



## **Experiences of Executive Leaders in Sorsogon: Navigating Challenges and Driving Educational Change**

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*Abstract*— This study explores the experiences of executive leaders in Sorsogon within the educational context, revealing key themes related to their perceptions, challenges, and successes. The findings highlight leaders' agility and strategic skills, emphasizing the importance of self-awareness and adaptability in navigating educational difficulties. Informants noted that effective executive leadership fosters proficient educators and enhances the quality of education, with leaders acting as role models. The research identifies essential skills for educational leaders, including recognizing staff efforts and effective communication, which contribute to a supportive and motivating work environment. Furthermore, qualities such as vision, integrity, and accountability are deemed crucial for successful leadership. Leaders face challenges, including non-supportive higher-level leadership, budgetary constraints, and schools' geographical locations, hindering effective program implementation. Despite these obstacles, leaders strive to engage stakeholders and promote collaboration in curriculum development and instructional leadership. The study underscores the significance of empowering subordinates in decision-making, fostering inclusivity and ownership, and ultimately enhancing organizational effectiveness. Overall, the findings provide valuable insights into the dynamics of executive leadership in education, emphasizing the need for continuous development and strategic planning to overcome challenges and improve educational outcomes.

Keywords — Executive Leaders, Executive Leadership, Educational Challenges, Sorsogon.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Effective school leadership is a cornerstone for the success of educational institutions. It helps shape the learning environment, promote teacher development, and improve student outcomes. Secondary schools face diverse challenges as executive leaders aim for academic and holistic excellence. The executive leaders have pivotal roles in shaping the educational landscape and steering schools towards success. According to Aureada (2021), school heads carry out functions connected to the mission. They are also responsible for managing curriculum and instruction. They supervise, support teaching and learning, and monitor student progress. They also ensure that an effective instructional climate is achieved.

Another study discussed how school heads practice leadership roles in the new normal. It was found that school heads' leadership practices are related to instructional directives and resiliency in stress management. They are also directed towards managing conflicts and establishing functional and practical teams. Leadership practices are also geared towards administrative dispositions such as commitment, empathy, and tolerance. Honesty, inclusivity, and accommodating are also evident (Villar, 2021). Research on school administrators newly hired in Kadingilan I and II districts, Bukidnon, discovered that newly hired school heads possess interpersonal skills. It also revealed that they are competent and flexible. They characteristics needed also have for school administrators, such as patience, open-mindedness, and commitment. Nevertheless, even with such competencies, school heads face leadership challenges. They encounter problems in staff supervision and worklife balance. In addition, new school administrators confronted problems in school management and maintaining the legacy established by their predecessors. School heads overcome such challenges by applying positive attitudes like open-mindedness alongside self-reliance. They also seek support from others and practice good time management, but still need professional development. It was catered through development programs, financial management training, and instructional supervision programs (Castañeros et.al. 2023).

In the Philippines, the Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) Framework was developed by the Department of Education to continue to drive improvements to teaching and learning quality by promoting new standards. In this framework, interaction between maximizing school effectiveness and ensuring



people's effectiveness was ensured. This was possible through a broad sphere of instructional and administrative practices stipulated in its five domains. Domains include: Leading strategically, Managing School Operations and Resources, Focusing on Teaching and Learning, Developing Self and others, and Building connections. These five domains stipulate a broad conceptual sphere of leadership practices of school heads. Moreover, PPSSH sets clear expectations for the school head in the career stages of professional development, from beginning to exemplary practice. The framework guided school heads on what to do during their career path.

School executive leaders need to improve leadership skills to become more capable of addressing pressing issues and concerns in the school. The Department of Education issued DepEd Memorandum No.50 as a response, 2020 titled "DepEd Professional Development Priorities for Teachers and School Leaders for School Year 2020-2023." This serves as a guide for identifying professional development programs developed for teachers and school leaders (Department of Education, 2000). Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) provided professional development priorities for school heads. Meanwhile, the Philippine Professional Standards for Supervisors (PPSS) identify and develop professional development for supervisors. Priorities presented were anchored on DepEd Order No.24 s. 2020.

The national government released its Development Plan entitled "Ambisyon 2040" to improve our educational system. It is our country's long-term plan, which is contextual to the needs of Filipino Society. About the targets of Ambisyon 2040, the Department of Education pushed various educational reforms in frameworks and standards, such as Sulong Edukalidad. It provided four reform agendas to enhance the quality of basic education. Such a program pertains to KITE (K to 12 Review and update, Improvement of Learning Environment, Teachers' upskilling and Reskilling, and Engagement of stakeholders for support and collaboration). This framework is the backbone of the department's various programs, projects, and activities (PPAs) initiatives. These reforms, in the form of policies and PPA, help alleviate challenges in every Filipino classroom, which is a big part of Filipino society (De Jesus, 2022).

A study in Sorsogon assessed the need to improve leadership skills. Digo's (2021) findings revealed the need to improve skills in servant leadership and emphasized the demand to enhance one's leadership trademark. It was found that there is a need to develop an online distance course on leadership style in the Graduate School of Sorsogon State University. Participants showed readiness for e-learning alongside flexible learning modes.

Schools in Sorsogon province are abundant with aspiring executive leaders who have potential. These aspiring executive leaders would be more capable given appropriate interventions and opportunities. It is imperative to design an executive leadership program that would cater to the training needs of aspiring executive leaders in different schools in Sorsogon to enhance the capabilities of such would-be leaders. This also provides them with opportunities to be more competent. Through this study, the experiences of current executive leaders would provide valuable insights in designing a leadership program for aspiring school leaders.

#### **II. METHODOLOGY**

This study used qualitative action research as an approach. Engaging reflection and linking theory to practice, the action research type allowed, through its qualitative approach, to get a deep view of the difficulties experienced by the respondents while solving problems. The paper used criterion sampling to choose executive leaders among the Department of Education (DepEd) in Sorsogon Province, such as the Assistant Schools Division Superintendent and ten potential educational leaders from four public secondary schools. The participants were identified based on their personal and professional experience, thus providing valuable knowledge from different sources to such an extent that their participation was paramount for getting information about the particular challenges and successes of leadership positions in the education system.

For the data collection phase, semi-structured interviews were the best-fit method since they allowed for collecting information about the participants' experiences in depth, not limited by a fixed structure, aside from the use of a pre- and post-assessment that was performed during the implementation of an executive leadership program. The study used thematic analysis to make sense of the qualitative findings, allowing it to discover the prominent themes and patterns that characterized the answers of the research participants. The researcher did qualitative coding, compared and



contrasted data in new perspectives through pre- and post-assessment interviews, and thus, quantified the participants' progression during their learning journey of executive leadership.

#### **III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Interviews with executive leaders in Sorsogon provided valuable insights into their experiences with executive leadership in the educational context. Several key themes emerged from the data, highlighting their perceptions, challenges, and successes.

# Knowledge on educational leadership (Foundations of Educational Leadership)

Executive leaders have agility and the skills necessary to respond to challenges. They also have the capacity to identify strategic opportunities in a workforce that continually evolves. Executive leaders understand themselves. They also know how to deploy their strengths in different diversified contexts. They skillfully adapt to situations, identifying the best course of action based on their knowledge. Burckbucler (2024) quoted the dean of Mark Cannon, an instructor in Executive Leadership, as saying that executive leaders make the most of their capabilities in evolving circumstances. Their decision significantly impacts the organization. In the province of Sorsogon, educational leaders also outline the importance of executive leadership. According to one of the informants:

Executive leadership in an educational context serves as a guide and encourages educators to become more proficient and effective. The ultimate purpose is to improve the quality of education in the place of your assignment. In the case of DepEd officials such as Superintendents, Supervisors, and principals, they are looked upon by the teachers and other employees as role models in the accomplishment of their daily tasks.

The main business, as they say, of DepEd is to produce learners who are viewed with skill, abilities, and values that will guide them as they go along in their studies, ready to become productive and to participate in the process of nation-building. In the context of Sorsogon, we envision all Sorsoganons to be patriotic and possess the necessary qualities of a Sorsoganon. Executive Leadership also oversees all activities to realize organizational goals, crafting the direction of the division. They are the ones that give direction to strategic planning that the DepEd regularly undertakes to guide employees as to what activities and actions they will undertake. In crafting with the division's vision, we are guided by the National Framework; we have the socalled one vision, one DepEd. In the context of the Sorsogon Division, we consider the province. We align with the provincial government's vision/aim to realize. (Informant 1)

In the Department of Education, executives lead the organization in implementing programs and projects to realize its goals and objectives, as stated by another informant:

Executive leadership is the ability of those in managerial positions in DepEd to manage, direct, and guide employees in the entire organization and influence people in the overall plan, vision, and mission of DepEd. (Informant 2)

#### Skills possessed in Executive Leadership

Recognition of hard work and dedication among colleagues was perceived as a positive experience indicative of effective leadership. Acknowledging the efforts of personnel was seen as an integral component of developing a supportive and motivating leadership culture. Also, encouraging participation from teachers and students can enhance a motivating environment. One of the informants stressed the importance of recognizing and rewarding deserving employees. During the interview, he said:

"Our fellow workers in the division office and schools are hard-working, including the personnel tasked to deliver the services expected of them by their Key Results Area (KRA). The participation of teachers and students indicates that we are doing it right in the division. Recognition is also given by higher offices, which are very positive experiences that could be attributed to good leadership." – (Informant 1)

Another important skill that an educational leader should have is good communication. He needs to be articulate so that the goals and objectives of the organization are met. This account is being reinforced by a statement of another informant stating that:

"Essential Skills that need to be developed in an educational leader are the art of communication. A good communicator is better in community building". (Informant 2)

Wordings highlighted the significance of recognizing and valuing the contributions of staff members within educational institutions. Acknowledgement of hard work and dedication of colleagues could help executive



leaders to cultivate a supportive and inclusive work environment where individuals feel motivated to perform their best. Furthermore, the participation of teachers and students in decision-making processes serves as an invaluable indicator of effective leadership, underscoring the importance of fostering collaboration and engagement across all levels of the organization.

Recognizing staff members' efforts and promoting a culture of appreciation are essential to effective leadership practices (Casinillo & Suarez, 2021). Executive leaders can enhance employee morale, motivation, and job satisfaction by encouraging a supportive work environment where contributions are valued and acknowledged. These factors ultimately lead to improved organizational performance and outcomes. Moreover, active participation of teachers and students in decision-making processes fosters a sense of ownership in the institution. It empowers stakeholders to contribute to its success and sustainability.

Communication is also important in every educational institution. It builds a community that is well informed and supportive of the organization's programs and projects. Effective communication is the cornerstone of successful educational leadership. It plays a pivotal role in fostering a positive learning environment. It also nurtures collaborative relationships, thus driving institutional growth. In education, leaders must navigate complex interactions with diverse stakeholders, including students, faculty, parents, and the broader community (Parmar, 2023). By doing this, the success of the organization's programs and projects is highly guaranteed.

## Qualities Possessed by an Executive Leader

Educational institutions want leaders who can understand and encourage people. They seek leaders who can learn from past experiences, take on new challenges, and make decisions under uncertainty. Good educational leaders possess quality that makes them learning agile. They should flex their influence while communicating vision, showing gratitude, and collaborating effectively. Qualities educational leaders make possessed by them successful. They help create a positive environment in the workforce. An informant said that:

"A successful executive leader should be a visionary with a future foresight (what would happen in DepEd Sorsogon. He should have the ability to create a good vision for the organization. Decision-making is an essential quality. In every aspect of your leadership, decision-making is needed. Leading by example is also crucial; it makes your subordinates follow you even if you are not speaking so much or you do not issue a memorandum, they will follow your orders. Another good quality is the right utilization of resources; one needs to make wise decisions. Integrity is also important. Even if others do not check on you, good deeds continue because you believe you are accountable to God and will always do what is right. A leader should be credible. Your subordinate should look at you as a very credible leader. By this, they will not doubt your character and your position. Lastly, a leader in a division should always be accountable for all their actions. It is not placing the blame on others. You are accountable for the people you lead, the resources you manage, and the division's overall performance". (Informant 1)

To reach an organization's aim, a leader should possess salient characteristics in improving outcomes. He makes crucial decisions that could lead to the organization's success. This is evident in the answer of one of the informants, who says that:

- Educational leaders should be risk takers. He takes risks to achieve his goals. He should also be honest. Must walk the talk and learn by doing. He must also have a passion for work and have a data-driven management" (Informant 2)
- Leaders are venturing into uncharted waters, and as a result, they are risk takers. Leaders are willing to listen to others while trying untested approaches; they accept the risk of failure (Malcolm Webber, 2022). These leaders leave their comfort zones and try new ideas to break free from self-imposed limitations or ceilings.

## STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND PLANNING Overcoming Challenges

The interviews also revealed significant challenges faced by executive leaders in their roles. Non-supportive leadership at higher levels and difficulty tapping the cooperation of all teachers emerge as key challenges. Limited support from higher-ups can hinder the effective implementation of programs and initiatives. At the same time, the need to ensure the cooperation of all teachers underscores the complexities of leading diverse teams within educational settings.

#### Non-Supportive Leadership

One of the key informants shared his view about executive leaders' challenges in schools in Sorsogon. He said that a lack of interest in



supporting educational programs and projects by its stakeholders may hinder the realisation of such. According to him:

"Some of the key challenges that I experienced as an educational leader in Sorsogon are the apathy of some educational and community leaders to promote a culture of respect, collaboration, and innovation." (Informant 1)

Another informant said that one of the challenges he encountered was a lack of stakeholders' support. He acknowledged that stakeholders are an integral part of an organization, and their support is needed to fulfill the organization's plan. He stated:

"To fully realize our strategic direction, the greatest challenge is to rally our stakeholders to help us, particularly in resource generation, to implement specific programs and projects that will realize our strategic positions." (Informant 2)

In line with mental health and well-being, colleagues' support is influential. Negative mood among staff was associated with poorer quality of care. In addition, the damaging effects were exacerbated if support from their colleagues was low. On the other hand, supportive managers positively impact employee engagement. They also increase employee satisfaction and organizational commitment and reduce employee turnover (Teoh et al., 2016).

Studies showed that a lack of or weakness in effective planning for all aspects of a project causes significant problems. It can even lead to its closure sometimes. However, working on a project as a team contributes to overcoming many obstacles.

It is important to consider that some members may be from different locations. This may require development plans for appropriate communication (Ibraheem, 2018).

Thus, communication channels between parties are improved when stakeholders' engagement is done effectively. It also creates substantial support for the project. In addition, it gathers information for the organization, thus, reduces potential for conflict or other project crippling issues. It also enhances the reputation of the organization.

## **Budgetary Constraints**

Another challenge that the informants experienced as a critical barrier as they perform their roles as executive leaders is budgetary limitations. Many leaders indicated Volume 06, Issue 07, 2025 | Open Access | ISSN: 2582-6832

that financial constraints prevented them from participating in valuable leadership development programs. One leader stated,

Even when there are available programs, the lack of budget often means we cannot attend or implement what we have learned" (Informant 1)

According to Llego (2019), budget cuts in education are a complicated problem that stems from multiple issues. Such issues may include small pay, unstable jobs, lesson materials, technological and media upgrades delays, and textbooks. They also involve instructional materials budget delays, failure to implement continuing professional development for teachers, larger classes, health issues, and even school closures. Such effects due to a lack of budget could hinder lesson delivery and program implementation, benefiting learners.

On the other hand, financial reports for programs and projects of any educational institution should also be handled properly. There is a need for regular reporting to avoid doubts from stakeholders. A study conducted in Nueva Ecija found a statistically strong positive relationship between the level of transparency and accountability about school finances. Higher levels of accountability were consistent with higher levels of transparency in managing school finances (Gaspar et.al, 2022). These findings align with the result of the interview with key informants, as one of them said that:

Financial transparency in all educational institutions should be evident. All office transactions must be transparent. (Informant 1)

Conversely, another problem the key informant shared is the school's location. He emphasized that this may lead to low academic achievement. In the interview, he mentioned:

The geographical location of some of the schools is also one of the challenges. This could lead to low academic achievement of students, thus hindering the success of the educational process. In any organization, we experience challenges. We do not always expect the best all the time. Challenges make us go. They help us ponder where our organization goes wrong and if we can identify and face some of those challenges. Those are vehicles by which we will improve. (Informant 2)

This wording could be associated with a study that showed significant variations between learners in urban and rural schools in learning Mathematics. Researcher **United International Journal for Research & Technology** 



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observation has shown that many learners in rural settings live in poverty, and their learning and life experience opportunities are limited. It was followed by the suburban township learners. Urban classrooms were set to be somehow more conducive to learning than classrooms in rural and suburban township schools (Febana et.al, 2022). The result of the study indicated that students' geographical location has an impact on academic achievement. Educational leaders feel that such challenges are problems that need to be addressed.

Although executive leaders are continually confronted with challenges in their work, they take such experiences as opportunities to rally their stakeholders, get them involved in educational initiatives, and solicit their support in the institution. As leadership continues to evolve, the ability to tackle diverse challenges becomes pivotal. Leaders continually ask themselves what they have yet to learn. They also encourage collective learning to address challenges thoroughly.

### INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Instructional leadership supports the development of the teaching and learning process. International research meta-analyses reveal that instructional leadership positively influences student achievement (Le Fevre, 2021). Curriculum development is important in the educational process. It helps teachers be systematic in delivering lessons and competencies. It can also help create a curriculum relevant to the needs of learners and society.

#### Involvement in Curriculum Development

Curriculum development is a planned, deliberate course of actions that enhance students' learning experience quality. It includes the development of an organization of learning activities that are designed to meet intended learning outcomes. Hence, it is imperative that the involvement of stakeholders in the development of the curriculum is needed. This importance is stressed in the answer of one of the informants, as he said that:

In DepEd Sorsogon, I always see school heads, master teachers, and key teachers involved in the development and delivery of the curriculum. I believe they are my partners in delivering quality education. (Informant 1)

This answer is supported by the statement of Aloma (2023), which stressed that to create effective education systems, all stakeholders need to come together meaningfully through collaboration. Open and transparent dialogues create healthy relationships and

successful teaching and learning outcomes. In the development and delivery of curriculum, stakeholders must come together to make a stronger and meaningful curriculum and advancements in education.

#### Monitoring and Providing Technical Assistance

One of the Key informants emphasizes the significance of monitoring the curriculum implementation. By doing so, he believed schools perform and thus ensure the achievement of educational goals. According to him:

Monitoring and providing technical assistance to school heads and teachers on implementing the curriculum, ensuring that the goal of education is focused on the teaching and learning process. It is important to measure the performance of learners. (Informant 1)

A study conducted by Biasong in 2016, which was mentioned in Datahan's (2020) work, revealed that one of the objectives supporting the overall purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to provide information on the delivery of education as a basis for technical assistance. Outcomes of School Monitoring and Evaluation become the benchmark for principals on what they need to do to improve the quality of instruction and organizational performance. This implies that monitoring and evaluation in educational institutions ensure that teaching, learning, and curriculum implementation continually improve.

## LEADING FOR IQUITY AND INCLUSION

By providing opportunities for subordinates to exercise leadership potential and actively contribute to decisionmaking processes, executive leaders delegate responsibilities and cultivate a sense of accountability among team members. This participatory approach promotes a collaborative environment where diverse perspectives are valued. As a result, it will enhance organizational effectiveness, fostering professional growth among staff.

Active participation and input from all team members can help executive leaders leverage their staff's expertise and insights, leading to more informed decision-making and innovative solutions to complex challenges. This approach strengthens organizational cohesion and empowers individuals to realize their full leadership potential.

Executive leaders in Sorsogon highlight the importance of empowering their subordinates, including school heads and master teachers. They give them opportunities to exercise leadership potential and participate in



decision-making. This approach nurtures a sense of ownership and accountability among team members and contributes to a more collaborative and effective leadership culture within educational institutions.

Based on the interview conducted, one of the key informants stated that:

"As executive leaders, we empower our subordinates or those under our leadership to become leaders. We give them opportunities to exercise their leadership potential, and all members of our team share their thoughts by allowing them to give their opinions, suggestions, etc." (informant 1)

In the same vein, another key informant stated that:

"Our fellow workers in the division office and in schools are hard-working, including the personnel tasked to deliver the expected services per their Key Results Area (KRA). The participation of teachers and students indicates that we are doing it right in the division. Recognition is also given by higher offices, which are very positive experiences that could be attributed to good leadership." (Informant 2)

One salient theme from the interviews emphasized empowerment and inclusion in decision-making processes. Executive leaders in Sorsogon underscored the significance of empowering their subordinates, such as school heads and master teachers, by providing them with opportunities to exercise leadership potential and actively participate in decision-making. This approach encourages a culture of ownership among team members, ultimately contributing to a more collaborative and effective leadership environment within educational institutions. Moreover, the responses align with the idea that inclusive leadership is vital to the success of an entire organization for several reasons. They are stated as: Enhance innovation and creativity, decision making, increase employee improve engagement and retention, better problem solving, mitigate bias and discrimination, and enhance reputation and brand image (Duberke, 2023).

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical role of effective executive leadership in secondary schools in Sorsogon, Philippines, emphasizing its impact on educational quality and student outcomes. The findings reveal that executive leaders face multifaceted challenges, including the need for strategic agility, strong interpersonal skills, and the ability to foster collaboration among staff and stakeholders. Moreover, integrating the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) provides a framework to enhance leadership competencies and professional development. Educational leaders can create supportive environments that enhance motivation and engagement by empowering subordinates and promoting inclusive decision-making. As the educational landscape continues to evolve, investing in leadership development programs tailored to the specific needs of aspiring leaders is essential for addressing challenges and driving improvement in educational institutions. Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of nurturing capable leaders who can effectively navigate complexities and foster a culture of excellence within the educational system.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve principal leadership in secondary schools in Sorsogon, it is suggested that a professional development program be tailored, the teachers and school heads be involved, and the initiatives on mentorship, collaboration, and budget constraints be launched. First, the professional development program must be specific to the challenges the leaders face and, simultaneously, must enable them to gain necessary competencies in line with the PPSSH (Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads). Coordinating leadership can guarantee that teachers and staff, in particular, take part in decision-making, which, in turn, will lead to their engagement in the process and further encourage their sense of belonging. It is also true that the guidance of the senior leaders will be beneficial to the newer ones as far as passing on knowledge is concerned. Messages in the proposed training must bear the touch of communication skills, underpinning the fact that a leader should be able to explain their vision.

A strategy for curbing budgetary difficulties, emphasizing the call for increased financial support and awareness of the problem, will ensure the required training is available. By developing stakeholder engagement, support for the school's activities will be multiplied. At the same time, a system for checking and rating leadership will allow space to identify steps that need evolution. With the help of the mentioned tactics, educational institutions will thus give birth to effective leaders who are good role models for society and are ultimately the driving force behind the revolution, aiding the community and schools to move towards positive changes without obstructing the education process. **United International Journal for Research & Technology** 



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