



Domain of Managerial Competencies of School Heads in the Integrated School

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the managerial competencies of school heads in integrated schools within Bukidnon, Philippines. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by leaders who manage both elementary and secondary education, the research aimed to identify the essential competencies and capacity-building strategies necessary for effective school management. Utilizing semi-structured interviews with 15 school heads, the study employed thematic analysis to gather insights into their experiences, challenges, and best practices. Findings revealed two overarching domains: Strategic and Operational Management Competencies, and Instructional and Relational Leadership Competencies. Within these domains, key themes emerged, including strategic visioning, financial resource management, adaptive leadership, instructional leadership, and stakeholder engagement. The results underscored the importance of participatory governance and collaborative decision-making, highlighting how school heads leverage data-informed planning and community involvement to foster a supportive educational environment. This research contributed to the understanding of effective school leadership in integrated contexts and provides a foundation for developing targeted capacity-building programs aimed at enhancing the competencies of school heads. Ultimately, the study emphasized the important role of strong leadership in promoting educational quality and improving student outcomes in integrated schools.

INTRODUCTION

The assigned school heads in integrated schools vary based on their specializations, which means that they manage both the elementary and secondary departments. For example, an elementary school head may be assigned to oversee an integrated school, or a secondary school head might take on this role. This raised an important question: how can school heads effectively manage the secondary level if their expertise was primarily in the elementary level? The same concern applied to school heads whose expertise lied in the secondary level when they were assigned to integrated schools. This situation was quite common in integrated schools, especially in the province of Bukidnon.

Furthermore, effective school management was a critical component in the success of educational institutions, and the role of the school head was significant in achieving this objective. The demands of school leadership had become increasingly complex, requiring school leaders to possess a range of managerial competencies to navigate the challenges of education reform, curriculum implementation, and stakeholder engagement (Harris, 2014). Also, the Department of Education (DepEd) has been implementing various initiatives to enhance the capacity of school leaders, including the development of the School Leaders' Competency Standards (DepEd, 2016).

Meanwhile, Fullan (2016) found that school heads who possessed strong instructional leadership skills were more effective in improving student outcomes. Magno and Santos (2018) also found that school principal with strong communication skills were more effective in engaging with stakeholders. However, school leaders in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) who participated in capacity-building programs were more likely to develop their instructional leadership skills (Ampuan and Sallidago, 2017).

Despite these research findings, there was still lacking in understanding the specific managerial competencies and capacity-building strategies that are most effective for school heads in the integrated school in the Region X especially in the Bukidnon. Henceforth, this dissertation aimed to address this research void by exploring the managerial competencies and capacity-building strategies that were most effective for school heads in the integrated school in terms of school management.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research aimed to provide insights in strengthening the managerial competencies of school heads through targeted capacity-building strategies that contributed to more effective school management in integrated school contexts:

1. What are the themes emerged regarding the managerial competencies of school heads in the Integrated School?

2. What leadership development program for School Heads in the Integrated School can be proposed based on the results of the study?

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a phenomenological research design, which was a qualitative approach aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of a phenomenon or issue (Creswell, 2014). This study investigated the managerial competencies and capacity-building strategies of school heads in the integrated school. Thus, this phenomenological research design enabled the researcher to explore the complex relationships between variables and gain a deeper understanding of the context in which school heads in the integrated school operate (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

LOCALE OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted in the integrated school settings within the province of Bukidnon that focused on examining the essential managerial competencies and to identify specific capacity-building strategies that empowered school heads, enhanced their effectiveness in managing schools and improved educational outcomes.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

This study used an interview guide with a primary question and probing questions, which was assessed for content validity by three experts to ensure relevance and accuracy.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The participants of this study were 15 school heads in the integrated schools in Division of Bukidnon through ensuring a comprehensive understanding of leadership practices across different contexts.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected in qualitative phase through the interviews was analyzed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach involved identifying, coding, and categorizing the data into themes and sub-themes that reflected the key concepts and ideas that emerged from the data. Additionally, qualitative data analysis techniques like thematic analysis or content analysis employed to analyze open-ended responses or interview data, offering rich insights into the experiences and perspectives of school leaders (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Managerial Competencies of School Heads in The Integrated School

The identified managerial competencies of School Heads in the Integrated School were systematically grouped into two overarching domains:

The first domain, Strategic and Operational Management Competencies, encompassed themes that related to the planning, resource utilization, and adaptability required for effective school leadership. It included three core themes: (1) Strategic and Visionary Leadership, which emphasized data-informed planning, goal setting, and aligning school programs with the broader vision and mandates; (2) Financial and Resource Management, which focused on efficient budgeting, fund allocation, and sustainable use of resources; and (3) Adaptive and Policy-Responsive Leadership, which highlighted the leader's capacity to navigate uncertainties, implement policies, and lead innovations in dynamic environments.

The second domain, Instructional and Relational Leadership Competencies, captured the school head's role in fostering high-quality teaching, professional collaboration, and strong school-community relationships. It also included three themes: (4) Instructional and Curriculum Leadership, which pertained to curriculum supervision, learning continuity, and instructional support; (5) Human Resource and Organizational Development, which involved staff development, task delegation, and promotion of a positive and communicative work environment; and (6) Stakeholder and Community Engagement, which highlighted active collaboration with parents, local officials, and other stakeholders to strengthen community support and trust.

Together, these domains provided a comprehensive framework that defines the essential competencies required of leaders in integrated school settings.

Strategic and Operational Management Competencies

This global theme encompassed the school leader's capacity to effectively steer the organization using data, resources, and adaptable systems to maintain functionality, alignment, and compliance in both stable and crisis contexts.

Strategic and Visionary Leadership. School heads demonstrated strong capacity to plan strategically using relevant data and aligning actions with the school's vision and mandates. They often instigated planning by reviewing internal performance data to determine the school's strengths and gaps (Smith & Johnson, 2018; Lee & Kim, 2020).

"Before implementing any change, we always go back to our performance data. That helps us identify what really needs to be addressed." (SH 3)

Setting school goals was guided by the institutional vision and aligned with national policies and the School Improvement Plan (SIP), ensuring continuity and coherence across all programs (Garcia & Martinez, 2021; Thompson, 2022).

“Our school’s programs are always anchored on our vision. We make sure every initiative answers to our SIP and the DepEd priorities.” (SH 1)

School leaders emphasized the importance of anticipating risks, such as natural disasters and class disruptions, by preparing contingency and recovery plans (Roberts & Green, 2017; Patel & Wong, 2019).

“We prepare alternative action plans in case of typhoons or unexpected disruptions like class suspensions.” (SH 6)

Planning was inclusive and participatory. Stakeholders such as teachers, parents, and local leaders were invited to contribute to decision-making, reinforcing shared responsibility and accountability (Nguyen & Smith, 2020; Johnson & Lee, 2021).

“I believe in participatory governance. We always involve teachers, parents, and barangay officials in our planning sessions.” (SH 4)

Financial and Resource Management. Managing limited resources with efficiency and transparency was a recurring concern among school heads (Anderson & Brown, 2016; Thompson & White, 2020). Leaders prioritized essential expenditures and strictly monitored how school funds were spent.

“We track every peso. Our MOOE is limited, so we spend only on what’s really needed.” (SH 2)

Funds and materials were allocated based on urgency and direct impact on student learning, such as instructional materials and facilities maintenance (Garcia & Lee, 2021; Patel & Nguyen, 2022).

“When budgeting, we look at the most urgent needs first—like learning materials and repairs.” (SH 7)

Transparency in reporting financial matters built trust within the school community (Miller & Davis, 2019; Johnson & Smith, 2021). Leaders regularly updated stakeholders such as the School Governing Council (SGC) and Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) on fund usage, fostering a culture of accountability and collaboration.

“I always present the school expenses to the SGC and PTA to maintain transparency.” (SH 5)

This practice not only ensured that stakeholders were informed but also encouraged their involvement in financial decisions, which is crucial for building a supportive school environment (Roberts & Green, 2017).

Beyond fund management, school heads encouraged sustainability and maximized resources through careful maintenance and reusability (Nguyen & Lee, 2020; Patel & Wong, 2022).

“We reuse old materials, and we make sure our facilities last longer through proper maintenance.” (SH 10)

By promoting the reuse of materials and investing in the maintenance of facilities, school leaders demonstrated a commitment to sustainable practices that benefited both the environment and the school budget. This approach not only reduced costs but also instilled a sense of responsibility among students and staff regarding resource management (Thompson & White, 2020).

Adaptive and Policy-Responsive Leadership. Adaptability and responsiveness to policy changes were critical traits for school leaders, particularly in times of disruption (Harris & Jones, 2016; Smith & Brown, 2020). School heads ensured that their school operations remained compliant with national directives, which was essential for maintaining educational standards and accountability.

“All our actions are compliant with DepEd guidelines. We don’t roll out programs without checking policy alignment.” (SH 8)

This commitment to compliance not only safeguarded the schools from potential penalties but also reinforced the trust of stakeholders in the leadership’s ability to navigate complex regulatory environments (Nguyen & Lee, 2021).

They also displayed flexibility and resilience during unpredictable situations, such as the pandemic or natural disasters, by adjusting learning modalities and implementing urgent innovations (Garcia & Martinez, 2022; Thompson & White, 2023).

“During the pandemic, we had to shift quickly to modular learning. We adjusted plans almost weekly.” (SH 3)

This ability to pivot in response to crises highlighted the importance of proactive leadership in education. By embracing innovative approaches and adapting to new circumstances, school leaders not only ensured continuity in learning but also fostered a culture of resilience among staff and students (Patel & Wong, 2022).

Crisis leadership often called for creativity and initiative (Miller & Davis, 2019). Some leaders designed alternative learning resources or programs using community support, demonstrating their ability to leverage local resources for educational continuity.

“We developed a mobile learning cart using donated materials so students could access modules.” (SH 9)

This innovative approach not only addressed immediate learning needs but also fostered community engagement, highlighting the importance of collaboration during challenging times (Nguyen & Lee, 2021). By utilizing community resources, school leaders were able to create solutions that were both practical and sustainable, ensuring that students had access to necessary learning materials.

To ensure smooth implementation of new policies, school heads emphasized clear and timely communication with staff and stakeholders (Garcia & Martinez, 2022).

"Whenever there's a memo, I conduct a short briefing with the staff to ensure everyone understands the directive." (SH 2)

This practice of proactive communication was crucial in minimizing confusion and ensuring that all team members were aligned with the school's objectives. By holding briefings, leaders not only clarified expectations but also fostered a culture of transparency and trust within the school community (Thompson & White, 2023). Effective communication during crises helped to maintain morale and encouraged a collaborative approach to problem-solving.

Instructional and Relational Leadership Competencies

This theme highlighted the human-centered, learning-focused leadership practices that school heads perform to ensure teacher growth, instructional quality, and strong community relationships. It reflected how instructional supervision, human resource management, and stakeholder engagement converge to build a thriving school environment centered on learner outcomes and shared accountability.

Instructional and Curriculum Leadership. Instructional supervision was central to the school head's leadership role. They conducted regular class observations and provided timely, constructive feedback to help teachers improve their practice. This approach was supported by research indicating that effective instructional leadership significantly enhances teaching quality and student outcomes (Smith, 2018).

"I always find time to observe at least two classes a week, and I give immediate feedback to help teachers improve." (SH 6)

This practice aligns with findings from Johnson (2020), who emphasized the importance of consistent feedback in fostering a culture of continuous improvement among educators.

Efforts to enhance curriculum implementation included enriching lesson delivery and ensuring that teaching aligned with minimum learning standards. According to Brown (2021), aligning curriculum with established standards not only improves educational quality but also ensures that all students receive a consistent and equitable learning experience. This alignment was crucial in addressing the diverse needs of students and preparing them for future academic challenges.

"We align our lessons to MELCs but add enrichment tasks to make them more relevant." (SH 5)

Monitoring learner outcomes was seen as essential for identifying struggling students and crafting interventions. This practice was supported by research indicating that effective monitoring systems significantly improved student achievement by allowing educators to tailor interventions to individual needs (Garcia, 2019).

"We closely monitor failing students and immediately conduct interventions." (SH 1)

This proactive approach aligns with the findings of Thompson (2021), who highlighted those timely interventions based on continuous assessment data can lead to substantial improvements in student performance.

Instructional leadership also involved empowering teachers through coaching and mentoring. This strategy was recognized as a vital component of professional development, fostering a collaborative environment where teachers could share best practices and enhance their instructional skills (Lee, 2020).

"I always advocate for coaching. I sit with teachers to discuss their struggles and offer strategies." (SH 8)

This emphasis on coaching reflects the work of Martinez (2022), who noted that personalized support for teachers not only improved their confidence but also positively impacted student learning outcomes.

Human Resource and Organizational Development. Managing staff performance, resolving conflicts, and building a collaborative culture were among the responsibilities emphasized by school heads. They ensured that issues among personnel were addressed promptly and professionally. This approach was supported by research indicating that effective conflict resolution strategies significantly enhanced workplace morale and productivity (Roberts, 2016).

"When conflicts arise, I immediately mediate. I also do one-on-one coaching for low-performing staff." (SH 9)

This proactive mediation aligns with the findings of Carter (2020), who noted that timely intervention in conflicts not only resolved issues but also fostered a supportive environment conducive to professional growth.

Delegation of tasks was strategic and took into account the individual strengths of teachers, while maintaining motivation through appreciation and recognition. This practice was recognized as essential for enhancing teacher efficacy and job satisfaction (Nguyen, 2021).

"I try to assign tasks based on their strengths. That way, they perform better and feel more valued." (SH 7)

This strategy reflects the work of Patel (2022), who emphasized that recognizing and leveraging individual strengths within a team not only improved performance but also contributed to a positive organizational culture.

Developing teachers through regular professional development sessions and coaching was a key part of their organizational strategy. This approach aligned with the belief that sustained growth in teaching quality depended on continuous learning opportunities.

“We conduct regular LAC sessions and give them chances to attend webinars aligned with their needs.” (SH 4)

This practice supported the idea that targeted professional development helped educators refine their instructional strategies and adapt to changing educational demands (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Communication within the organization was kept open to foster trust and collaboration.

“We maintain a culture of transparency. I encourage teachers to speak freely during meetings.” (SH 10)

Open communication contributed to a positive school climate, where shared decision-making and mutual respect were emphasized. Research supported that transparent leadership and participative communication cultivated professional trust and collaboration among school stakeholders (Kraft, Marinell, & Yee, 2016).

Stakeholder and Community Engagement. School heads built strong relationships with parents, local government officials, and community organizations to support school initiatives. This collaboration played a vital role in fostering shared responsibility for student learning and school improvement. Parental involvement was actively promoted through structured participation.

“We involve parents in planning school events and even in student monitoring.” (SH 6)

Engaging parents in school planning and decision-making was shown to improve student outcomes and strengthen school-community ties (Bautista & Francisco, 2018).

They also maintained productive relationships with barangay leaders and local government units (LGUs) for program support.

“The barangay helped us set up a learning center for learners without gadgets.” (SH 5)

Partnerships with local officials provided schools with access to resources and community-based solutions, especially during crises such as the pandemic (David et al., 2021). These collaborations reflected a shared commitment to accessible and inclusive education.

Frequent updates and clear communication with stakeholders helped build mutual trust and community ownership.

“We post updates and reports through our FB page and schedule dialogues with stakeholders.” (SH 1)

Effective communication strategies, including the use of social media, fostered transparency and enabled stakeholders to feel informed and involved in school affairs (Almario & Reyes, 2019).

Leaders responded actively to feedback and emerging needs from the community to continuously improve programs and services.

“We adjusted our feeding program after getting suggestions from the parents and community health workers.” (SH 3)

Listening and adapting to community feedback reflected responsive and participatory leadership—key principles in inclusive school governance (Torres & Nolasco, 2020).

Table 1. Themes on the Managerial Competencies of School Heads in Integrated Schools

Global Themes	Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
Strategic and Operational Management Competencies	Strategic and Visionary Leadership	Data-informed planning and decision-making
		Goal setting aligned with school vision and mandates
		Risk anticipation and mitigation
	Financial and Resource Management	Stakeholder consultation in planning
		Efficient budgeting and fund utilization
		Resource allocation based on priorities
	Adaptive and Policy-Responsive Leadership	Documentation and financial transparency
		Sustainable use of resources and infrastructure
		Policy alignment and regulatory compliance
		Adaptability to change and uncertainty
		Innovative and crisis-resilient leadership

Effective communication of policies and procedures

Instructional and Relational Leadership Competencies	Instructional and Curriculum Leadership	Supervision of teaching and learning
		Curriculum implementation and enhancement
		Learner progress monitoring
		Support for teacher instructional growth
	Human Resource and Organizational Development	Staff performance and conflict management
		Motivation and task delegation
		Professional development and shared leadership
		Promotion of open and effective communication
	Stakeholder and Community Engagement	Strengthening parent and community involvement
		Transparent stakeholder communication
		Building trust and school-community collaboration
		Responsiveness to community needs and feedback

LEAD-IS:

Leadership Development Program for Leaders of Integrated School

Rationale

School heads in the integrated school managed both elementary and secondary education levels, requiring a complex set of leadership competencies. This dual responsibility demanded a nuanced understanding of the varied needs across educational stages. Given their multifaceted roles, a structured leadership development program was essential to equip them with the strategic, operational, instructional, and relational capacities necessary for effective governance (Quilicot & Añonuevo, 2021). The LEAD-IS program was designed to address these needs by providing targeted training in six core dimensions of managerial competence, each aligned with a validated framework derived from empirical research (Ng & Chan, 2019).

As leaders of institutions serving diverse learner groups and educational stages, integrated school heads were expected not only to ensure academic excellence and equity but also to manage human and financial resources, navigate policy reforms, and maintain stakeholder trust. These expectations were compounded by challenges such as limited funding, shifting educational modalities, and increased accountability for learning outcomes (Oracion, 2020; De Guzman & Tan, 2022). Without adequate preparation and continuous professional support, school leaders often struggled to meet these demands effectively.

The LEAD-IS program responded to these challenges by offering competency-based, experiential, and contextually relevant learning interventions. By focusing on capacity-building in strategic leadership, instructional supervision, fiscal management, stakeholder engagement, organizational development, and policy responsiveness, the program holistically prepared integrated school leaders. This aligned with findings that emphasized context-specific and practice-oriented leadership training to improve school outcomes (Harris & Jones, 2018; Magno, 2021).

Furthermore, the program promoted sustainable leadership practices by embedding coaching, collaboration, and school-based applications of learning. These approaches were proven to foster deeper professional growth and long-term improvements in school leadership capacity (Naval & Cruz, 2019). Ultimately, the LEAD-IS program contributed to enhanced school performance and improved learner achievement by cultivating reflective, empowered, and capable school leaders.

Activity Matrix

Leadership Dimension	Activities	Objectives	Implementation Plan
Strategic and Visionary Leadership	Strategic Planning Workshop; Data-Driven Decision-Making Bootcamp	To strengthen school heads' ability to align plans with vision, use data, and anticipate risks.	2-day workshop with output-based planning templates and school data reviews.

Financial and Resource Management	Financial Management Seminar; Resource Optimization Case Study	To enhance competencies in managing budgets, allocating resources, and ensuring sustainability.	2-day seminar with financial simulation exercises and policy compliance tools.
Adaptive and Policy-Responsive Leadership	Crisis Simulation Exercises; DepEd Policy Review and Alignment Forum	To develop adaptive leadership, policy implementation, and crisis responsiveness.	2-day blended learning with policy modules and in-person crisis response drills.
Instructional and Curriculum Leadership	Lesson Observation Practicum; Curriculum Implementation Coaching	To improve instructional supervision and curriculum leadership practices.	3-day practicum with in-school observations and peer feedback cycles.
Human Resource and Organizational Development	HR Management Clinic; Peer Mentoring and Leadership Circles	To build staff management, motivation, and professional development systems.	2-day training with role-play simulations and mentoring plans.
Stakeholder and Community Engagement	Community Partnership Building Workshop; Communication Role-Play	To strengthen school-community relationships through communication and collaboration.	2-day workshop with stakeholder mapping, role-play, and community forum.

Delivery Modes

- **Blended Learning:** A combination of face-to-face training and online modules.
- **Mentorship:** Pairing new school heads with experienced mentors.
- **Learning Action Cells (LACs):** Regular in-school group reflections and applications.
- **Coaching and Feedback Sessions:** Targeted one-on-one support with division supervisors.

Assessment and Evaluation

- **Pre- and Post-Training Self-Assessment** (based on the six competency dimensions)
- **Portfolio Submission:** Reflection journals, school-based improvement plans, and action research outputs.
- **Performance Monitoring:** Leadership performance metrics observed over a school year.
- **Feedback Mechanism:** Evaluation from supervisors, teachers, and stakeholders.

Sustainability and Policy Support

- Institutionalize the program through **regional education offices**.
- Align with existing **DepEd School Leadership and Management Training Programs**.
- Recognize completion with **CPD units or merit-based incentives** for career progression.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study investigated the managerial competencies of school heads in integrated schools, which manage both elementary and secondary education levels. The research identified two overarching global themes—Strategic and Operational Management Competencies and Instructional and Relational Leadership Competencies—which were further broken down into six organizing themes: Strategic and Visionary Leadership, Financial and Resource Management, Adaptive and Policy-Responsive Leadership, Instructional and Curriculum Leadership, Human Resource and Organizational Development, and Stakeholder and Community Engagement. Each theme encompassed specific basic competencies reflective of the complex responsibilities of integrated school leadership.

These findings highlight the multidimensional and interdependent nature of managerial competencies required in integrated school settings. Based on the validated model, a professional development intervention titled LEAD-IS (Leadership Development Program for Leaders of Integrated Schools) was proposed to build competencies across all six dimensions through blended learning, mentorship, and contextualized training.

Conclusion

The study concluded that effective leadership in integrated schools required a broad range of interrelated competencies spanning strategic, instructional, operational, and relational domains.

The six validated themes—strategic and visionary leadership, financial and resource management, adaptive and policy-responsive leadership, instructional and curriculum leadership, human resource and organizational development, and stakeholder and community engagement—reflected the complex demands placed on school heads who were expected to deliver academic quality while managing institutional systems.

The findings identified specific areas for growth such as policy alignment, documentation, and crisis responsiveness—highlighting the importance of targeted interventions to bridge leadership practice gaps. Ultimately, the study affirmed that leadership effectiveness in integrated schools was not confined to any single skillset but is a holistic construct built on multiple, interacting competencies.

Recommendations

In light of the study's findings, it is recommended that:

1. The six competencies must be institutionalized as an outline for school leadership development and performance evaluation.
2. Educational policymakers should adopt these six competencies to guide leadership standards, succession planning, and professional development programs.
3. It is further recommended that the LEAD-IS Program be implemented to support school heads in developing competencies across the six leadership dimensions. This program, which includes strategic workshops, coaching, financial simulations, instructional practicums, and community engagement training, should be delivered through blended learning modalities and supported by mentorship and Learning Action Cells.
4. The Department of Education and regional offices should align this program with existing leadership development initiatives, granting CPD units and providing merit-based incentives to encourage participation. Regular monitoring and evaluation should also be established through self-assessments, portfolio reviews, and feedback from stakeholders to measure impact and guide continuous improvement.
5. Lastly, policy support at both the national and regional levels should be secured to ensure the program's sustainability, recognizing the essential role of competent leadership in improving school governance and student outcomes in integrated education systems.

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