

Core Behavioral and Leadership Competencies of the Public Elementary School Heads in Pangasinan

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Abstract — The study delved on the level of core behavioral and leadership competencies of public elementary school heads in Pangasinan. The study determined the profile of the respondents, their level of core behavioral and leadership competencies, the significant relationship between the level of their core behavioral and leadership competencies and their profile variables, and the significant difference in the level of their core behavioral and leadership competencies across their profile variables. The descriptive method of research was used in this study. Findings showed that majority of the public elementary school heads have doctoral degrees, holding Principal III positions, experienced, and equipped with trainings. In addition, the public elementary school heads have very strong core behavioral and leadership competencies. Likewise, length of service is correlated with school heads' service orientation. Further, length of service is contributory to the ability of school heads to lead people. The study recommended that public elementary school heads can adopt the intervention plan crafted by the researcher to further strengthen their core behavioral and leadership competencies. In addition, a similar study should be conducted taking into consideration other factors that can affect their level of core behavioral and leadership competencies.

Keywords — *Core Behavioral Competencies, Leadership Competencies, People Management, Service Orientation, Leading People*

I. Introduction

The Department of Education (DepEd) has established standards and criteria for educational leadership and management in public schools through its orders and memoranda. Public elementary school heads, in order to succeed in this position, need to possess a distinct set of core behavioral and leadership characteristics. These qualities outline the required skills and credentials of said school leaders. Over time, the abilities needed for school leaders have changed to meet the demands of contemporary society and the constantly shifting educational scene. Education leadership now encompasses a complex interaction of behavioral and leadership qualities that enhance academic performance, create a positive school climate, and enable leaders to respond to changing circumstances. Similar to how a school leader sets the tone as the top management in terms of planning, organizing, supervising, making decisions, and managing financial and instructional operations, these qualities are crucial in determining the course and success of public elementary schools.

Exceptional school leaders are those who have attained the pinnacle of competence required for their demanding roles. Nevertheless, the specific competencies essential for school leadership can vary significantly, contingent upon legal mandates, the intricacies of the job, and the prevailing organizational culture. In the international landscape, it remains uncertain whether the highest academic degrees are a prerequisite for effective school leadership. This begs the question: Does the acquisition of advanced degrees truly matter in terms of school performance and the demonstration of leadership and core behavioral competencies? The reality is that one need not embark on the arduous journey of earning a bachelor's or master's degree to assume a leadership position within a school. This brings us to the critical inquiry: What should policymakers, education authorities, and decision-makers reasonably expect from school leaders who have pursued advanced studies? Is there substantial justification for the continued investment in the professional development of current and prospective school administrators through continuous education? These are complex questions that may yield conflicting answers.

Studies examining the connection between leadership, academic performance, and academic degrees have been conducted, yet they predominantly focus on student outcomes, such as learning, academic achievement, and grades. Few have ventured into the realm of linking academic degrees with leadership and performance. In order to improve schools and increase student accomplishment, school heads are essential. Furthermore, to improve and change social conditions quickly, it is important to ascertain their competencies. Student achievement increases as school leaders gain these competencies more (Özdemir et al., 2019).

Dela Cruz and Donoso's (2019) examine the leadership competencies of Public Elementary School principals in Pangasinan I, Philippines, and their potential correlation with the academic performance of Grade Six pupils. This local study offers valuable insights into the impact of leadership competencies on student academic achievement within the Pangasinan region. Results showed that strong leadership competencies of school principals can harness the talents and motivations of teachers, students, and parents; develop inclusive and inspiring learning cultures for the whole school; and provide intensive, individualized, and sustainable teacher training.

In this dynamic environment, school leaders are tasked with sharing tools, strategies, and innovative practices related to change leadership. These resources enable staff to swiftly embrace and lead successful change and innovation initiatives, allowing educational institutions to keep pace with the rapid evolution of the business environment today.

Collaboration and influence, characterized by working indirectly through persuasion and trust rather than formal authority, are critical leadership competencies. Leaders must demonstrate the ability to collaborate with peers, partners, and those beyond their direct command, positively impacting overall business performance.

Great educational institutions are built on excellent school leadership. According to Isla (2021), effective leadership is critical for fostering a learning environment in which every student

has to access quality education. His study highlights the vital role of effective leadership in creating a conducive learning environment where all students have access to high-quality education. Teachers who pursue postgraduate leadership education in the Philippines can play a significant role in supporting successful teaching and learning practices, adapting to changing educational landscapes, and infusing fresh ideas into schools. Regardless of their experience, school leaders must continuously refine their leadership skills and approaches to benefit both internal and external stakeholders.

By examining the legal bases, including Republic Act No. 9155, DepEd Orders and Memoranda, and the Civil Service Commission (CSC) Rules and Regulations, this research aims to ensure that the identified core behavioral and leadership competencies are not only theoretically relevant but also aligned with the legal and regulatory framework governing educational leadership in the Philippines and in Pangasinan, thereby enhancing the reliability and applicability of the study's findings. This alignment with legal principles is essential for shaping educational policy and practice in the region.

Leadership has long been a central focus in educational research and studies due to its pivotal role in enhancing the impact of schools on student outcomes, something greatly esteemed by Filipino teachers and school administrators. As noted by De Vita (2019), effective educational leadership is a critical factor in enhancing learning and student achievement. Significantly, it is through the efforts of teachers that student success is realized and fulfilled.

Additionally, the challenges faced by today's novice school leaders may significantly differ from those encountered by their predecessors several years or decades ago. An understanding of the obstacles encountered during the early stages of a school leader's career can influence the design and content of school leader preparation programs (Brill, 2019).

Taking on a leadership role invariably calls for reflection and careful consideration. The allure of power, authority, privileges, and benefits may be enticing, but the accompanying duties and responsibilities require one to pause and weigh the decision. In the absence of other qualified individuals, tenure and performance emerge as the primary criteria for appointment (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021).

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty's 2020 article underscores the pivotal role of leadership in igniting student learning. It investigates the leadership behaviors and practices that can lead to enhanced learning outcomes, serving as a valuable reference for comprehending the connection between leadership competencies and student achievements. They emphasized that educational leaders have immense power to create a positive culture in schools by building relationships between staff, teachers, and students to establish common respect and establishing a shared vision and expectations.

Hence, the role of a school administrator's leadership style is multifaceted, and it plays a pivotal role in molding the educational culture (Smith, 2019). It entails the unique behaviors

exhibited by leaders to motivate a group of employees towards achieving organizational goals. On the other hand, management style pertains to the philosophical mechanisms and the managerial capacity to influence and guide a group in achieving objectives.

Shonubi (2019) highlights that effective school heads often exhibit leadership and management tasks positively correlated with student achievement. The principal's role has grown in complexity as societal dynamics, political expectations, and the nature of schools as organizations have evolved. Likewise, Storey (2019) underscores that the success of any organization hinges on the type of leadership approach employed. The researcher suggests that an effective leader should be innovative, motivational, transparent, and possess the ability to foster a collaborative approach to attain organizational goals. A new leader adopts an effective leader-follower approach in fulfilling their responsibilities. Highly proficient school heads are those who have acquired the optimal level of competencies essential for effectively carrying out their roles. These competencies are crucial for their capacity to drive positive educational outcomes.

Meanwhile, Dela Cruz (2019) emphasized that having professionalism and ethics is very significant core behavioral competency of school leaders. Some of these competencies include demonstrating the values and behaviors stipulated in the Norms of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees (RA 6713), practicing ethical and professional behavior, and maintaining professional image: being trustworthy, punctual, and honest, making personal sacrifices to meet the organization's needs, and acting with sense of urgency and responsibility.

According to Dubrin (2020), a school leader should be result-focused in order to achieve school's goals and objectives. His study enumerated behavioral competencies that encompass a result focus leader such as achieving school goals with optimal use of time and resources, avoiding wastage through effective work methods, producing quality of work in terms of usefulness/acceptability, and completeness, delivering error-free outputs most of the time by conforming to standard operating procedures correctly and consistently, and listening to suggestions of colleagues to improve the quality of output.

Also, teamwork is one of the most important core behavioral competencies of school heads as divulged by the study of Leithwood (2019). His study suggested that in order to have a successful teamwork, a school head should work with colleagues to achieve school goals and objectives, strengthen partnership with stakeholders to sustain school programs, projects, and activities, collaborate with the school community to maintain order and peace inside and outside the school, accept suggestions from colleagues to improve school's program and activities, and maintain healthy relationship with colleagues to work harmoniously as a team.

Moreover, the study of Obiena (2020) highlighted the significance of a service-oriented school leader. His study found out some strategies to become a service-oriented school leader. Some of these strategies include the ability to explain organizational directions, issues and problems to the school community, ability to take responsibility for dealing with issues and

concerns of the school, ability to initiate activities that promote advocacy for men and women empowerment, ability to participate in updating school's mission and vision based on DepEd's strategies and directions, and ability to develop service improvement programs through simplified procedures that will further enhance service delivery.

Another study conducted by Tinio (2019) found out that aside from core behavioral competencies, leadership competencies are also important for a school head. His study revealed that important leadership competencies include leading people, people performance management, and people development. Leading people includes using basic persuasion techniques during meetings/ conferences to inspire colleagues to do their tasks well, influencing colleagues in order to have specific impact or effect to others especially to students, setting good example by demonstrating desired behavior of a leader, assuming a pivotal role in promoting the personal and professional development of colleagues, and leading colleagues in promoting effective work environment.

Literature Review

The notion that student outcomes such as academic performance, social and emotional growth, and general school climate are favorably impacted by successful leadership which is defined by the listed abilities. In the context of Pangasinan Public Elementary School leadership, this study aims to determine the relationship between leadership qualities and these outcomes, based on theoretical underpinnings as well as legislative criteria. To bridge the gap between theory and practice, leadership development and training programs, both at the national and regional levels, contribute to building the competencies of Public Elementary School heads.

These programs serve as a practical link between the theoretical framework and the effective implementation of leadership competencies, ensuring alignment with educational laws and regulations. Acknowledging the significance of contextual factors, the framework considers that the competencies required for school leadership may be influenced by various local factors, such as the socio-economic environment of Pangasinan, the diversity of the student population, and the unique challenges faced by the schools in the region. These contextual factors may shape the specific leadership competencies that are most relevant in Pangasinan, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the core competencies essential for school leadership in the region.

Educational institutions' effectiveness hinges significantly on the leadership provided by school heads. According to research conducted by Leithwood et al. (2019), effective leadership in schools has a direct impact on student outcomes, emphasizing the crucial role of school leaders in shaping the learning environment.

The dynamic and complex nature of educational leadership is emphasized by the work of Meng and Hoy (2020), who explore the influence of transformational leadership on instructional improvement. This study sheds light on how leadership behaviors can enhance teaching and

learning practices, linking leadership competencies to tangible improvements in the educational process.

The foundational framework for this study draws from McGrath's functional leadership theory, serving as the basis for identifying the essential qualifications of a leader. These qualifications include leading change, leading people, results-driven orientation, business acumen, and business coalition. McGrath's theory centers on delineating what a leader must undertake to ensure that the group's requirements are fulfilled, thereby facilitating the achievement of goals. The theory posits that the leader's role is to address or facilitate the completion of tasks that are not adequately managed for the group's needs. In essence, the leader is perceived as a completer, and the optimal leadership contribution lies in observing which functions are unattended within a segment of the group and enabling that segment to fulfill them.

McGrath formulates the functional approach as generic, applicable to anyone leading a team, with its primary objective being the identification of critical functions necessary for the effective performance of a work group in an organization. The functional style operates on the assumption that leadership is defined by the leader's behavior and its corresponding impact on the group. This approach hones in on the specific areas that a leader must address to be effective. In essence, if a leader, through various means, ensures that all functions crucial for both task accomplishment and group maintenance are adequately managed, then the leader is deemed to have fulfilled their role effectively. Therefore, functional leadership is the contribution that any leader makes to a group to satisfy specific needs.

Flexible behavioral and leadership competencies theory, within the realm of leadership studies, accentuates the adaptability and versatility indispensable for effective leadership in diverse scenarios. This theoretical framework contends that proficient leaders should possess a dynamic repertoire of skills and behaviors that can be flexibly applied to meet the specific contextual demands of the organization or team they lead. This approach underscores several key elements: first, the importance of adaptability, whereby leaders can adjust their strategies in response to varying circumstances, demonstrating openness to change and resilience in the face of challenges. Second, versatility is a hallmark of effective leadership, allowing leaders to seamlessly transition between different leadership styles as dictated by the situation, whether authoritative or collaborative. Additionally, the theory places a premium on problem-solving skills, emphasizing a leader's capacity to analyze challenges critically and apply innovative solutions tailored to specific issues. Interpersonal agility is another key aspect, highlighting leaders' excellence in building relationships and navigating diverse communication styles for successful collaboration. Finally, a commitment to continuous learning and development is intrinsic to this theory, acknowledging that effective leaders stay informed about new trends and integrate new knowledge into their practices.

Distinguishing itself from transformational leadership theory, which centers on inspiring and motivating followers towards visionary outcomes, flexible competencies theory underscores

immediate adaptability and situational responsiveness. While both theories recognize the importance of effective leadership, transformational leadership theory places a strong emphasis on creating a lasting vision and inspiring followers for the long term, leveraging emotional intelligence and charisma. In contrast, flexible competencies theory is more immediate, focusing on a leader's ability to swiftly adapt to diverse challenges, providing a practical and context-dependent approach. In summary, while transformational leadership theory focuses on long-term inspiration and emotional appeal, flexible behavioral and leadership competencies theory positions itself as a pragmatic framework, emphasizing the adaptability and problem-solving abilities of leaders in response to various and dynamic situations.

More than anything else, while this study is grounded on the above theories discussed, it is believed that it entails a bit difference by incorporating trending ideas and concepts along core behavioral competencies and leadership competencies that are used as variables in this study. Such is more specifically discussed in the conceptual framework of the study that follows.

Statement of the Problem

This study determined the core behavioral and leadership competencies of the public elementary school heads in Pangasinan.

Specifically, it sought answers the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - a. highest educational attainment;
 - b. position;
 - c. length of service as school head;
 - d. number of relevant trainings/seminars attended?
2. What is the level of the core behavioral competencies of the school heads along:
 - a. self-management;
 - b. professionalism and ethics;
 - c. result focus;
 - d. teamwork;
 - e. service orientation; and
 - f. innovation?
3. What is the level of the leadership competencies of the school heads along:
 - a. leading people;
 - b. people performance management; and
 - c. people development?

II. Methodology

Research Design and Strategy

The researcher used the Quantitative Method particularly descriptive research design to determine the core behavioral and leadership competencies of the public elementary school heads in Pangasinan. The researcher opted to use this research design considering the objectives, research problems, and first-hand data from the respondents which were described using survey questionnaires.

This study was confined in determining the core behavioral and leadership competencies of public elementary school heads in Pangasinan. The study used stratified random sampling. Stratified random sampling is a method of sampling that involves the division of a population into smaller subgroups known as strata. In stratified random sampling, or stratification, the strata are formed based on members' shared attributes or characteristics. In this study, the researcher treated each SDO as stratum.

III. Results and Discussion

This chapter interprets, presents, and analyzes the data of the study. Table 1 presents the profile of the respondents along highest educational attainment, position, length of service as school head, and number of relevant trainings/seminars attended.

Profile of the Respondents

Table 1: Profile of the Respondents

Variables	Frequency <i>n=200</i>	Percentage
Highest Educational Attainment	Doctor's Degree	43
	With Doctor's Units	27
	Master's Degree	15.5
	With Master's Units	14.5
	Bachelor's Degree	0
Position	Principal IV	12
	Principal III	29
	Principal II	16.5
	Principal I	25.5
	OIC/Head Teacher	17
Length of Service as School Head	Less than 5 years	29.5
	6-10 years	55
	11-15 years	5.5
	More than 15 years	10
No. of Relevant trainings/ seminars attended	1-2	6.5
	3-4	26
	5 and above	67.5

Highest Educational Attainment. The table shows that majority of the respondents are with doctorate degrees and exhibit the highest levels of educational attainment, with 86 or 43% individuals holding doctorates indicating a strong commitment to furthering their expertise.

This resonates with studies emphasizing the increasing importance of postgraduate education in today's knowledge-driven economy, where advanced degrees are often essential for career advancement and specialized roles (Mason, 2019). Overall, the data underscores the value of advanced education in fostering expertise and professional development.

Position. As can be seen on the table, the data indicates that Principal III positions hold the highest numbers, with 58 individuals occupying this role, suggesting a significant representation at this level of educational leadership.

Conversely, the lowest numbers are observed among Principal IV positions, with only 24 individuals in this role. While Principal IV positions may represent higher levels of authority or responsibility in certain contexts, their relatively lower representation in the data could suggest either a smaller pool of candidates or a lesser prevalence of these positions within the educational system under study. This underscores the hierarchical structure within educational leadership roles and the varying degrees of influence and responsibility associated with each position.

Length of Service as School Head. As can be gleaned from the table, data reveals that individuals with a length of service as a school head between 6-10 years have the highest representation, with 110 individuals falling into this category, indicating a substantial number of school heads with moderate experience levels. This finding aligns with literature suggesting that school heads often reach a peak of effectiveness and impact after gaining several years of experience in their role (Leithwood et al., 2019). School heads in this range of experience may have developed a deeper understanding of their school's needs and challenges, as well as honed their leadership skills to effectively address them. On the contrary, the lowest representation is observed among individuals with 11-15 years of experience as a school head, with only 11 individuals falling into this category. This finding may reflect a phenomenon known as the "plateau effect" in educational leadership, where school heads experience a leveling off of effectiveness or motivation after a certain number of years in the role (Bush, 2020). Additionally, turnover rates or career transitions could contribute to the lower numbers in this category, as experienced school heads may move into other roles within education or retire. Overall, the data underscores the importance of experience in shaping educational leadership effectiveness, while also highlighting potential challenges associated with sustaining motivation and effectiveness over extended periods.

Number of Relevant Trainings/ Seminars Attended. The table shows that, respondents who have attended 5 or more relevant trainings/seminars have the highest representation, with 135 individuals falling into this category. This suggests a strong commitment to professional development and continuous learning among this group of educators. Research supports the notion

that ongoing professional development opportunities contribute to improved teaching practices, student outcomes, and overall school effectiveness (Desimone, 2019). Educators who engage in frequent training and seminars are likely to stay updated on current educational trends, research-based instructional strategies, and policies, enabling them to better meet the evolving needs of their students and schools. Conversely, the lowest representation is observed among individuals who have attended 1-2 relevant trainings/seminars, with only 13 individuals falling into this category. While this group may still value professional development, their lower attendance rate could indicate potential limitations in accessing or prioritizing such opportunities. To address this gap, educational institutions and policymakers should consider strategies to make professional development more accessible and tailored to the needs of all educators, regardless of their experience level or position within the education system.

Table 2 presents the table of the level of the core behavioral competencies of the public elementary school heads.

Table 2: Table Level of Core Behavioral Competencies of School Heads

Indicators	Overall Weighted Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
Self-Management	4.79	Very Competent
Professionalism and Ethics	4.78	Very Competent
Result Focus	4.65	Very Competent
Teamwork	4.78	Very Competent
Service Orientation	4.72	Very Competent
Innovation	4.61	Very Competent
Grand Weighted Mean	4.72	Very Competent

Table 2 exhibits of the core behavioral competencies of school heads, self-management and professionalism/ethics emerged as the highest-rated, both with weighted means of 4.79 and 4.78, respectively. This suggests that school heads excel in managing themselves effectively, demonstrating integrity, and upholding ethical standards in their roles.

Futhermore, innovation emerged as the lowest-rated competency, with a weighted mean of 4.61.

While still rated as "Very Competent," this suggests a potential area for further emphasis in fostering creativity, experimentation, and problem-solving among school heads.

Generally, the grand weighted mean for all core behavioral competencies is 4.72, indicating an overall high level of competency among school heads. However, the variations in individual competencies highlight areas where targeted development efforts could further enhance leadership effectiveness and organizational performance.

Table 3 presents the table of the level of leadership competencies of the public elementary school heads.

Table 3: Table Level of Leadership Competencies of School Heads

Indicators	Overall Weighted Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
Leading People	4.74	Very Competent
People Performance Management	4.73	Very Competent
People Development	4.74	Very Competent
Grand Weighted Mean	4.74	Very Competent

Legend:
4.50-5.00 Very Competent (VC)
3.50-4.49 Competent (C)
2.50-3.49 Moderately Competent (MC)
1.50-2.49 Slightly Competent (SC)
1.00-1.49 Not Competent (NC)

It can be noted in Table 3 that the respondent school heads obtained a grand weighted mean of 4.74 denoting a descriptive equivalent of “Very Competent”. This implies that school heads possess very strong leadership competencies. All things considered, these results demonstrate how well school administrators can support the growth of their staff members and cultivate an environment that values ongoing learning and development. It is possible to improve organizational outcomes and leadership effectiveness by maintaining the focus on varying development tactics to suit individual needs.

IV. Conclusion

Majority of the public elementary school heads have doctoral degrees, holding Principal III positions, experienced, and equipped with trainings. The public elementary school heads have very strong capability in managing themselves effectively, demonstrating integrity, and upholding ethical standards in their roles. The public elementary school heads possess very strong capability in influencing and leading their people. Length of service is correlated with school heads’ service orientation. Length of service is contributory to the ability of school heads to lead people. A proposed intervention plan was crafted based on salient findings of the study to enhance the core behavioral and leadership competencies of school heads. Public elementary school heads can adopt the intervention plan crafted by the researcher to strengthen their core behavioral and leadership competencies. Public elementary school heads should recognize problems encountered that may pose an effect in their level of core behavioral and leadership competencies. A similar study should be conducted taking into consideration other factors that can affect the core behavioral and leadership competencies of school heads. This study recommended the proposed intervention plan for review and implementation. Future researchers could utilize the result of this study for their future references.

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