose of the study, the instrument was validated by experts in educational management, education leadership, and educational innovation, and it underwent a reliability test to measure the consistency and reliability of respondents' responses.

In gathering the data, the researcher obtained formal authorization to distribute the questionnaire to the chosen public school principals in the San Francisco District after both the research adviser and the Dean of Graduate Studies approved the questionnaire. The researcher personally delivered the questionnaires to the respondents in order to provide appropriate orientation regarding the purpose of the study and to assure respondents that their responses would be maintained confidentially. Each respondent was given three days to answer the survey, allowing adequate time for reflection before responding. Upon retrieval, the researcher assessed each returned response for completeness, coordination, and accuracy before including it in the analysis, and incomplete or invalid responses were excluded from data analysis. The validated data were then methodically compiled, tabulated, and analyzed using appropriate statistical tools to satisfy the objectives of the study, with results displayed in tabular and graphic format to enable a clear, concise, and orderly interpretation of the findings concerning the strategic leadership behaviors and challenges of visionary school leaders fostering innovation.

Proper statistical methods were applied to organize, analyze, and interpret the data collected, including the demographic profile of respondents, the level of strategic leadership practices exhibited by school leaders, and the challenges faced by school leaders. Descriptive statistics in terms of frequency and percentages were used to describe the demographic profile of the school administrators, providing a clear overview of age, educational level, position or rank, years as an administrator, current school level, and school size. Data regarding the level of strategic leadership practices were analyzed and interpreted using weighted means and standard deviations based on a 5 point Likert scale to uniformly compare responses across respondents, with results interpreted from a perspective of poor to outstanding. The same statistical measures of weighted means and standard deviations were used to analyze and interpret the frequency and extent of challenges faced by school principals in relation to each of the five strategic leadership practices, ranging from not challenging to very highly challenging. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, or Pearson r, was used to assess the relationships between the data collected, specifically to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between the extent to which school leaders demonstrate strategic leadership practices and the challenges they face as school leaders, with the level for determining significance set at the 0.05 alpha level for the study. The means described above were further statistically tested using inferential statistics to examine the significance of differences in the level of strategic leadership practice and the challenges faced by school leaders when grouped according to demographic profile. The t-test for Independent Samples was utilized for variables having two groups, while One-Way Analysis of Variance, or ANOVA, was used for variables with three or more groups, such as age, educational level, position, years of experience, and school size. When differences between groups were found to be statistically significant through ANOVA, a Tukey Post-Hoc Test was employed to

identify which groups differed significantly from one another. The maximum significance for all hypothesis tests conducted in this study was established at the 0.05 level of significance, which served as the cutoff for determining the acceptance or rejection of the null hypothesis.

The items in the questionnaire were designed with a range of responses on a Likert-like scale, allowing each respondent to select an appropriate response based on the strength of agreement with a particular statement. For the Level of Strategic Leadership Practices, a scale range of 4.21 to 5.00 was interpreted as Outstanding, indicating that school leaders consistently exhibit the described strategic leadership behavior; a scale range of 3.41 to 4.20 was interpreted as Very Satisfactory, indicating that school leaders often demonstrate the strategic leadership behavior described; a scale range of 2.61 to 3.40 was interpreted as Satisfactory, indicating that school leaders sometimes demonstrate the described behavior; a scale range of 1.81 to 2.60 was interpreted as Unsatisfactory, indicating that school leaders seldom demonstrate the described behavior; and a scale range of 1.00 to 1.80 was interpreted as Poor, indicating that school leaders never or rarely demonstrate the described behavior. For the Challenges Encountered by School Leaders, a scale range of 4.21 to 5.00 was interpreted as Very Highly Challenging, indicating that the challenge is extremely evident and greatly affects leadership toward innovation; a scale range of 3.41 to 4.20 was interpreted as Highly Challenging, indicating that the challenge is often experienced and has a significant impact on leadership practices; a scale range of 2.61 to 3.40 was interpreted as Moderately Challenging, indicating that the challenge is sometimes experienced and has a moderate effect on leadership; a scale range of 1.81 to 2.60 was interpreted as Slightly Challenging, indicating that the challenge is occasionally experienced and has minimal impact; and a scale range of 1.00 to 1.80 was interpreted as Not Challenging, indicating that the challenge is rarely, if ever, experienced by school leaders.

In this study, several key terms were theoretically and operationally defined to guide the research. Age conceptually refers to a person's lifespan and is generally associated with maturity level, experience, and the ability to make good decisions, and operationally it refers to the number of years an individual head of school is old based on the age listed in the demographic section of the questionnaire. Building Connections conceptually reflects a principal's ability to establish and maintain positive working relationships with teachers, parents, community members, and other stakeholders to promote school programs and innovative practices, and operationally it refers to how school heads build good relationships with teachers and others. Capacity and Competence Gap conceptually means that there is not enough knowledge or ability among those leading their organizations, and operationally it is informed by the lack of training or experience in strategic leadership and leading innovation among teachers and school leaders, reflecting managers' feelings of inadequacy. Challenges in Leading Strategically conceptually refers to strategic leadership practices such as planning, setting directions, managing systems, improving instruction, developing leaders, and engaging stakeholders, and operationally it is measured by how respondents view the difficulty in implementing these practices. Communication is generally defined as the process of exchanging information, shared expectations, and shared goals between school leaders and other stakeholders so that adequate shared understanding exists and these parties maintain an aligned vision with that of the school, and operationally it is exhibited through the frequency with which school leaders communicate school goals and directions as rated by respondents. Decision Making conceptually refers to choosing the most appropriate action from available options to address a school concern and improve performance, and operationally it refers to the frequency and effectiveness of school leaders' decision-making practices as perceived by respondents. Developing Self and Others refers to the ongoing enhancement of leadership skills as well as the improvement of teacher and staff practices through mentoring and development, and operationally it is assessed by respondents' evaluation of leadership's commitment to providing support for professional development opportunities for teachers and staff.

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Educational Attainment conceptually refers to the highest academic credentials earned by an individual, and operationally it represents the highest graduate level attainment achieved by school head administrators as shown in the demographic section of the questionnaire. Innovation conceptually refers to the adoption of innovative concepts, techniques, approaches, or technologies used in the teaching and learning and management of schools, and operationally it is measured by the degree to which educational leaders facilitate, implement, and support the use of innovative practices. Innovation Management refers to the establishment of a climate for school innovation by educational leaders, and operationally leaders are evaluated by how they demonstrate and encourage innovation in their respective educational settings. Limited Resources conceptually refers to a lack of financial, human, or material support resulting in reduced efficiency and innovation for organizations, and operationally it is assessed by respondents' view of whether the resources available at their schools are sufficient or inadequate. Leading Strategically conceptually refers to the decision-making steps taken to lead, guide, and steer an organization toward effectively developing and reaching its educational objectives and goals through a methodical series of strategic thinking, planning, and actions, and operationally it refers to the application of strategic leadership by school leaders in their daily operations. Management of School Operations and Resources conceptually refers to the ability to utilize human, financial, and material resources efficiently to support school operations, and operationally it is evaluated based on respondents' perception of the effectiveness of academic leaders in managing school operations. Management of Systems and Processes conceptually refers to the structure, organization, and coordination of all school structures, policies, and procedures that support teaching, learning, and innovation, and operationally it is evaluated based on respondents' assessment of the efficiency of the system and how effectively processes were managed. Nurturing Oneself and Others denotes the individual development of school-based leaders and their capacity to foster the learning and wellbeing of those who work with them, and operationally it is measured by leadership support for both professional and emotional development. Policy and Bureaucratic Constraints conceptually refers to organizational level rules and procedures put in place that may limit flexibility and slow decision making and innovation, and operationally it is measured by the policy barriers perceived by respondents. Position or Rank conceptually relates to an individual's degree of power and responsibility within an organization, and operationally it relates to the actual job title or ranking of the Heads of School as indicated in the demographic profile. Promoting Quality Teaching and Learning conceptually refers to efforts aimed at improving instructional practices and learner outcomes within the school, and operationally it is measured based on respondents' assessment of instructional leadership effectiveness. Resistance to Change conceptually describes the hesitation of people or groups to accept new ideas or ways of doing things, and operationally it is evaluated as the degree of resistance school leaders encounter when implementing new ideas. Strategic Leadership refers to the overall capacity of leaders to lead and direct others toward achieving long-term organizational goals of success and efficiency, and operationally it is assessed by the degree to which a school principal demonstrates competence in implementing the strategic leadership practices defined by this study's indicators. Strategic Leadership Development Plan conceptually involves a systematic Leadership Enhancement Program aimed at improving leadership capabilities related to planning, innovation, and organizational development, and operationally the program describes the expected final product of this study resulting from the data analysis. Strategic Planning and Decision-Making conceptually describes a method of creating long-term plans and developing rationale to inform decision-making procedures, and operationally it is based on how often school leadership engages in planning and decision-making activities.

Stakeholder Engagement conceptually refers to the participation of people or groups whose interests are or will be affected by decisions and actions made by schools, and operationally it measures how much collaboration takes place between school administrators or leaders and their community's stakeholders. Stakeholder Engagement Issues conceptually refers to problems or challenges in involving stakeholders effectively in school programs and decision-making, and operationally it is assessed through reported difficulties in coordination and participation. Setting the Direction of the School conceptually refers to creating well-defined goals, vision, and priorities to provide direction to school development, and operationally it is measured by evaluating how clearly and effectively the direction for the school was set by the respondents. Twenty first Century Educational Context conceptually refers to the modern educational environment shaped by technology, globalization, and changing learning demands, and operationally it refers to the current school environment in which leadership practices are implemented. Vision Development and Communication conceptually means developing a vision of the future specifically for the school and sharing this vision in a manner that is inspiring and clear, and operationally it is measured by the effectiveness with which school leaders develop a school vision and communicate that vision to others. Visionary School Leaders conceptually means leaders in education who understand how to develop, maintain, and execute a specific direction or goal regarding improving and enhancing their schools, and operationally it refers only to those elementary and secondary school leaders involved in this research project. Years of Administrative Experience conceptually means that the length of time an individual has served in a leadership or management role contributes to their level of experience and ability, and operationally it represents the total length of time school principals have been working in these roles based on the number of years indicated on the questionnaires.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the description, analysis, and interpretation of the data gathered from the twenty eight heads of schools who served as respondents in this study, all of whom were purposively selected from among the school administrators of the DepEd San Francisco District. The discussion that follows is grounded entirely in the data collected through the research instrument administered to the respondents and is organized to correspond directly with the objectives of the study. The chapter begins with the demographic profile of the respondents, covering age, highest educational attainment, years of administrative experience, and the type and size of school managed. It then proceeds to an examination of the level of strategic leadership practices demonstrated by the school leaders across eight domains, namely vision development, communication, strategic planning, decision making, developing self and others, building connections, leading strategically, and managing school operations and resources. This is followed by an analysis of the challenges encountered by school leaders in leading strategically for innovation within the twenty first century educational context, specifically in the areas of setting the direction of the school, management of systems and processes, promoting quality teaching and learning, nurturing oneself and others, and stakeholder engagement. The chapter subsequently presents the results of the correlation analysis between the level of strategic leadership practices and the challenges encountered, followed by the results of the difference testing when respondents were grouped according to their demographic profile. Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to describe the demographic profile and the levels of leadership practice and challenge, while Pearson r correlation and both analysis of variance and independent samples t test procedures were employed to examine relationships and differences among variables, all interpreted at the 0.05 level of significance.

With respect to age, the data show that the twenty eight respondents were distributed across four age brackets, with the largest proportion, comprising 12 respondents or 42.9%, falling within the 41 to 50 age range. This was followed by the 51 to 60 age bracket with 10 respondents or 35.7%, the 31 to 40 age bracket with 4 respondents or 14.3%, and the 61 and above bracket with 2 respondents or 7.1%, yielding a total of 28 respondents or 100%. This distribution indicates that the majority of school leadership positions in the district are held by administrators in the mid-career to late career range, with comparatively fewer very young or very senior leaders represented in the sample. This pattern is consistent with the observation of Mustiningsih et al. (2023) that visionary leadership capabilities tend to deepen through accumulated experience as school heads build a culture of innovation within their districts. Adams et al. (2023) similarly note that the effectiveness of school leadership is shaped by the experience gained through navigating reform and crisis phases in education, while Leithwood et al. (2020) affirm that successful school leaders draw primarily from lived leadership experience to strengthen their instructional leadership and decision making capacities. Taken together, these findings suggest that the predominance of mid-career administrators in the district positions them to be relatively well equipped to manage the complex leadership demands of contemporary educational environments and to lead innovative practices. In terms of practice, this age profile underscores the necessity of leadership development programs that cultivate both visionary and strategic competencies, particularly those oriented toward fostering innovation and school improvement, as suggested by Valdés-Sánchez and Gutiérrez-Esteban (2023) and Gonzales et al. (2024). From a policy standpoint, the education system may benefit from mentoring initiatives, succession planning, and continuous professional development opportunities that balance experience with innovation, in line with the recommendations of Yusay and Hechanova (2024) and DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2020. Future research may further examine how age interacts with experience and adaptability to influence leadership effectiveness and the successful implementation of innovative practices in twenty first century learning environments, as suggested by Widodo et al. (2023) and Suhendri et al. (2024).

In terms of highest educational attainment, the data reveal considerable variation among the respondents. Of the 28 respondents, 3 or 10.7% reported a bachelor's degree as their highest educational attainment, while 14 or 50.0% had completed units toward a master's degree without completing the degree itself. Five respondents, or 17.9%, had completed their master's degree, an equal proportion of 5 respondents, or 17.9%, had completed units toward a doctorate, and only 1 respondent, or 3.6%, had completed a doctoral degree, for a total of 28 respondents or 100%. These figures indicate that a substantial number of school leaders in the district are actively engaged in graduate level study or are nearing completion of advanced degrees that could enhance their capacity for effective leadership. This trend aligns with international literature suggesting that school administrators with higher levels of graduate education tend to demonstrate stronger competencies in strategic vision development, decision making, and collaborative leadership. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020) found that higher levels of formal education and professional training among school leaders correspond with a greater likelihood of successfully implementing strategic school improvement and instructional leadership strategies, reinforcing the assertion that continued pursuit of advanced academic credentials equips administrators with additional tools for strengthening their strategic leadership capabilities.

The data on years of administrative experience show that the largest group of respondents, comprising 10 individuals or 35.7%, had served between 16 and 20 years in an administrative capacity. Equal proportions of 5 respondents each, or 17.9% for each bracket,

reported having 1 to 5 years, 6 to 10 years, and 11 to 15 years of experience respectively, while 3 respondents, or 10.7%, reported 21 years or more of administrative service, bringing the total to 28 respondents or 100%. This distribution reflects a balanced representation of leaders across early, mid, and late career stages, with a notable concentration of administrators possessing extensive tenure alongside a substantial cohort still relatively early in their administrative careers. This pattern of continuity and diversification in leadership experience corresponds with the findings of Gonzales, Garza, and Leon Zaragoza (2024), who observed that principals engaged in school improvement initiatives demonstrate greater innovation in thought and practice when afforded opportunities for professional growth and leadership development. Adams et al. (2023) further note that administrators become more effective as they gain immersion in complex educational environments, with experience strengthening their capacity to lead change, engage stakeholders, and sustain innovative processes. These findings imply that leadership preparation and training programs should be tailored to the varying needs of administrators across different career stages, ensuring that both newly appointed and veteran leaders receive the support necessary to build capacity for strategic leadership and innovation implementation. Policy attention to mentoring programs and capacity building initiatives, as emphasized by Valdés-Sánchez and Gutiérrez-Esteban (2023), would further support administrators in addressing the demands of educational innovation, while future research may explore how differences in administrative experience shape innovation capacity, adaptability, and the effectiveness of strategic management practices within schools.

Regarding the type of school managed, the data indicate that 19 respondents, or 67.9%, oversee elementary schools, while 9 respondents, or 32.1%, manage secondary schools, for a total of 28 respondents or 100%. Elementary school leadership therefore constitutes the larger segment of school administration within the district, a pattern that may reflect either the greater number of elementary schools present or the broader scope of responsibilities associated with this level. Although secondary school leaders represent a smaller proportion of the sample, they are understood to contend with distinct challenges related to adolescent learning, curriculum complexity, and departmental management. Gonzales, Garza, and Leon Zaragoza (2024) observe that the type of institution shapes how school leaders approach innovation, with elementary education oriented toward foundational learning and a holistic approach while secondary education emphasizes specialization, academic tracking, and career preparation. Widodo et al. (2023) similarly note that school culture and the visionary orientation of leadership substantially influence the capacity for innovative practice, reinforcing the view that leadership effectiveness is shaped by the particular context in which it is exercised. These findings suggest that leadership training programs should be differentiated by school level to address the distinct curricular and supervisory demands of elementary and secondary contexts, a point also emphasized by Schmitz et al. (2023) and by Valdés-Sánchez and Gutiérrez-Esteban (2023), who note that the level of education shapes both the supportive and inhibiting factors that influence the implementation of educational innovations. Future research may examine more closely how elementary and secondary school environments differ in the implementation of leadership strategies and educational innovations and in the resulting improvements achieved.

With respect to the size of school managed, the data show that 12 respondents, or 42.9%, oversee medium sized schools, 9 respondents, or 32.1%, manage small schools, 5 respondents, or 17.9%, manage large schools, and 2 respondents, or 7.1%, manage mega large schools, totaling 28 respondents or 100%. Most administrators in the district are therefore responsible for schools with moderate student populations, with comparatively fewer managing either very large or very small institutions. School size carries direct implications for the scope of responsibilities that administrators must handle, including teacher supervision, resource allocation, and the overall complexity of organizational management. Gonzales, Garza, and

Leon Zaragoza (2024) note that principals play an essential role in generating innovative change while managing the complex demands of their organizations according to institutional context and size, while Valdés-Sánchez and Gutiérrez-Esteban (2023) similarly observe that educational innovation is shaped by both enabling conditions and contextual challenges tied to institutional complexity and size. These findings suggest that leadership training should be differentiated according to school size to better prepare administrators in resource management, delegation, and instructional supervision, a point reinforced by Schmitz et al. (2023), who identify transformational leadership as particularly critical in complex school environments requiring adaptable coordination. Future research may further examine how school size interacts with leadership practice and decision making efficiency to influence innovation and overall school performance.

The second part of this chapter addresses the level of strategic leadership practices demonstrated by the school leaders of the DepEd San Francisco District for School Year 2025 to 2026, examined across eight domains. In the domain of vision development, the overall mean was 4.527 with a standard deviation of 0.448, interpreted as outstanding. Among the specific indicators, ensuring that the school vision aligns with DepEd goals and policies obtained the highest mean of 4.679 with a standard deviation of 0.476, interpreted as outstanding, followed by clearly articulating a compelling school vision with a mean of 4.571 and a standard deviation of 0.504, also interpreted as outstanding. Leading initiatives that support the realization of the school's vision obtained a mean of 4.500 with a standard deviation of 0.577, interpreted as outstanding, while consistently communicating the vision to teachers, learners, and stakeholders obtained a mean of 4.357 with a standard deviation of 0.559, likewise interpreted as outstanding. These results suggest that respondents not only understand the importance of establishing a school vision but actively translate this understanding into leadership practice. Gonzales et al. (2024) affirm that when principals actively develop and communicate clear, innovative directions for their schools, they meaningfully contribute to improvement processes by fostering creativity, collaboration, and innovation centered practice. Mustiningsih et al. (2023) similarly found that visionary leadership substantially influences the cultivation of a culture of innovation by aligning institutional goals with a shared vision and continuous improvement strategies, while Schmitz et al. (2023) reported that establishing visionary and strategic direction strengthens an organization's overall capacity to innovate, particularly in supporting teachers as they adapt to new technologies and instructional strategies. These findings collectively suggest that strong vision development among school leaders enhances strategic alignment, innovation adoption, and goal driven school management. In practice, school leaders may continue strengthening communication strategies that translate vision into concrete action at all levels of the school, while policy attention to vision development within leadership programs would ensure cohesive alignment with Department of Education standards. Future research may explore the interaction between vision development and other strategic leadership domains, such as decision making or innovation, to better understand its direct impact on school effectiveness and student outcomes.

In the domain of communication, the overall mean was 4.429 with a standard deviation of 0.332, interpreted as outstanding. Maintaining open and transparent communication with teachers and staff obtained the highest mean of 4.607 with a standard deviation of 0.567, interpreted as outstanding, followed by actively listening and responding to concerns from the school community with a mean of 4.500 and a standard deviation of 0.509, also interpreted as outstanding. Communicating expectations and directions clearly to school stakeholders obtained a mean of 4.429 with a standard deviation of 0.504, interpreted as outstanding, while using multiple communication channels to reach stakeholders effectively obtained a mean of

4.179 with a standard deviation of 0.390, interpreted as very satisfactory. These results indicate that while respondents demonstrate strong proficiency in strategic communication overall, there remains room for growth in the diversification of communication platforms used to reach stakeholders. Sun et al. (2023) note a direct link between school leadership and the level of trust between teachers and leaders, which in turn contributes to improved student learning and school improvement, while Williams and Richardson (2023) observe that transparency and consistency in communication help build trust between teachers and leaders and foster greater teacher involvement in school activities. Nguyen and Ha (2023) further indicate that internal communication contributes to employee engagement, organizational commitment, and goal alignment within educational organizations, and Dedering and Pietsch (2023) highlight the role of relational communication in fostering a collaborative school community and supporting school improvement processes. These findings collectively affirm that effective communication is an essential element of strategic school leadership that yields positive educational outcomes. In practice, school leaders may continue diversifying communication strategies through digital tools and collaborative forums to ensure stakeholder access to accurate information, while policy consideration of advanced communication competencies, including crisis communication, digital literacy, and participatory dialogue, would strengthen future leadership training and evaluation systems. Future research may further examine the relationship between communication practices and other strategic leadership constructs such as decision making and stakeholder engagement.

In the domain of strategic planning, the overall mean was 4.402 with a standard deviation of 0.421, interpreted as outstanding. Leading the preparation of school improvement plans aligned with national directions obtained the highest mean of 4.536 with a standard deviation of 0.508, interpreted as outstanding, followed by involving teachers and stakeholders in strategic planning processes with a mean of 4.429 and a standard deviation of 0.573, also interpreted as outstanding. Regularly monitoring and adjusting plans based on school needs obtained a mean of 4.357 with a standard deviation of 0.488, interpreted as outstanding, while using data and evidence to guide strategic decisions obtained a mean of 4.286 with a standard deviation of 0.460, likewise interpreted as outstanding. These results suggest that respondents consistently engage in thoughtful planning and collaboration while incorporating evidence based decision making into their leadership practice. VanGronigen et al. (2023) note that school improvement planning is most successful when schools maintain specific strategies, monitor them regularly, and establish clear procedures for using them to achieve school level goals, while Koh et al. (2023) emphasize that sustaining school improvement requires strong strategic direction, data driven decision making, collaborative leadership, and continuous appraisal of implemented strategies. Meyer et al. (2022) similarly suggest that structured planning combined with collaborative support among teachers and adaptive leadership practices facilitates meaningful school change, and Sun et al. (2023) note that leadership practices incorporating planning and communication are positively correlated with increased teacher trust, collaboration, and improved school performance. These findings collectively indicate that sustainable school improvement requires strategic, collaborative, and evidence based planning. In practice, administrators may continue prioritizing inclusive planning processes that involve teachers, parents, and other stakeholders in developing consensus based improvement plans, while policy support for data driven leadership training, including data analytics and evaluation of strategic plan effectiveness, would further strengthen leaders' capacity to translate data into action. Future research may investigate the relationship between the quality of strategic planning and measurable outcomes such as improvements in instructional practice and student achievement.

In the domain of decision making, the overall mean reported in the narrative was 4.321 with a standard deviation of 0.492, while the tabulated total presented a mean of 4.402 with a

standard deviation of 0.421, both interpreted as outstanding. Ensuring that decisions support long term school development obtained the highest mean of 4.393 with a standard deviation of 0.497, interpreted as outstanding, followed by using data and evidence to justify decisions with a mean of 4.321 and a standard deviation of 0.476, also interpreted as outstanding. Making timely and well informed decisions and considering multiple perspectives before making decisions both obtained a mean of 4.286, with standard deviations of 0.460 and 0.535 respectively, both interpreted as outstanding. These results suggest that respondents consistently integrate careful analysis and strategic foresight into their decision making practices, reflecting strong competency in inclusive, evidence based approaches. Sun (2023) and Meyer (2022) note that data informed and adaptable school leaders improve instructional quality, foster teacher collaboration, and are more likely to succeed in creating sustainable school reforms and building stakeholder trust through evidence based decision making, findings that reinforce the present results indicating that strategic, inclusive, and evidence based decision making contributes to effective schools over both the short and long term. In practice, school leaders may continue engaging stakeholders and gathering accurate data while anticipating the long term effects of decisions, while policy support for advanced decision making training, including scenario planning, data analytics, and ethical considerations, would strengthen leadership development programs. Future research may examine how decision making interacts with other strategic leadership domains, such as visioning and strategic planning, and its impact on school performance and student outcomes.

In the domain of developing self and others, the overall mean was 4.536 with a standard deviation of 0.412, interpreted as outstanding. Encouraging teachers to pursue growth and learning opportunities obtained the highest mean of 4.750 with a standard deviation of 0.441, interpreted as outstanding, followed by engaging in continuous professional development with a mean of 4.571 and a standard deviation of 0.504, also interpreted as outstanding. Modeling professional and ethical leadership behavior obtained a mean of 4.464 with a standard deviation of 0.576, interpreted as outstanding, while providing constructive feedback to support staff improvement obtained a mean of 4.357 with a standard deviation of 0.559, likewise interpreted as outstanding. These findings suggest that respondents prioritize both their own professional growth and that of their staff, fostering a culture of continuous learning and ethical leadership. Meyer et al. (2022) and Sun et al. (2023) note that principals who engage in ongoing professional learning while supporting teacher development positively influence instructional quality and overall school effectiveness, while Koh et al. (2023) find that school leaders who provide constructive feedback, model professional behavior, and facilitate collaborative professional learning communities improve teacher competence, morale, and organizational commitment. These findings reinforce that continuous professional learning, mentoring, and supportive leadership practices are essential to effective school leadership. In practice, school leaders may continue providing ongoing professional development opportunities for themselves and their staff, including coaching and performance feedback, while policy support for structured mentoring programs would strengthen this dimension of leadership across the education system. Future research may examine how developing self and others relates to other strategic leadership dimensions, such as vision development and strategic planning, in shaping teacher performance, school culture, and student achievement.

In the domain of building connections, the overall mean was 4.304 with a standard deviation of 0.478, interpreted as outstanding. Maintaining positive relationships with parents and community members obtained the highest mean of 4.464 with a standard deviation of 0.637, interpreted as outstanding, followed by collaborating with internal and external stakeholders to support school programs with a mean of 4.357 and a standard deviation of

0.559, also interpreted as outstanding. Strengthening partnerships with LGUs, NGOs, and community groups obtained a mean of 4.286 with a standard deviation of 0.600, interpreted as outstanding, while building networks that promote innovation and resource mobilization obtained a mean of 4.107 with a standard deviation of 0.497, interpreted as very satisfactory. These results indicate that respondents are generally effective in fostering partnerships, although further efforts directed toward innovation focused networking could strengthen school programs. Guzman (2022) and De Jesus (2024) affirm that stakeholder engagement and collaboration between school leaders and their communities remain critically important to effective school improvement, while Acierto (2024) and Mandolado and Ancho (2023) note that involving teachers, parents, and community stakeholders in planning, decision making, and implementation supports more responsive and sustainable school development. These findings collectively highlight that strong stakeholder connections are essential for sustaining innovation and ongoing school improvement. In practice, school leaders may continue diversifying and strengthening stakeholder connections to expand access to innovative solutions and resources, while policy support for structured community engagement processes and formal partnerships with local government units and non governmental organizations would further strengthen school efforts. Future research may examine the relationship between building connections and other strategic leadership dimensions, such as strategic planning and vision development, in shaping school performance and community development.

In the domain of leading strategically, the overall mean was 4.411 with a standard deviation of 0.442, interpreted as outstanding. Setting priorities that support long term school success obtained the highest mean of 4.536 with a standard deviation of 0.576, interpreted as outstanding, followed by guiding the school in adapting to changes in the educational environment with a mean of 4.464 and a standard deviation of 0.508, also interpreted as outstanding. Proactively identifying opportunities for school improvement obtained a mean of 4.393 with a standard deviation of 0.497, interpreted as outstanding, while promoting innovation and forward thinking initiatives obtained a mean of 4.250 with a standard deviation of 0.585, likewise interpreted as outstanding. These results suggest that respondents effectively combine foresight, adaptability, and strategic planning to drive school improvement and sustainability. Meyer et al. (2022) found that principals who successfully lead change through thoughtful strategic planning, collaboration, and adaptive leadership foster greater teacher engagement and stronger school performance, while Sun et al. (2023) similarly found that leadership practices that build trust among teachers cultivate collaboration, organizational effectiveness, and positive outcomes within the education system. These findings affirm that strategic leadership combined with a collaborative school environment is essential to maintaining effective schools and driving innovation. In practice, school leaders may continue focusing on long term planning, proactive problem solving, and innovation in anticipating the future of education, while policy attention to training opportunities in strategic leadership, change management, and innovative program implementation would further support school leaders. Future research may examine the relationship between strategic leadership and measurable outcomes, including school performance, teacher efficacy, and student achievement.

In the domain of managing school operations and resources, the overall mean was 4.607 with a standard deviation of 0.427, interpreted as outstanding. Ensuring efficient utilization of school resources and following DepEd policies in managing finances and physical resources both obtained the highest mean of 4.714 with a standard deviation of 0.460, interpreted as outstanding, followed by mobilizing resources to support teaching and learning with a mean of 4.464 and a standard deviation of 0.576, also interpreted as outstanding. Maintaining systems that support safe and effective school operations obtained a mean of 4.536 with a standard deviation of 0.508, interpreted as very satisfactory. These results indicate that respondents are

highly competent in resource management, ensuring that school operations are both effective and compliant with regulatory standards. Shaked (2023) affirms the link between effective management of operations and resources and instructional leadership, noting its contribution to improved learning environments, teaching quality, and attainment of educational objectives, while Perez (2023) observes that effective resource allocation and operational management by principals create more sustainable environments that foster greater collaboration among teachers. These findings reinforce the need for effective management of operations and resources to support educators in enhancing school effectiveness. In practice, school leaders may continue implementing systems and workflows that support efficient, compliant, and safe resource use, while policy consideration of institutionalized training in resource management, financial compliance, and operational planning would further strengthen leadership development. Future research may continue to explore the relationship between operational management practices and outcomes such as teacher performance, student achievement, and school sustainability.

The third part of this chapter addresses the challenges encountered by school leaders in leading strategically for innovation within the twenty first century educational context, examined across five domains. In the domain of setting the direction of the school, the overall mean was 3.286 with a standard deviation of 1.009. Challenges in communicating long term direction to stakeholders obtained the highest mean of 3.429 with a standard deviation of 1.168, interpreted as highly challenging, followed by limited time for strategic planning due to administrative workload with a mean of 3.393 and a standard deviation of 1.100, interpreted as moderately challenging. Difficulty aligning the school vision with stakeholder priorities obtained a mean of 3.036 with a standard deviation of 1.201, interpreted as moderately challenging. These findings suggest that while school leaders understand the importance of establishing a clear direction, they encounter practical barriers that hinder the translation of vision into actionable plans. Adams et al. (2023) note that many school leaders experience difficulty balancing the diverse expectations of teachers, parents, and the community while pursuing school improvement goals, creating complex challenges in collaboration and consensus building, while Duray (2025) similarly finds that increased accountability mandates and administrative responsibilities leave school leaders with limited time to focus on long term planning and strategic leadership functions. These findings affirm that stakeholder alignment, communication demands, and time limitations continue to present significant obstacles to effective school leadership. In practice, improved time management strategies, delegation, and structured planning frameworks would support leaders in establishing a clear school vision, while policy support for guideline documents and professional development opportunities would strengthen strategic communication and stakeholder engagement. Future research may explore strategies to reduce administrative burden and increase alignment between school vision and stakeholder priorities.

In the domain of management of systems and processes, the overall mean was 3.512 with a standard deviation of 0.945, interpreted as highly challenging. Lack of adequate technology to support school processes obtained the highest mean of 3.679 with a standard deviation of 0.983, interpreted as highly challenging, followed by insufficient resources to support planned programs with a mean of 3.607 and a standard deviation of 0.994, also interpreted as highly challenging. Complexities in implementing DepEd policies and guidelines obtained a mean of 3.250 with a standard deviation of 1.076, interpreted as moderately challenging. These findings suggest that operational and technological constraints significantly affect the efficiency and effectiveness of school processes. Schmitz et al. (2023) confirm that limited access to digital technology adversely affects instructional delivery, administrative

effectiveness, and the capacity of schools to implement new teaching approaches, while Suhendri et al. (2024) similarly note that limited physical and digital resources constrain the ability of school leaders to function effectively in planning, communication, and organization. These findings reinforce the importance of addressing resource and technology limitations to improve school management and achieve educational effectiveness. In practice, school leaders may prioritize mobilizing necessary resources, implementing technology systems, and streamlining operational procedures, while policy support in the form of targeted funding, technology grants, and simplified policy guidelines would reduce the administrative burden on school leaders. Future research may examine the relationship between technological capacity, resource availability, and school performance, as well as best practice models for schools operating with limited resources.

In the domain of promoting quality teaching and learning, the overall mean was 3.321 with a standard deviation of 1.037, interpreted as moderately challenging. Difficulty sustaining instructional leadership due to multiple responsibilities obtained the highest mean of 3.429 with a standard deviation of 1.069, interpreted as highly challenging, followed by insufficient support for teachers' professional development needs with a mean of 3.286 and a standard deviation of 1.084, interpreted as moderately challenging. Challenges in monitoring classroom instruction consistently obtained a mean of 3.250 with a standard deviation of 1.041, likewise interpreted as moderately challenging. These results suggest that the combined workload of administrative and instructional tasks creates barriers to ensuring consistent teaching quality. Meyer et al. (2022) note that when principals model and encourage collaborative practices among teachers, provide instructional direction, and develop school improvement plans, instructional quality and educational outcomes improve, while Sun et al. (2023) similarly affirm that teacher trust, professional support, and collaborative learning environments enhance both teacher effectiveness and school improvement. These findings suggest that challenges related to workload management and insufficient support may hinder the successful implementation of instructional leadership. In practice, school leaders may develop strategies to balance administrative and instructional responsibilities through effective delegation, improved time management, and structured monitoring systems, while policy support in the form of additional resources, targeted professional development, and administrative support would help alleviate workload related pressures. Future research may investigate the impact of workload management strategies and professional development interventions on instructional quality and student learning outcomes.

In the domain of nurturing oneself and others, the overall mean was 3.120 with a standard deviation of 1.055, interpreted as moderately challenging. Limited opportunities for personal and professional renewal obtained the highest mean of 3.179 with a standard deviation of 1.090, followed by difficulty balancing personal wellbeing and leadership responsibilities with a mean of 3.107 and a standard deviation of 1.031, and high stress levels associated with administrative duties with a mean of 3.071 and a standard deviation of 1.120, all interpreted as moderately challenging. These findings suggest that while school leaders remain committed to their professional roles, they experience strain that may affect both their effectiveness and the support they extend to their staff. Adams et al. (2022) note that excessive workload, stress, and work related pressures diminish leaders' effectiveness, decision making quality, and their capacity to create a positive school environment, while Suhendri et al. (2023) similarly find that continuous professional development, appropriate work life balance, and attention to individual development positively influence leadership ability, organizational performance, and support provided to teachers and students. These findings affirm that attending to personal wellbeing and continued professional development positions administrators to sustain effective leadership. In practice, school administrators may adopt stress management techniques and consistently model appropriate work life balance while pursuing professional development for

themselves and their staff, while policy support for wellness programs, counseling services, and leadership retreats would further support this dimension. Future research may examine the relationship between administrator wellbeing, staff support practices, and student performance in identifying strategies for sustainable leadership.

In the domain of stakeholder engagement, the overall mean was 3.250 with a standard deviation of 1.021, interpreted as moderately challenging. Lack of stakeholder support for innovation and school programs obtained the highest mean of 3.286 with a standard deviation of 1.049, followed by limited participation of parents in school initiatives with a mean of 3.250 and a standard deviation of 1.110, and challenges in sustaining partnerships with LGUs and community groups with a mean of 3.214 and a standard deviation of 1.031, all interpreted as moderately challenging. These results suggest that while school leaders strive to involve stakeholders, achieving consistent and meaningful engagement remains a significant challenge. Mandolado and Ancho (2023) affirm that strong partnerships support educational program improvement, resource support, and effective school improvement efforts among parents, school leadership, and community organizations, while De Jesus (2024) similarly finds that meaningful stakeholder engagement develops school community partnerships, supports shared responsibility for education, and increases the implementation of educational initiatives, whereas a lack of engagement limits innovation and organizational development. These findings affirm that sustaining meaningful stakeholder engagement is necessary for effective leadership and continuous school improvement. In practice, school leaders may develop strategies to increase stakeholder awareness of the benefits of school programs, partner more closely with community organizations, and provide stakeholders with feedback demonstrating their involvement and its benefits, while policy support for formal mechanisms facilitating stakeholder involvement and resources supporting school district and community partnerships would further strengthen engagement. Future research may investigate effective stakeholder engagement techniques and how improved relationships contribute to educational leadership, school innovation, and student learning.

The fourth part of this chapter presents the results of the correlation analysis conducted to determine the significant relationship between the level of strategic leadership practices demonstrated by school leaders and the challenges they encountered in leading strategically toward innovation in the twenty first century educational context, using Pearson r correlation at the 0.05 level of significance. The analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.143 with a p value of 0.4672, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, indicating a very weak positive correlation and resulting in the acceptance of the null hypothesis. This finding suggests that there is no statistically significant relationship between the level of strategic leadership practices demonstrated by school leaders and the challenges they encounter in leading strategically. While school leaders in this study generally demonstrate strong strategic leadership capabilities across the domains of vision, communication, and operational management, the level of these competencies does not appear to correlate with the degree of challenges experienced in leading change. Valdés-Sánchez and Gutiérrez-Esteban (2023) similarly find that even highly effective school leaders remain constrained by factors related to organizational change, stakeholder expectations, and the implementation of innovative practices that lie beyond their direct influence, while Duray (2025) affirms that school leaders tend to experience comparable levels of management challenges regardless of their individual leadership capabilities and skills. These findings collectively suggest that external and systemic factors affecting school leaders' capacity to lead change outweigh the influence of individual leadership competencies alone. In terms of practice, these findings illustrate the need for supportive structures, resources, and professional development programs that address

challenges lying beyond the direct capacity of school leaders. In terms of policy, decision makers may need to strengthen technology provision, operational support, and stakeholder engagement mechanisms to reduce barriers to strategic leadership. Future research may explore moderating variables such as school size, resource availability, and stakeholder relationship dynamics to further understand the management of challenges associated with school leadership.

The fifth part of this chapter presents the results of the difference testing conducted to determine whether significant differences exist in the level of strategic leadership practices and challenges encountered by school leaders when grouped according to their demographic profile. With respect to age group, analysis of variance revealed a significant difference in strategic leadership practices across age groups, with an F value of 7.065 and a p value of 0.02337, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance, resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicates that school leaders of different age groups demonstrate varying levels or approaches to strategic leadership practice. In contrast, no significant difference was found in the challenges encountered by school leaders when grouped according to age, with an F value of 1.543 and a p value of 0.31874, which exceeds the 0.05 level of significance, resulting in the acceptance of the null hypothesis, suggesting that school leaders across all age groups tend to experience similar challenges in their roles. Adams et al. (2023) note that school leaders develop leadership capacity as they accumulate professional experience, building skills for managing change, fostering collaboration, and improving their schools, while Duray (2025) identifies common challenges facing all school leaders regardless of professional experience or age, such as policy pressures, limited resources, and educational reforms. These findings together suggest that while experience contributes to the development of effective leadership practices, school leaders also confront systemic and contextual challenges that extend beyond individual capabilities. Because strategic leadership practices differed significantly across age groups, a Tukey post hoc test was conducted to identify the specific pairs of age groups exhibiting significant mean differences. The results showed no statistically significant pairwise differences, as all p values exceeded 0.05: the 61 and above group compared to the 51 to 60 group yielded a mean difference of negative 0.388 with a p value of 0.34491; the 61 and above group compared to the 41 to 50 group yielded a mean difference of negative 0.267 with a p value of 0.64132; the 61 and above group compared to the 31 to 40 group yielded a mean difference of negative 0.670 with a p value of 0.06584; the 51 to 60 group compared to the 41 to 50 group yielded a mean difference of 0.121 with a p value of 0.77164; the 51 to 60 group compared to the 31 to 40 group yielded a mean difference of negative 0.282 with a p value of 0.38732; and the 41 to 50 group compared to the 31 to 40 group yielded a mean difference of negative 0.403 with a p value of 0.10976. Although the ANOVA indicated an overall significant difference across age groups, none of the individual pairwise comparisons reached statistical significance, with the largest observed difference occurring between the 31 to 40 and 61 and above groups, suggesting that the overall difference is diffused across the age categories rather than concentrated between any specific pair. In terms of implications, leadership development programs may design age responsive opportunities that build younger leaders' strategic competencies while leveraging the mentoring expertise of senior leaders, while policymakers may develop age inclusive support systems to ensure consistent, high quality leadership across the district. Future research may examine how age interacts with other demographic characteristics, such as years of experience or school type, to further explain differences in strategic leadership practice.

With respect to highest educational attainment, analysis of variance revealed no significant difference in strategic leadership practices, with an F value of 0.318 and a p value of 0.81236, which exceeds the 0.05 level of significance, resulting in the acceptance of the null hypothesis. This indicates that school leaders demonstrate relatively similar strategic leadership

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practices regardless of whether they hold a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral level qualification. Similarly, no significant difference was found in the challenges encountered according to educational attainment, with an F value of 3.861 and a p value of 0.06398, which, although closer to the threshold, still exceeds the 0.05 significance level, resulting in the acceptance of the null hypothesis. Meyer et al. (2022) note that a principal's leadership practices and capacity to foster teacher collaboration are critical variables in school achievement and organizational transformation, while Sun et al. (2023) similarly find that a principal's leadership ability shapes teacher trust, cooperative action, cohesiveness, and opportunities for organizational improvement. Both studies suggest that relational and contextual factors, rather than educational background alone, more significantly shape leadership effectiveness. These findings imply that future leadership development should provide real world experience, mentorship, and experiential learning opportunities to strengthen strategic leadership abilities, while leadership development policies should support the professional growth of all leaders regardless of formal educational attainment. Future research may examine how educational attainment interacts with years of administrative experience and school size to influence leadership effectiveness and the management of challenges.

With respect to years of administrative experience, analysis of variance revealed no significant difference in strategic leadership practices, with an F value of 0.934 and a p value of 0.48855, which exceeds the 0.05 level of significance, resulting in the acceptance of the null hypothesis. Similarly, no significant difference was found in the challenges encountered by school leaders across varying years of administrative experience, with an F value of 0.394 and a p value of 0.80817, which likewise exceeds the 0.05 level of significance, resulting in the acceptance of the null hypothesis. These findings suggest that both new and experienced school leaders demonstrate comparable levels of strategic leadership and encounter similar challenges in leading strategically. Meyer et al. (2022) note that while experience builds capability for effective school management, it does not necessarily shield leaders from persistent systemic problems such as inadequate resources, policy demands, and stakeholder pressures, while Sun et al. (2023) similarly emphasize that professional support structures within the school, including continuous development, collaboration, and trust building, play a more decisive role in leadership performance than length of tenure alone. These findings collectively suggest a dual relationship between experience and organizational support in shaping leadership effectiveness. In practice, professional development for leaders should provide both new and experienced administrators opportunities to enhance their skills, collaborate, and engage in joint problem solving, while policy support for ongoing professional development and mentoring programs should be extended to all leaders regardless of tenure. Future research may examine the interaction between years of experience, leadership competencies, and leadership context in shaping leaders' capacity to develop strategic actions and address challenges.

With respect to type of school managed, an independent samples t test revealed no significant difference in strategic leadership practices between elementary and secondary school leaders, with a t value of 0.558, 26 degrees of freedom, and a p value of 0.58188, which exceeds the 0.05 level of significance, resulting in the acceptance of the null hypothesis. Similarly, no significant difference was found in the challenges encountered by elementary and secondary school leaders, with a t value of negative 0.080, 26 degrees of freedom, and a p value of 0.93649, which likewise exceeds the 0.05 level of significance, resulting in the acceptance of the null hypothesis. These findings indicate that leadership practices and challenges experienced by school leaders are generally similar regardless of whether they manage elementary or secondary schools. Chen et al. (2023) note that while leadership experience strengthens confidence and expertise, school leaders continue to face similar systemic barriers,

including limited resources, government mandates, and stakeholder pressures, regardless of school level, while McKay et al. (2022) similarly note that school leadership remains one of the most stressful and emotionally demanding professions, requiring leaders to continuously adapt to workload stress, time demands, and conflicting responsibilities regardless of tenure or school type. In terms of implications, professional development programs should incorporate both elementary and secondary school leaders in strengthening strategic leadership skills and strategies for overcoming challenges, while policymakers may consider unified support frameworks consistent across both school levels. Future research may explore how school resources and size relate to school level and its impact on leadership practices and the handling of challenges.

With respect to size of school managed, analysis of variance revealed no significant difference in strategic leadership practices, with an F value of 0.713 and a p value of 0.58958, which exceeds the 0.05 level of significance, resulting in the acceptance of the null hypothesis. This indicates that school leaders demonstrate comparable levels of strategic leadership practices regardless of whether they manage small, medium, large, or mega sized schools. Similarly, no significant difference was found in the challenges encountered by school leaders according to school size, with an F value of 2.430 and a p value of 0.16733, which exceeds the 0.05 significance level, resulting in the acceptance of the null hypothesis. These findings indicate that leadership practices and challenges experienced by school leaders remain generally consistent regardless of the size of school managed. Meyer et al. (2022) note that although larger schools typically involve more complex organizational structures, leadership effectiveness is more significantly influenced by the competency of those under a leader's direction, collaboration, and strategic leadership practice than by school size alone, while Sun et al. (2023) similarly observe that school leaders share comparable challenges related to resource allocation, stakeholder involvement, and policy implementation regardless of school size, with systemic and organizational factors exerting a greater influence on leadership than organizational scale. In terms of implications, leadership development programs should prepare leaders of schools of all sizes equally in the skills and strategies needed for effective management and innovation, while policymakers may develop standardized frameworks and support structures to facilitate consistent strategic leadership practice regardless of school size. Future research may examine how school size interacts with school level and available resources to influence the implementation of leadership and the challenges encountered by school leaders.

Taken together, the findings of this chapter reveal that school leaders in the DepEd San Francisco District demonstrate consistently outstanding performance across all eight domains of strategic leadership practice, with vision development, communication, strategic planning, decision making, developing self and others, building connections, leading strategically, and managing school operations and resources all reflecting strong leadership competencies grounded in evidence based, collaborative, and stakeholder oriented approaches. At the same time, school leaders continue to encounter moderate to high challenges across the domains of setting the direction of the school, management of systems and processes, promoting quality teaching and learning, nurturing oneself and others, and stakeholder engagement, with technological and resource limitations emerging as the most pressing concerns. The absence of a statistically significant relationship between the level of strategic leadership practices and the challenges encountered, together with the largely consistent pattern of non significant demographic differences apart from the significant variation in strategic leadership practices across age groups, indicates that the challenges faced by school leaders are shaped predominantly by external and systemic factors rather than by variations in individual leadership competence or demographic profile. These findings directly address the objectives of the study by establishing both the current state of strategic leadership practice and the

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persistent barriers to innovation within the district, while contributing empirical evidence to the broader field of educational leadership by reinforcing the understanding that strong leadership capacity alone does not eliminate structural and contextual obstacles to innovation. These results provide the empirical foundation upon which the subsequent chapter builds, specifically informing the development of a Strategic Leadership Development Plan intended to strengthen visionary and innovative leadership practice while directly addressing the systemic challenges identified in this chapter.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study, taken together, affirm that school leaders in the DepEd San Francisco District perform exceptionally well across all domains of strategic leadership, particularly in developing a clear vision, communicating effectively with stakeholders, making sound decisions for school improvement, and managing resources efficiently. These outcomes lend strong support to Transformational Leadership Theory, as evidenced by the leaders' consistent ability to articulate a compelling vision and to collaborate meaningfully with stakeholders in pursuit of shared institutional goals. The results likewise validate the tenets of Strategic Leadership Theory, since school leaders demonstrated the capacity to align their daily operational decisions with long term objectives, to arrive at sound judgments during school improvement initiatives, and to sustain deliberate planning for continued institutional growth. At the same time, the challenges identified in the areas of resource management, stakeholder engagement, and the sustaining of instructional leadership reflect the underlying premises of Complexity Leadership Theory, underscoring that school leaders operate within a dynamic and continually evolving environment that demands ongoing innovation and adaptability regardless of their demonstrated competence.

Further examination of the demographic variables revealed that age exerted a statistically significant influence on strategic leadership practices, suggesting that maturity and accumulated professional experience meaningfully contribute to a leader's effectiveness. In contrast, other demographic factors, including highest educational attainment, position or rank, years of administrative experience, school level, and school size, did not yield significant differences in either leadership practices or the challenges encountered. Notably, the absence of a significant relationship between the level of strategic leadership practice and the challenges faced indicates that even highly competent leaders remain susceptible to common institutional difficulties irrespective of their skill level, reinforcing the view that such challenges are largely systemic rather than a reflection of individual leadership capacity.

These findings collectively affirm the continuing relevance and applicability of Republic Act No. 9155, or the Philippine Education Act of 2001, which vests school heads with the authority to lead and manage school operations effectively, as well as Republic Act No. 10533, or the K to 12 Basic Education Act of 2012, which mandates the delivery of quality educational outcomes to learners. They further reinforce the intent of Department of Education Order No. 24, series of 2020, which institutionalizes the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads as a framework for achieving exemplary leadership performance. In light of these results, it becomes evident that sustained in service training, the provision of adequate resources, and the cultivation of strong partnerships with education stakeholders remain essential to strengthening the effectiveness of school leaders as they navigate the demands of twenty first century education.

Building on these conclusions, the study strongly recommends the adoption of the proposed Strategic Leadership Development Plan as a practical and evidence based guide for

enhancing the strategic leadership competencies of school leaders. This plan, structured around the key areas of vision development, strategic planning, decision making, innovation promotion, stakeholder engagement, reflective leadership, and professional development, offers a comprehensive model for strengthening visionary leadership, improving the quality of decision making, fostering innovation, and addressing the emerging challenges confronting education today. Its implementation is expected to enable school leaders to sustain school improvement initiatives, cultivate meaningful collaborative partnerships, and consistently deliver quality learning outcomes. Accordingly, the adoption of this plan is strongly encouraged as a viable and effective pathway toward the continued development of school leadership and the pursuit of organizational excellence within the district.

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