

Capacitating Aspiring School Heads: A Grounded Theory Study on Leadership Development

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Abstract— This study aimed to capacitate aspiring school heads of Castilla District DepEd Sorsogon Province, Philippines. The present study utilized qualitative research using the grounded theory model. Aspiring school heads reported a lack of training, advice, mentoring, cooperation, stakeholder participation, continuous improvement possibilities, and role models that inspired them. The prospective school heads gave useful insights into their preferred leadership development program. This curriculum includes leadership training and mentorship and professional development and progress. The following topics arose from the program's contribution to future school heads' aspirations: Empowering Educational Communities and Transformational Leadership, Promoting Systematic Educational Reform via Policy Advocacy and Strategy, Fostering Lifelong Learning and Empathy in Education Leadership, and Training and Skill Development for Leadership Readiness and Competence. Hence, this study stressed the importance of training, mentoring, and inspiration for potential school leaders, which may help them achieve their goals in numerous ways. From the above results, the following suggestions were made: Offer organized mentorship from experienced school administrators to aspiring school heads. Create a mentorship program for prospective school administrators to learn from experienced leaders to help potential leaders develop their talents, students must be encouraged to engage in school activities. Promote continual learning and empathy among educational leaders to encourage future school administrators to seek personal growth and introspection actively. Develop and implement a capacity-building program for school principal candidates. Finally, additional research may be conducted to validate the findings of this study.

Keywords— aspiring school heads, grounded research, leadership development program.

I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is at the heart of quality education. There is a growing belief that educational leadership is the second most important factor explaining learning outcomes. Leaders at multiple levels matter, from those within the school to those outside of the school such as middle managers, including those outside of education systems in government, or those working on legislature and oversight (UNESCO, 2024). Indeed, effective leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the success and culture of schools in the constantly changing system of education. Academic institutions globally acknowledge the crucial importance of leadership in promoting academic success, encouraging collaboration, and creating a favorable learning atmosphere.

In response to these requirements, numerous educational institutions have adopted leadership development programs as a strategic investment to cultivate proficient leaders. These programs are designed to improve the abilities and expertise of educational leaders, such as principals, assistant principals, and other administrative personnel so that they are fully prepared to handle the intricacies of contemporary education (Foister & Digo, 2024; Montales & Digo, 2024; Balona & Digo, 2024;

Fajardo & Digo, 2023). Educational leaders, comprising principals, assistant principals, and other administrative figures, are entrusted with the responsibility of not only steering academic achievement but also fostering a collaborative and positive school culture. The hypothesis underpinning this research is that investment in leadership development programs will not only enhance the individual capacities of leaders but will also manifest in tangible improvements at the organizational level.

Leadership development programs, when designed by professional standards, contribute to the overall quality and effectiveness of educational leadership in the country. In conjunction with the RPMS, it establishes a framework that not only evaluates the performance of school leaders but also encourages and recognizes the importance of continuous professional development. Leadership programs, as a form of professional development, align seamlessly with the RPMS objectives, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and ensuring that school leaders are well-equipped to meet the evolving challenges in education. DepEd Order No. 42, issued in 2017, signifies the national commitment to establishing and implementing

professional standards for school heads across the Philippines. The document aims to enhance the quality of educational leadership by defining the expected competencies and behaviors of school heads. The order outlines the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads, a set of benchmarks that serve as a guide for assessing the performance and competence of school leaders. These standards cover various domains, including school leadership, instructional leadership, and community leadership, reflecting the multifaceted roles of school heads. The professional standards outlined in the order provide a clear framework against which the impact of leadership development programs can be measured. Leadership development programs can be designed and assessed based on their alignment with these standards, ensuring that participants acquire the necessary competencies to meet the expectations set by the profession. DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017 emphasizes a competency-based approach to school leadership. This approach underscores the importance of not only theoretical knowledge but also the practical application of skills in real-world educational settings. Leadership development programs, when aligned with the professional standards, can address specific competencies outlined in the order. Furthermore, the order emphasizes the significance of continuous professional development for school heads. Leadership development programs, as a form of professional development, play a crucial role in ensuring that school leaders stay updated with the latest educational trends, methodologies, and leadership practices. Through the lens of this order, the impact of leadership development programs can be assessed by examining whether participants demonstrate improvements in the identified competencies and behaviors outlined in the professional standards. Evaluation criteria can be directly linked to the expectations set by DepEd for effective school leadership. Another is the DepEd Order No. 007, s. 2019 (Guidelines on the Implementation of RPMS for SY 2019-2020). In line with the RPMS, likely underscores the importance of continuous professional development for school leaders. Continuous learning and improvement are inherent in the RPMS philosophy, recognizing that the educational landscape evolves, and leaders must adapt to effectively address the changing needs of schools and students. Given the emphasis on continuous professional development, leadership programs become integral to the RPMS process. Leadership programs provide a structured avenue for school leaders to enhance their skills, stay informed about best practices, and align their professional growth

with the objectives set by the RPMS. The study dealt with questions surrounding the direct impact of leadership programs on participants, the observed changes in organizational dynamics, and the lasting influence on the overall effectiveness of secondary schools.

By understanding the nuanced relationship between leadership development initiatives and organizational outcomes, this research seeks to contribute valuable insights to educational policymakers, school administrators, and those engaged in the continuous improvement of secondary education systems. The study aimed to develop a program model to capacitate the aspiring school heads of Castilla District Dep Ed Division of Sorsogon Province. This explored and understood the experiences of individuals aspiring to become school heads in Castilla District. Develop and implement a program based on the identified experiences of aspiring school heads and examine how the implemented program contributes to the realization of the participants' aspirations to become school heads. Finally, this aims to design a program model to enhance the capacity and preparation of aspiring school heads, building on the findings and insights gathered from the study. This study aimed to develop a program model to capacitate the aspiring school heads of Castilla District Dep Ed Division of Sorsogon Province. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions: What are the experiences of the informants as aspiring school heads? What program may be developed and implemented based on their experiences? And, how does the program contribute to the aspirations of school heads?

II. RELATED LITERATURE

The DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017, establishes a robust foundation for studying the impact of leadership development programs on school heads. The order provides a clear set of professional standards that not only guide the expectations for school leadership but also offer a structured framework for the design, implementation, and evaluation of leadership development initiatives within the Philippines. Compliance with this order ensures that leadership development aligns with national standards, contributing to the enhancement of educational leadership practices across the country. Likewise, DepEd Order No. 007, s. 2019, in conjunction with the RPMS, establishes a framework that not only evaluates the performance of school leaders but also encourages and recognizes the importance of continuous professional development. Leadership programs, as a

form of professional development, align seamlessly with the RPMS objectives, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and ensuring that school leaders are well-equipped to meet the evolving challenges in education.

These bear significances to the present study as they establish a performance evaluation framework, encourage continuous professional development, align with RPMS objectives, influence organizational culture, equip leaders for challenges, and integrate leadership development within the policy context. The present study holds significance by aligning with and contributing to the objectives outlined in Republic Act 9155, DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017, and DepEd Order No. 007, s. 2019. It addresses the needs of aspiring school heads, informs the enhancement of leadership practices, and contributes to the overall improvement of educational leadership within the Philippines.

Ingvarson et al. (2005) stressed that professional development program structure and procedure affect teachers' knowledge, practice, and efficacy. Teacher Program studies to improve teacher quality. Teachers were polled at least three months following an activity to assess program effects on their practice. Based on recent research on effective professional growth, a theoretical model was built and evaluated using blockwise regression analysis to determine impact factors. Contextual factors (e.g., school support), program structure (e.g., length), process features (e.g., emphasis on content; active learning; examination of student work; feedback; follow-up), a mediating variable (level of professional community generated), and four outcome measures were included in the model. All four types of research demonstrated strong direct effects of subject emphasis, active learning, and follow-up on knowledge and professional community. Rarely was feedback considered in program design. The perceived impact of activities on teachers' practice and student learning outcomes greatly. New empirical evidence shows how successful principals use transformational and instructional leadership tactics to improve over time directly and indirectly (Day et al., 2016; Buban & Digo, 2021).

Arrieta and Ancho (2020) mentioned that no one else is qualified to lead, thus tenure and performance are used. One becomes an academic head because he/she is the most senior teacher, even without educational qualifications. This study examines how new academic heads manage their teachers. It listed their problems, learnings, and realizations as new academic chiefs. For six months, seven new learning area heads with less than

two years of experience from a private sectarian school in the National Capital Region, Philippines were observed and interviewed using the phenomenological technique. New academic heads cited paperwork, culture, protocols and procedures, superior expectations, and teacher supervision as their biggest challenges. Some former academic leaders mentored them and their supervisors advised them on these problems. To improve their leadership skills, they developed professionally and personally. A succession plan will include academic head introduction, leadership, and mentorship.

School principals have a significant role in the achievement of learning outcomes and they are required to possess the information, abilities, and attitudes necessary to effectively lead (Balona & Digo, 2024). However, research indicates that it is challenging to identify exceptional leaders who can deliver effective results. In addition, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the experiences and motivations of individuals who are willing to take on leadership roles in schools (Kudrats & La Serna, 2023).

It is becoming increasingly apparent in the 21st century that it is of utmost significance to provide principals with the appropriate chances for training in leadership and management abilities (Agravante et al., 2023). This is because it is a means of enhancing the efficiency of schools and achieving quality performance. Principals are simply given a title and a function without receiving the appropriate training, which is the primary point of contention in this debate (Maphoto, 2016). Leaders have expressed the need for consistent and different engagement and motivational sessions, even though financial and environmental constraints exist. To achieve educational excellence in both academic and extracurricular activities, it is necessary to address individual obstacles as the way ahead. The significance of leadership methods and leadership that are inventive and creative is reaffirmed by this. Bhattacharyya, E. (2020).

Tertiary institutions have been commissioned by the Education Bureau to offer organized leadership development courses for aspiring, newly appointed, and serving principals (Ng & Szeto, 2015). Contemporary educational literature has extensively covered teachers' professional development (PD), but there has been limited focus on the PD of principals, despite their crucial role in enhancing student learning outcomes. Our study aimed to assess the degree to which principals

implement learning-centered leadership practices and how these practices are affected by the professional development (PD) programs they have participated in within the last year (Gümüş et al., 2020).

Publicly funded school leadership training programs have multiplied in the region, although their efficacy is unclear. Weinstein et al., (2017) used data from the Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (TERCE) for seven Latin American countries to examine the relationship between school leaders' formal education and training and well-known school leadership practices reported by teachers. They constructed linear regression models for each Latin American country to determine how principal preparedness affects educational leadership metrics. Findings suggest that education or training has little effect on most leadership metrics and suggested that principals' initial selection processes and shortcomings may explain this finding.

The National Qualifications and Standards for Headship in China were introduced by the Ministry of Education in China in 2013. The purpose of these standards was to provide guidance and assistance for the professional growth of principals living in China. Additionally, this is the first time that legislators have documented the idea of increasing the level of professionalism of principals. This thesis provides an overview of research that was conducted to gain an understanding of the process of leadership preparation, specifically about the selection, recruitment, and development of new leaders. The research also investigated the impact of the preparation process, specifically on the enactment of leadership and the socialization of principals, after the research had been completed (Xue, 2021). According to Huber (2008) the growing responsibilities of school leaders, who are typically referred to as principals, head teachers, administrators, or individuals in charge of a school, ensuring and improving the quality of schools has become a major focus for educational policymakers. In the early years of the 21st century, there is a widespread consensus among nations that school administrators must possess the necessary skills to enhance teaching, learning, and students' growth and success. As a result, the training and advancement of school administrators is a top priority for legislators across many political ideologies in numerous countries. Professional development programs in numerous countries prioritize the creation and adjustment of training and development opportunities.

Nannyonjo (2017) asserts that leadership is an essential component of any undertakings that are related to charity. School leadership affects all aspects of education, and students must have great leaders for them to reach their goals. Despite this, she asserted that good school leadership is not the norm in many of the state's educational systems. When it comes to school leaders, it is frequently assumed that they will fulfill the obligations and projects that have been allocated to them, regardless of their capacity. It is also the case that programs that are designed to either prepare or support school leaders are either nonexistent or ineffective.

The complexity of modern educational structures makes school leadership harder. Long-term preparation, induction, and professional growth can create several competencies. Education systems have created models of such preparedness. Their development in specific national contexts with local tradition and contemporary educational authority agendas affects school management and leadership (Dorczak, 2019).

Effective school heads foster teamwork, assist teachers, and involve parents in student improvement. Fostering trust and respect in schools and communities through learning (UNICEF, 2021). Therefore, school leaders must demonstrate diverse competencies to achieve the global goal of quality and lifelong learning. In the Philippines, the Department of Education aims to develop individuals who love their country, possess strong values, and contribute to national development. Furthermore, Ibay and Pa-alisbo (2020) assert that the proficiency and capability of personnel in a managerial position are essential for executing designated management activities or duties. Managerial skills are essential since they substantially influence multiple facets of an organization's operations. Being a manager in an educational context involves taking on the responsibilities of an effective leader and skilled problem-solver in both simple and complex situations. However, it was observed in Thailand that there is a need to improve some managerial qualities. School administrators must develop and nurture their skills to effectively and efficiently manage.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to implement a capacity program for aspiring school heads of Castilla District DepEd Sorsogon Province. It explored the informants' experiences as aspiring school heads and determined the program that may be developed, implemented, and evaluated based on their experiences.

Research Design

The present study utilized qualitative research using the grounded theory model. Grounded theory proposes that careful observation of the social world can lead to the construction of theory. It is iterative and evolving, aiming to construct new theories from collected data that account for those data. It is also known as the grounded theory method (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020).

The Informants

The main source of data for this research was the responses of the informants from the interview conducted. The informants were the 14 aspiring school heads of the Castilla District, Division of Sorsogon secondary schools who were purposively chosen. They were chosen based on these criteria; master teachers and TICs for at least 1 year, Teacher-III for at least 3 years. They manifest a desire to progress into administrative roles, such as principals or assistant principals.

Research Instrument

The main instruments used in gathering data were the interview questionnaire and interview guide which were prepared by the researchers. An interview guide was used to gather the needed data from the respondents. The interview questionnaire was composed of 2 parts. The first part was on the experiences of the aspiring school heads and the second part was on the proposed program based on their experiences. On the other hand, an interview guide was used to gather data on the contribution of the said program for aspiring school heads. A dry run was conducted on December 10, 2023, to the selected secondary schools in the Division of Sorsogon which were part of the study. After the dry run, the researcher revised some items in the instrument. Some of the items were modified to elicit responses suited to the problems.

Data Collection Procedure

The data-gathering procedure had three phases. In the first phase, the researcher sent a communication letter asking permission to the Schools Division Superintendent. After the approval from the Schools Division of Sorsogon, the researcher sent the letter to the school heads. The second phase was the distribution of the interview questionnaire to determine the experiences of the aspiring school heads and the program to be developed and implemented based on their experiences. This was conducted last January 5, 2024. Subsequently, the researcher gathered data geared toward theory building. These were the bases for crafting the program which was the capacity building for

aspiring school heads. After that, an interview was done to evaluate the impact or contribution of the training program for the aspiring school heads. The interview was conducted last May 12, 2024, through face-messenger. More so, they were interviewed at their most convenient time. An informed consent was given to the informants before the data gathering. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and ensured the anonymity of the data gathered.

Data Analysis Procedure

After the interview was conducted, the researcher transcribed the recorded audio. After transcribing the verbal information into text, the systematic coding and categorizing of the data to identify patterns and themes were made. Themes represented the central ideas and patterns within the data, providing insights into the research questions. The process ends with the analysis and interpretation of these themes to draw meaningful conclusions, which are then reported in a structured format.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. The Experiences of the Informants as Aspiring School Heads.

This section explores the experiences of aspiring school heads through the perspectives of 14 respondents, providing ample insight into the readers' needs. The following themes were developed such as lack of training, guidance, and mentorship, collaboration and stakeholder engagement, lack of opportunities for continuous improvement and professional growth, and motivation and inspiration from role models and stories.

Theme 1: Motivation and Inspiration from Role Models and Stories

Respondents draw motivation and inspiration from various sources, including former school leaders, stories of existing school leaders, and personal experiences. These sources of inspiration fuel their aspirations to become school heads and empower them to overcome challenges and pursue leadership roles actively.

"Seeing the impact that former school leaders have had on their communities drives me to follow in their footsteps. Their dedication and commitment to education are what I aspire to emulate."(Informant 5)

"Personal experiences with past leaders who mentored me have had a profound impact on my career choices. Their guidance and the stories they shared about their

struggles and successes inspire me to take on leadership roles." (Informant 8)

"Learning about the challenges faced by current school leaders and how they overcame them inspires me to pursue leadership despite the difficulties. Their resilience and determination serve as a blueprint for my journey." (Informant 10)

Hudson and Peter (2013) reiterated that inspiration as an emotional occurrence requires openness and social awareness. Mentor role models help mentees to develop personal traits and practices. Like other leaders, inspiring mentors can help mentees build character and achieve workplace goals. Aspiring school leaders often look to former school leaders as role models who exemplify effective leadership qualities and practices. These individuals may have served as mentors or supervisors, providing guidance, support, and inspiration to those aspiring to follow in their footsteps. By observing the successes and challenges faced by former school leaders, aspiring leaders gain valuable insights into the realities of leadership roles within educational institutions. They may aspire to emulate the positive qualities and strategies demonstrated by these role models, while also learning from their experiences and lessons learned. By learning from the experiences of their peers and colleagues, aspiring leaders gain confidence in their abilities and aspirations to make a difference in their schools.

Theme 2: Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement

This theme focuses on how important it is to collaborate with stakeholders, including parents, teachers, students, and community members, to complete school-related tasks and initiatives. To create a cooperative and welcoming school climate, respondents emphasize that effective leadership in educational settings necessitates forging strong bonds and connections with a variety of stakeholders. Respondents emphasize the importance of collaboration with stakeholders, including teachers, students, and community members, in achieving success in school activities and initiatives. Building linkages and making connections with stakeholders are seen as essential qualities for effective leadership and contribution to the school community.

"I actively sought opportunities to gain leadership experiences by immersing myself in different situations at work, and engaging in initiatives not only initiated by DepEd but also by other organizations." (Informant 9)

"In my early years of teaching, I was given opportunities to take on leadership roles. It's essential to execute proper communication to gain trust and confidence from both the School Head and peers." (Informant 10)

"I realized early on that involving teachers and parents in the planning process made a significant difference in the success of school programs. Their insights and feedback often led to more well-rounded and effective strategies." (Informant 11)

"Collaboration with students and community members provided diverse perspectives that were invaluable in shaping school initiatives. It wasn't just about leading; it was about listening and incorporating their ideas." (Informant 12)

"Building partnerships with local businesses and organizations opened up new resources and opportunities for our students. These collaborations enriched our school programs and gave students real-world experiences." (Informant 13)

Parents, teachers, community leaders, civic organizations, and students should be encouraged to participate in school activities to improve the school and students' achievements. A good school principal will identify methods to use people's talents and interests to benefit the school and create a suitable environment. To increase school performance, the administration must involve stakeholders in decision-making. Babayeva (2023) examined school leaders' views on stakeholders' responsibilities in school development and offered strategies for engaging stakeholders. The findings show that parents, teachers, students, community members, and government officials are crucial to school development. School leaders stressed teamwork, communication, and shared decision-making to engage stakeholders. The study suggests that school leaders establish clear communication channels, involve stakeholders in decision-making, and foster a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for school development to increase stakeholder involvement. The report suggests ways school administrators might increase stakeholder involvement in school improvement.

The experiences of these prospective principals serve as a reminder of how important stakeholder involvement and collaboration are to good educational leadership. Through proactive stakeholder involvement in decision-making and fostering strong relationships both inside and beyond the school community, educational leaders

may improve school operations, foster a welcoming and inclusive school climate, and give kids access to opportunities for enrichment. Aspirant school administrators should make stakeholder involvement and collaboration a top priority as crucial elements of their leadership style. By doing this, they may help all members of the school community develop a feeling of shared accountability, group ownership, and mutual trust, which will eventually improve learning outcomes and create a more cohesive, supportive learning environment.

Theme 3: Lack of Training, Guidance and Mentorship

This theme underscores the crucial role that leadership training programs and mentorship play in shaping individuals into effective leaders within educational settings. Respondents highlight the significance of mentorship from former school heads and gaining leadership experiences through active participation in school activities. Mentions of supporting new leaders and seeking opportunities to immerse oneself in different situations reflect a commitment to personal and professional growth in leadership roles.

"Without proper guidance, it was challenging to navigate the complexities of leadership. The absence of a mentor left me feeling unprepared for the unexpected challenges that arose." (Informant 1)

"I found myself relying on trial and error more often than not, simply because there wasn't a structured training program available. Having a mentor could have significantly shortened my learning curve" (Informant 3)

"The leadership training I received was minimal, and I often felt isolated in my role. It was the lack of mentorship that made the transition into leadership particularly difficult for me." (Informant 4)

"When I stepped into a leadership position, I realized how much I needed guidance. The absence of a strong mentorship network meant I had to seek out learning opportunities on my own." (Informant 5)

It had previously been determined that informal mentoring was essential to succession planning and leadership development. Eight aspiring school leaders shared information on their experiences and qualities of informal mentorship using open-ended questions and reflective exercises. Four topics came out of the data analysis from the standpoint of human science research:

(a) defining informal mentoring, (b) traits of successful informal mentors, (c) positive relationships, and (d) mentoring advice. The informal mentoring experiences that the participants had proved advantageous. The procedure was flexible, and there was a high level of reported trust between mentor and protégé. Most of the aspiring leaders understood that they needed to have good mentors and also serve as mentors to new teachers because they wanted to become school leaders soon (Parfitt & Rose, 2020). In addition, Bush & Coleman (1995) examined the advantages of mentoring for newly appointed principals, mentors, and the school system. It also addresses specific constraints associated with this method of professional growth. It was concluded that mentorship is beneficial in assisting principals in adjusting to their new position, but it may lack the rigor required to be a truly effective form of professional development.

Respondents acknowledge the invaluable impact of mentoring and training programs. These training programs serve as stepping stones for them to acquire wisdom, and skills and adopt best practices, as well as provide insights into the challenges and nuances of leadership within schools. By learning from speakers who have previously held leadership positions, aspiring school heads gain practical knowledge and develop leadership skills that are essential for success in their roles. Active participation in school activities offers aspiring school heads opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings. By mentoring pre-service educators or providing guidance to colleagues, they contribute to the development of future leaders within the educational system. This act of supporting others not only reinforces their understanding of leadership concepts but also fosters a culture of collaboration and knowledge-sharing within the school community. This indicates that insufficient training programs and a lack of formal mentorship provide serious obstacles for prospective school heads trying to grow as leaders. The informants' shared experiences demonstrate the critical role that training and mentoring play in developing effective leaders in educational environments. These prospective school heads' experiences suggest that although formal education and organized mentoring are important, informal mentoring and self-directed learning are also very beneficial. The informants' proactive search for learning opportunities and their reliance on formal or informal mentoring highlights the importance of having robust support networks for leadership development.

Theme 4: Lack of Opportunities for Continuous Improvement and Professional Growth

The theme of continuous improvement emerges through statements advocating for ongoing personal and professional development. Respondents stressed the importance of embracing feedback, observing, and seeking opportunities for growth to enhance leadership skills and effectiveness. The need of ongoing professional and personal development for effective leadership is emphasized by this theme

To become an effective school leader, firmly it is very important to earn first with fundamental skills, and to attain this, seeking feedback and keep observing what's going on is a big help also (Informant 11).

The challenge I have is my readiness the perform as School Head. This is to institutionalized assessment for the readiness of being a school head” (Informant 13).

“I often find myself needing more structured opportunities for professional development. While I try to learn from my experiences, a lack of formal programs means I have to seek out learning opportunities on my own.” (Informant 14)

Newly appointed principals are expected to be trained in human resources management, including empowering middle leaders and managing underperforming staff, financial management, legal matters related to school management, and curriculum and instructional leadership. They also found peer networking and mentorship important for their early principalship (Ng & Szeto, 2015). School heads had access to opportunities for professional development, but they were not institutionalized and required to seek them out for their benefit and progress. The study found that school leaders need constant professional development, which educational authorities must prioritize. Thus, education actors and interest groups should collaborate to encourage school heads to participate in CPD programs to continuously improve themselves. Educational leaders recognize that their journey toward excellence is a continuous one. They understand the importance of continually seeking ways to improve themselves, both personally and professionally. This commitment to ongoing development involves a mindset of lifelong learning and a willingness to engage in reflective practice. By regularly assessing their strengths, weaknesses, and areas for growth, leaders can identify opportunities to enhance their skills, knowledge, and

abilities. Feedback is a powerful tool for growth and improvement.

These prospective school heads' experiences show that effective leadership requires ongoing development and advancement in one's career. But the absence of chances for continued learning poses serious obstacles, making it harder for them to adequately prepare for and succeed in leadership positions. According to this analysis, centralized examinations, formalized professional development programs, and continuous training opportunities would be advantageous for prospective school leaders. By filling in these gaps, academic institutions can ensure that leaders have the knowledge and abilities needed to meet the changing demands of their positions and better support their leaders' ongoing development.

Educational leaders are proactive in seeking opportunities for growth and development. Whether through formal training programs, conferences, workshops, or informal learning experiences, they actively pursue avenues to enhance their knowledge, skills, and leadership abilities. By staying abreast of current research, trends, and best practices in education, leaders can adapt to evolving challenges and effectively address the needs of their school community. Additionally, they encourage and support the professional growth of their team members, fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement within the school.

2. Program that may be Developed and Implemented Based on their Experiences

This section provides themes about how programs may be developed and implemented based on the experiences of the aspiring school heads. Two components emerged; Comprehensive Leadership Training and Mentorship Programs and Continuous Professional Development and Growth Opportunities.

The significance of getting advice from seasoned mentors who can offer helpful advice and assistance is emphasized by the respondents. The mentoring component is especially appreciated since it provides individualized guidance and practical examples to assist prospective school administrators in navigating the challenges of leadership. Respondents emphasize the importance of professional development and training programs to prepare aspiring school heads for leadership roles.

Component 1: Comprehensive Leadership Training and Mentorship Programs

This theme highlights the importance of comprehensive leadership training and mentorship programs as a critical factor in preparing aspiring school heads for their future roles. These programs are seen as essential in equipping future leaders with the necessary skills, knowledge, and practical experience needed to navigate the complexities of educational leadership. Aspiring school heads recognize the value of both structured training and mentorship from experienced leaders, which together provide a solid foundation for effective leadership.

"I learned from training and guidance from my former School Heads" (Informant 1), "Underscoring the value of direct mentorship. Another shared,

"Without proper guidance, it was challenging to navigate the complexities of leadership. The absence of a mentor left me feeling unprepared for the unexpected challenges that arose" (Informant 2).

"Address key competencies outlined in the PPSSH domains and strands, ensuring that the seminar equips aspiring school heads with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for effective school leadership." (Informant 4)

A study assessed two crucial elements in leadership development programs: a comprehensive evaluation of leadership skills using a 360-degree assessment and the provision of leadership mentoring. The findings demonstrate the extent to which mentees become more receptive when mentors prioritize coaching over enforcing rules, and when mentors proactively establish personal connections with mentees regularly. The findings also demonstrate a statistically significant disparity between self-reports and observer-reports. The discussion includes the consequences and constraints (Solansky, 2010). In addition, Gumus (2019) mentors and mentees usually sign one-year contracts to create trust. Mentors will visit schools throughout the year. Mentorship was also vital for new school principals' professional development, according to mentors and mentees. Results showed that mentors were key support partners for new principals, helping them adjust to their jobs and providing valuable guidance.

According to studies, structured mentorship programs help prospective leaders become more prepared for leadership roles by giving them the chance to learn from the experiences of seasoned professionals. This helps to lower the learning curve. In addition, formal leadership

development courses covering decision-making, communication, and conflict resolution are vital to guarantee that aspiring school administrators are prepared for the wide range of issues that come with their jobs.

The analysis underscores the need for developing and implementing comprehensive leadership training and mentorship programs based on the experiences of aspiring school heads. Under the first component of the program, three domains are covered which include the following; leading strategically, managing school operations and resources, and focusing on teaching and learning.

The respondents' experiences indicate that these programs are crucial in building the necessary skills and confidence for effective leadership. In addition, with the proposed program model which centered on the different domains of the Philippine Professional Standard for School Heads (PPSSH), leadership skills will be acquired by the aspiring school heads to prepare them for a challenging leadership role.

Component 2: Continuous Professional Development and Growth Opportunities

Continuous professional development and growth opportunities are recognized as essential for the ongoing effectiveness and success of aspiring school heads. This theme emphasizes the importance of providing aspiring leaders with regular opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge, ensuring they remain adaptable and well-prepared for the evolving challenges of educational leadership. Aspiring school heads understand that leadership is a dynamic role that requires ongoing learning and development to stay current with best practices and emerging trends in education.

"To become an effective School Leader, it's very important to first develop fundamental skills. Seeking feedback and continuously observing what's happening around you is crucial for growth" (Informant 11).

"Another respondent highlighted the lack of institutional support for assessing readiness, stating, "The challenge I face is my readiness to perform as School Head. There is no institutionalized assessment for evaluating readiness for this role" (Informant 13).

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) has a beneficial impact on the performance of those in leadership positions (Gyamfil et al., 2023). Current forms of Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

showed that principals were dissatisfied with CPD opportunities and training material. Principals also expressed time, financial, and workload difficulties when pursuing CPD. While aspiring school heads are eager to learn and grow, there is a clear need for more structured and ongoing professional development opportunities. Research indicates that leaders who engage in regular professional development are better equipped to handle the complexities of their roles and are more likely to implement innovative strategies that improve school performance. Continuous learning opportunities, such as advanced leadership training, workshops, and self-directed learning resources, are crucial for helping leaders stay ahead of emerging challenges and adapt to the ever-changing educational landscape. The experiences shared by the respondents highlight the gaps in current professional development offerings, particularly the need for more structured and continuous learning opportunities. This aligns with research findings that emphasize the necessity of regular professional development to maintain leadership effectiveness. By providing ongoing opportunities for growth, educational institutions can ensure that their leaders are not only prepared for their initial roles but also continue to develop the skills needed to navigate the complexities of modern educational leadership.

The analysis points to the need for developing and implementing continuous professional development and growth opportunities based on the experiences of aspiring school heads. The respondents' insights reveal that while they are committed to their professional growth, the lack of formalized and ongoing development programs hinders their ability to fully realize their leadership potential. To address these challenges, educational institutions should focus on creating comprehensive professional development programs that provide continuous learning and growth opportunities.

With the proposed program model, the second component focused on the two remaining domains which are the developing self and others, and building connections. These domains highlight the role of school heads in nurturing themselves and others and underscore the school heads' competence in engaging stakeholders in initiatives towards the improvement of school communities. This program will ensure that aspiring school heads are equipped to meet the demands of their roles and continue to evolve as effective leaders throughout their careers.

3. Contributions of the Program to the Aspiration as School Heads

This section presents the responses of the informants during the interview of the researcher using the themes and possible elaborations of the statement. Four themes emerged which are as follows; Fostering Transformational Leadership and Empowering Educational Communities, Driving Systemic Educational Reform through Policy Advocacy and Strategic Implementation, cultivating a Culture of Lifelong Learning and Empathy in Education Leadership and Cultivating Leadership Readiness and Competence through Training and Skill Development.

Theme 1: Fostering Transformational Leadership and Empowering Educational Communities

Several participants expressed a desire to contribute to the development of the school and community, either through enhancing their leadership skills or by supporting the growth and potential of educators and students. This theme highlights a commitment to leadership, personal growth, and the betterment of educational practices.

"I want to pursue my aspirations as school head to help the school and community" (Informant 2).

"I have the capability and character of being a leader, to help the department (DepEd) to deliver the education that is needed by the learners. To help the educator to develop their potential. And also, to improve my career as an educator by leading." (Informant 4)

"I am aspiring for a school head because I want to apply the best practices and positive impact of my previous school heads. I also want to be a school head to support and help shape educational policies, and leadership, and set goals to improve the educational environment." (Informant 5)

"To support teaching and non-teaching professional development cultivate the most appropriate behavior and teaching practices." (Informant 6)

Within this theme, participants articulate a profound dedication to fostering transformational leadership qualities within themselves and others, aiming to empower educational communities to thrive and excel. Their expressions reflect a deep understanding of the pivotal role that effective leadership plays in driving positive change within schools and wider society. Participants recognize the importance of continually refining their leadership abilities to effectively steer

their schools toward success. By acknowledging the need for ongoing personal growth and skill development, they demonstrate a commitment to embodying the qualities of exemplary leaders who inspire and motivate others.

A central aspect of this theme involves nurturing the growth and potential of educators and students alike. Participants understand that empowering individuals within the educational community is essential for creating an environment conducive to learning and innovation. They aspire to provide mentorship, guidance, and resources to help others realize their full potential. Beyond the confines of the school walls, participants seek to make meaningful contributions to the broader community. They recognize that schools are not isolated entities but integral parts of larger societal ecosystems.

By fostering collaboration and partnerships, they aim to address community needs and promote social cohesion through education. At the heart of their aspirations lies a commitment to advancing educational practices that prioritize student success and holistic development. Participants aspire to lead by example, championing innovative teaching methods, curriculum enhancements, and inclusive policies that cater to diverse learner needs. Implicit in their statements is a dedication to fostering a culture of continuous improvement within educational institutions. They understand that transformational leadership involves embracing change, soliciting feedback, and implementing evidence-based strategies to adapt to evolving educational landscapes.

Theme 2: Driving Systematic Educational Reform through Policy Advocacy and Strategic Implementation

Many participants aspire to become school heads to apply best practices, positively impact educational environments, and shape policies that improve educational quality. This theme underscores a focus on implementing effective strategies, influencing policies, and setting goals to enhance the educational experience for all stakeholders.

“To be an essential part of the schools' improvement and to look for a greener pasture for my family.”
(Informant 7)

“The program gave me a more holistic view about leadership and inspired me to better pursue my goals to become a school leader.” (Informant 8).

“My purpose is to manage a school that will serve students with passion, and care and will provide quality education for all” (Informant 9).

“To exercise passion for education and leadership”
(Informant 10).

Within this theme, participants demonstrate a strong commitment to driving systemic educational reform through a combination of policy advocacy and strategic implementation of best practices. Their aspirations reflect a deep understanding of the interconnectedness between policy frameworks, educational environments, and the overall quality of the educational experience for stakeholders. Participants are driven by a desire to implement evidence-based strategies and initiatives that have been proven to enhance educational outcomes. They recognize the importance of adopting innovative approaches to teaching, curriculum design, and student support systems to meet the diverse needs of learners and foster academic excellence.

Participants are committed to setting ambitious yet achievable goals for improving the educational experience for all stakeholders within their schools. They understand the importance of establishing clear objectives and benchmarks for measuring progress toward enhancing teaching and learning outcomes, fostering a supportive school culture, and promoting student well-being. Central to their aspirations is the recognition of the significant impact that educational policies have on shaping the educational landscape. Participants aim to leverage their positions as school heads to advocate for policy changes that promote equity, inclusivity, and quality in education. They seek to engage with policymakers at local, regional, and national levels to influence the development and implementation of policies that prioritize the needs of students and educators.

At the core of their aspirations lies a dedication to creating enriching and supportive educational environments that empower students to reach their full potential. Participants aim to cultivate inclusive school cultures where diversity is celebrated, and every learner feels valued and supported in their academic journey. Participants recognize that effecting meaningful change in education requires collaboration and partnership among various stakeholders, including teachers, parents, community members, and educational organizations. They aspire to build strong networks of support and collaboration to collectively address challenges, share

best practices, and drive continuous improvement in educational practices and policies.

Theme 3: Cultivating a Culture of Lifelong Learning and Empathy in Education Leadership.

Several participants expressed a deep passion for education and a desire to provide quality education for students. Additionally, there's a focus on personal growth, whether it's in terms of managing people and finances, cultivating appropriate behavior, and teaching practices, or gaining a holistic view of leadership. This theme emphasizes a strong commitment to education, personal development, and making a positive difference in the lives of students and communities.

“My purpose because I want to become school head is to enhance my leadership skills” (Informant 11).

“I am aspiring for a school head because I want to apply the best practices and positive impact of my passion school head, I won't able to be a school head to support and help in shaping educational policies, and leadership and set goals to improve educational environment” (Informant 12).

The participants exhibit a profound dedication to cultivating a culture of lifelong learning and empathy within the realm of education leadership. Their expressions reflect a deeply ingrained passion for education coupled with a commitment to personal growth and the well-being of students and communities. Participants are driven by a genuine passion for education and a belief in its transformative power to positively impact individuals and society. They view education not merely as a profession but as a calling—a vocation that demands dedication, compassion, and a relentless pursuit of excellence in serving the needs of learners. Participants acknowledge the importance of personal growth and development in their roles as education leaders. They aspire to continuously enhance their skills, knowledge, and capacities—whether in managing people and finances, cultivating effective teaching practices, or gaining a holistic understanding of leadership—to better serve the needs of their schools and communities.

At the heart of their aspirations lies a deep-seated commitment to cultivating empathy and understanding within educational leadership. Participants recognize the importance of fostering inclusive and compassionate learning environments where every individual feels valued, respected, and supported in their educational journey. Participants are driven by a desire to make a

positive difference in the lives of students and communities. They aspire to leverage their leadership roles to create meaningful opportunities for growth, learning, and empowerment, thereby contributing to the overall well-being and prosperity of society.

Theme 4: Cultivating Leadership Readiness and Competence through Training and Skill Development

Participants expressed a desire to use leadership training as a stepping stone toward assuming leadership roles within educational institutions. They highlight the importance of gaining knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for effective leadership. There's an emphasis on using training opportunities to prepare for managing responsibilities and working with diverse stakeholders.

“Through leadership training, it will be able to act and demonstrate how capable i am of managing numerous responsibilities and in dealing and working with the different personality of teachers, staff and students” (Informant 5).

“Poster an atmosphere where teachers are supported, empowered and valued by the school through this we can foster per collaboration” (Informant 6).

“This training might provide us with insights on how to become an effective and efficient school head someday” (Informant 7).

To have better influence and to have more opportunity to help my students, colleagues, parents and the community” (Informant 8).

“I think this will give me an idea of how to become a good school head” (Informant 9).

“It could give me knowledge, skills, and competencies needed” (Informant 10). “This training program would further elevate my leadership competence because i will learn from speakers who are experts in this field” (Informant 11).

“Through leadership training, I will be able to act and demonstrate how capable I am of managing numerous responsibilities and in dealing and working with different personality of teachers, staff and students.” (Informant 12)

The participants demonstrate a strong commitment to cultivating their readiness for leadership roles within educational institutions through targeted training and skill development. Their statements reflect a deep

understanding of the multifaceted nature of effective leadership and the importance of proactive preparation to successfully navigate the challenges and responsibilities inherent in educational leadership positions. Participants view leadership training as a crucial stepping stone towards assuming leadership roles within educational institutions. They recognize the value of formalized training programs in equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies to excel in leadership positions.

An underlying emphasis within this theme is on preparing to navigate the complex dynamics of working with diverse stakeholders within educational communities. Participants recognize the importance of building strong relationships with teachers, staff, students, parents, and community members and seek to develop the interpersonal skills necessary to effectively engage and collaborate with these diverse stakeholders. Implicit in their statements is a commitment to ongoing learning and growth as they prepare for leadership roles. Participants understand that leadership readiness is an ongoing process that requires continuous self-reflection, learning, and skill development to adapt to evolving challenges and opportunities within educational environments. In essence, this intensive theme encapsulates a fervent dedication to cultivating leadership readiness and competence through targeted training, skill development, and ongoing self-improvement efforts. It reflects a proactive approach to leadership preparation that underscores the importance of acquiring the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to effectively lead and serve within educational institutions.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn. (1) The experiences of the informants emerged in various fundamental themes. These themes emphasized the need of training, guidance, mentorship, and motivation among the aspiring school heads. (2) The perspectives shared by aspiring school heads in the Castilla District emphasize the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach to developing leadership skills. The preferred leadership development program highlighted mentorship and skill development which can make a significant contribution to their aspirations. (3) The program provides several contributions to the aspirations of the informants. These contributions allow them to achieve their full potential and to enhance their competencies through training and development.

Furthermore, it is recommended to: (1) Implement structured mentorship initiatives that provide prospective school administrators with guidance and support from seasoned leaders. Furthermore, it is important to motivate individuals to actively engage in school activities to offer tangible chances for ambitious leaders to enhance their abilities and proficiencies. (2) Establish an organized mentorship program that offers aspiring school heads guidance and assistance from experienced leaders. Moreover, it is crucial to inspire individuals to actively participate in school activities to provide concrete opportunities for aspiring leaders to improve their skills and competencies. (3) Foster a culture that values continuous learning and empathy among educational leaders, motivating future school administrators to actively seek out chances for personal development and introspection. Create and execute a capacity-building program designed to meet the specific requirements of individuals desiring to become school principals. These programs will focus on enhancing skills in leadership preparedness, strategic planning, conflict resolution, and engaging with stakeholders. (4) Offer continuous assistance and direction to aspiring school leaders throughout their career path, including mentorship, coaching, and access to resources that aid in their growth. Provide opportunities for aspiring school heads to enhance their skills and competencies through training workshops, seminars, and networking events. And (5), further studies may be conducted to supplement the findings revealed in this study.

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