

Leadership Preparedness of Aspiring School Heads in Samar

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Abstract — This study investigated the leadership preparedness of aspiring school heads in the DepEd Samar Division. The primary goal was to identify their strengths and weaknesses to propose a targeted leadership development program. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed, utilizing a structured questionnaire administered to 95 aspiring school heads—teachers and administrators—within the division. The questionnaire assessed their preparedness across four domains: school culture and climate, instructional leadership, organizational systems, and talent management, using a five-point Likert scale. Demographic information was also collected to explore potential correlations. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, percentages), correlation analysis, and ANOVA.

The findings revealed a high level of overall leadership preparedness among the participants. Specifically, they demonstrated very high levels of preparedness in fostering positive school culture and climate, and in talent management. Instructional leadership preparedness was also high, though with slightly more variability in responses. However, preparedness in organizational systems was rated as high, indicating a need for further development in this area. This suggests that while aspiring school heads feel confident in their ability to create positive learning environments and manage staff effectively, they may require additional training and support in managing the operational and administrative aspects of school leadership.

Correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between age, years of service, and leadership preparedness. This indicates that accumulated experience is a key factor in developing leadership readiness. In contrast, gender, marital status, and educational attainment were not significantly related to leadership preparedness. ANOVA analysis confirmed that age was the only demographic variable significantly influencing leadership preparedness levels. The most frequently reported challenges included a lack of confidence in transitioning to a leadership role, limited access to formal leadership training, and financial constraints in accessing such training. Other challenges included a lack of practical leadership experience, difficulties in balancing personal and professional responsibilities, and insufficient mentorship opportunities.

In conclusion, while aspiring school heads in the DepEd Samar Division demonstrate significant readiness for leadership roles, particularly in areas related to culture, instruction, and talent

management, a targeted leadership development program is recommended. This program should address the identified challenges by focusing on building confidence, providing access to relevant training and mentorship, and offering opportunities for practical experience in organizational management. The program should also consider the varying levels of experience among aspiring leaders, offering tailored support to meet their specific needs. Further research could explore the long-term effectiveness of such a program and identify other factors influencing sustained success in educational leadership.

Keywords — Leadership Preparedness, Aspiring School Heads, Samar, Instructional Leadership, Organizational Systems, Talent Management, School Culture, Leadership Development Program, Self-Efficacy, Transformational Leadership

I. Introduction

This study, conducted in 2024 by Analiza P. Bucatcat, Reynaldo Q. Casiano Jr., Maricrose L. Macairan, and Jeffrey G. Guinto of Northwest Samar State University, investigates the leadership preparedness of aspiring school heads in the Department of Education (DepEd) Samar Division. The research is timely and significant because effective school leadership is crucial for improving student outcomes and navigating the challenges faced by schools in the Philippines, particularly in geographically isolated and resource-constrained areas like Samar. Existing literature extensively documents the impact of effective school leadership on student achievement and school improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 2018; Leith wood et al., 2019; Waters et al., 2020). However, there's a recognized gap in research specifically addressing the leadership preparedness of aspiring school heads in Samar, considering its unique socio-economic and geographical context.

The study's rationale stems from the observation that while aspiring school heads in Samar possess enthusiasm and commitment, they often lack the specific skills and experience needed for effective school leadership. This gap may be attributed to limited access to formal leadership training and development opportunities in the region. The researchers aim to address this gap by exploring the leadership preparedness of aspiring school heads across key domains: school culture and climate, instructional leadership, organizational systems, and talent management. They also investigate the influence of demographic factors (age, gender, experience, education) on leadership preparedness and identify challenges faced by aspiring leaders.

The study contributes to the field of educational leadership by providing evidence-based insights into the leadership preparedness of aspiring school heads in a specific, under-researched context. The findings will inform the development of targeted leadership development programs tailored to the unique needs of Samar. This includes identifying specific skill gaps and addressing challenges related to access to training, resource limitations, and the integration of professional development with personal responsibilities. The research also contributes to the broader understanding of educational leadership in rural and underserved areas, offering valuable

recommendations for improving leadership preparation programs and ultimately enhancing the quality of education in similar contexts. The study's findings will be relevant to policymakers, educational administrators, and leadership development professionals seeking to improve the effectiveness of school leadership in resource-constrained environments.

Literature Review

The role of leadership in school and instructional improvement is well-documented, emphasizing its significance in enhancing classroom outcomes and organizational conditions that drive student success (Hallinger & Heck, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2019). Effective leadership involves practices related to teacher development and shaping school environments, operating at both school and classroom levels. Key areas of focus for effective school leadership include setting a clear direction, supporting individual teachers, fostering collaboration, and strategically managing resources (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2015). Transformational leadership extends these concepts by emphasizing participatory decision-making, intellectual stimulation, and high-performance expectations, all of which contribute to a thriving school environment (Silins et al., 2022).

Leadership preparedness is crucial for aspiring principals, involving the acquisition of diverse skills to address the unique challenges of educational settings. However, many principal preparation programs fall short in equipping candidates for real-world demands (Pannell et al., 2015). Effective principals drive student learning through strategic leadership, yet they often face a gap in applying theoretical knowledge in practice (Young et al., 2017). Research indicates that tailored field experiences enhance the transition from assistant principal to principal roles (Schulz et al., 2016).

Georgia's tiered educational leadership certification model exemplifies efforts to bridge the theory-practice divide, requiring significant field experience before candidates can advance to higher certifications (GaPSC, 2020). As the state's demographics evolve, the need for effective leadership practices becomes increasingly critical.

Mentorship also plays a vital role in developing educational leaders, with historical roots tracing back to ancient Greece. Studies reveal that strong leadership practices enhance collaboration and improve teacher performance, despite challenges like resource limitations and the need for professional development (Anabo, 2023). Recent research from Samar State University highlights the need for training in emotional intelligence and strategic communication to improve leadership effectiveness among school heads. Overall, continuous professional development and mentorship are essential for cultivating effective educational leaders and improving student outcomes.

II. Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design to investigate the leadership preparedness of aspiring school heads in the DepEd Samar Division. Data was collected from a sample of 95 aspiring school heads using a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire assessed leadership preparedness across four domains: school culture and climate, instructional leadership, organizational systems, and talent management, and also gathered demographic information and identified challenges faced by participants. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (correlation analysis and ANOVA) to examine relationships between variables and test hypotheses. The methodology ensured a comprehensive and rigorous approach to understanding the leadership preparedness of aspiring school heads in this specific context.

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive aspect involved determining the profile of aspiring school heads based on demographic factors (age, gender, civil status, education, experience, position, training) and their self-reported level of preparedness across four leadership domains: school culture and climate, instructional leadership, organizational systems, and talent management. The correlational aspect examined the relationships between these demographic factors and the levels of leadership preparedness. A quantitative approach was used, utilizing a structured questionnaire to gather data from a sample of 95 aspiring school heads in the DepEd Samar Division. Ethical considerations, including obtaining informed consent, were strictly adhered to throughout the research process. The researchers obtained necessary permissions from relevant authorities before data collection.

Sample of the Study

A purposive sampling technique was used to select the 95 participants for this study. This non-probability sampling method targeted individuals who met specific criteria: aspiring school heads within the DepEd Samar Division who were either teachers or administrators actively seeking leadership roles. Purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of individuals who could provide valuable insights into the leadership development needs of the division. The sample size was determined based on the feasibility of data collection and analysis within the given timeframe and resources. The researchers aimed for a sample size that would provide a representative overview of the leadership preparedness of aspiring school heads in the division while maintaining data manageability.

Measures

A structured questionnaire was developed and used as the primary instrument for data collection. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. Section 1 gathered demographic data on the participants, including age, gender, civil status, educational attainment, years of experience, current position, and professional development activities attended. Section 2 assessed leadership preparedness using a five-point Likert scale adapted from Olcay Yavuz and Quintin L. Robinson

(2018). This section measured preparedness across four domains (school culture, instructional leadership, organizational systems, and talent management). Section 3 identified challenges faced by aspiring school heads using a checklist adapted from Smith and Brown (2022). The reliability and validity of the adapted instruments were established in previous research, ensuring the quality and trustworthiness of the data collected.

Procedures

Data collection involved distributing a digital questionnaire via Google Forms. The questionnaire was designed for ease of access and completion by the participants. Follow-up reminders were sent to encourage timely responses. Data was automatically recorded in a Google Sheet, minimizing manual data entry and potential errors. After data collection, the data underwent a cleaning process to ensure accuracy and completeness. Incomplete or inconsistent responses were removed from the dataset. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics (percentages, means, standard deviations) and inferential statistics (correlation analysis, ANOVA) to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. The statistical software used for analysis was not specified in the provided text.

Data Processing

The data collected through Google Forms was automatically transferred to a Google Sheet, facilitating efficient organization and minimizing manual data entry errors. Data cleaning involved checking for completeness and consistency. Invalid or incomplete responses were excluded from the analysis. Demographic data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) to summarize the sample characteristics. The Likert scale data was analyzed by calculating mean scores for each item and domain to determine the overall level of leadership preparedness. The frequency of challenges reported in Section 3 was tallied and ranked to identify the most prevalent obstacles faced by aspiring school heads. Correlation analysis and ANOVA were used to examine relationships and differences between variables.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The purpose and procedures of the study were clearly explained to ensure participants understood their involvement. The research adhered to ethical guidelines to protect the rights and well-being of the participants. The study obtained necessary permissions from the DepEd Samar Division and other relevant authorities before commencing data collection. Researchers ensured that all data was handled responsibly and securely, adhering to ethical standards and data protection regulations.

III. Results and Discussion

1. Profile of the Respondents

The demographic profile of the 95 aspiring school heads reveals a predominantly female (71%), married (71%), and middle-aged (42-48 years, 28%) group. The majority hold a Master's degree or have completed Master's units (84%), indicating a commitment to advanced education. However, a significant number (63%) are currently serving as Teacher III, suggesting limited prior experience in formal leadership roles. This finding aligns with the existing literature highlighting the challenges of transitioning from teaching to school leadership (Pannell et al., 2015; Spillane & Lee, 2019). The relatively high proportion of respondents with extensive teaching experience (54% with 20+ years) suggests a potential pool of highly knowledgeable individuals who could benefit from targeted leadership training. The predominance of local professional development suggests a need for increased access to regional, national, and international training to broaden their perspectives and enhance their leadership skills. This disparity in experience levels and training opportunities underscores the need for a differentiated approach to leadership development programs.

2. Level of Leadership Preparedness

The study reveals a high level of perceived preparedness among aspiring school heads, particularly in Culture and Climate (mean = 4.71) and Talent Management (mean = 4.29). These findings suggest strong existing skills in fostering positive school environments and managing human resources. This aligns with the literature emphasizing the importance of these areas for effective school leadership (Leithwood et al., 2019; Waters et al., 2020). However, the lower mean score in Organizational Systems (mean = 4.19) indicates a need for more focused training in this area. This aligns with research highlighting the challenges novice principals face in managing school resources and operations (Pannell & McBrayer, 2020). The relatively high mean score in Instructional Leadership (mean = 4.27) suggests a strong foundation in pedagogical knowledge and practice. However, the variability in responses across all domains highlights the need for differentiated professional development to cater to individual needs and address specific weaknesses. Future research could explore the relationship between perceived preparedness and actual leadership effectiveness.

3. Relationship Between Respondent Profile and Leadership Preparedness

Correlation analysis reveals a significant positive relationship between age and years of service with leadership preparedness. This finding supports the existing literature linking experience to leadership effectiveness (Young et al., 2017). Older and more experienced respondents reported higher levels of preparedness, likely due to accumulated knowledge, skills, and confidence. However, no significant relationship was found between sex, civil status, highest educational attainment, and leadership preparedness. This challenges the assumption that formal education alone is sufficient for leadership readiness, highlighting the importance of experiential learning and professional development. The lack of a significant relationship between

position/designation and preparedness suggests that holding a higher position does not automatically translate to greater leadership readiness. This finding underscores the need for targeted leadership development programs that address specific skill gaps regardless of current positions.

4. Differences in Leadership Preparedness Across Respondent Profiles

One-way ANOVA reveals a significant difference in leadership preparedness across age groups, with older respondents reporting higher levels of preparedness. This finding reinforces the importance of experience in shaping leadership capabilities. However, no significant differences were found across other demographic variables (sex, civil status, highest educational attainment, position/designation, years in service). This suggests that factors beyond age and years of service are less influential in shaping perceived leadership preparedness. This finding highlights the need for inclusive leadership development programs that address the specific needs of individuals at different stages of their careers and with diverse experiences.

5. Challenges Encountered by Aspiring School Heads

The most significant challenges identified by aspiring school heads include a lack of confidence in transitioning to leadership roles (80%), a lack of formal leadership training (78%), and financial constraints (75%). These findings highlight the need for confidence-building initiatives, accessible leadership development programs, and financial support for training. The challenges related to time management, balancing personal and professional responsibilities, and lack of mentorship underscore the need for flexible and supportive leadership development programs. The lack of opportunities to develop practical leadership skills and exposure to real-world challenges emphasizes the importance of experiential learning, such as mentoring and shadowing opportunities. The findings also suggest that creating a supportive organizational culture that encourages leadership development is crucial. These findings suggest a need for a multi-faceted approach to leadership development that addresses both individual and systemic barriers.

6. Proposed Leadership Preparedness Program

Based on the findings, a comprehensive leadership preparedness program is proposed, incorporating various modules focusing on building confidence, providing practical training, and fostering mentorship opportunities. The program will address the identified challenges by offering flexible learning options, financial assistance, and a supportive learning environment. The program will be designed to meet the specific needs of aspiring school heads in the DepEd Samar Division, taking into account their diverse backgrounds and experience levels. The program's effectiveness will be evaluated through pre- and post-training assessments and ongoing feedback mechanisms. This program will be designed to create a pipeline of highly skilled and confident school leaders, ultimately leading to improved educational outcomes in the Samar Division.

IV. Conclusion

This research explored the leadership preparedness of aspiring school heads in the DepEd Samar Division, aiming to identify their strengths, weaknesses, and the factors influencing their readiness for leadership roles. The study's significance lies in its potential to inform the design of targeted leadership development programs and improve the quality of educational leadership in a region often under-resourced and geographically challenged.

The findings revealed a generally high level of perceived preparedness among aspiring school heads, particularly in areas fostering positive school culture (Culture and Climate), implementing effective instructional strategies (Instructional Leadership), and managing human resources (Talent Management). This suggests a strong foundation of existing skills and knowledge among potential leaders, which is encouraging. However, a notable gap was identified in preparedness concerning organizational systems, encompassing resource management, policy implementation, and operational efficiency. This gap highlights a crucial area for focused intervention and professional development, directly impacting a school's effective functioning.

The study also demonstrated a significant positive correlation between age and years of teaching/administrative experience and perceived leadership preparedness. This underscores the value of practical experience in developing leadership capabilities. However, other demographic factors, such as gender, marital status, and highest educational attainment, did not show a significant relationship with preparedness. These findings challenge assumptions that formal education alone suffices for effective leadership and emphasizes the need for a multifaceted approach to leadership development that combines formal training with practical experience and mentorship opportunities. This is particularly relevant in resource-constrained environments like Samar, where experiential learning may be more accessible than extensive formal training.

Several significant challenges faced by aspiring school heads were identified, including a lack of confidence in transitioning to leadership roles, limited access to formal leadership training, and financial constraints. These challenges highlight the need for targeted interventions such as confidence-building initiatives, accessible leadership development programs, and financial support for training. The findings emphasize the need for a multi-faceted approach that addresses both individual and systemic barriers to leadership development.

In conclusion, this research provides valuable insights into the leadership preparedness of aspiring school heads in Samar. While demonstrating considerable strengths in several key areas, the study also highlights critical gaps and challenges that require targeted interventions. The findings underscore the importance of experience, the need for accessible and affordable leadership development programs, and the creation of supportive systems to address the unique challenges faced by aspiring school leaders in this region. The study's recommendations can inform the development of effective leadership training programs tailored to the specific needs of

the DepEd Samar Division, ultimately contributing to improved educational outcomes for students in the region.

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