



STEPPING INTO LEADERSHIP: A NOVICE SCHOOL HEADS NARRATIVES

Christine O. Pamor

Master of Arts in Educational Management, Rizal Memorial Colleges, Inc.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of novice school heads as they transitioned into leadership roles, the coping strategies they used in addressing leadership challenges, and the educational insights drawn from their shared experiences. The study involved fifteen (15) novice school heads from public elementary schools in New Bataan, Davao de Oro Division, who had served in leadership positions for at least one (1) year but not more than three (3) years. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews using a validated interview guide and were analyzed through thematic analysis guided by Colaizzi's phenomenological method. Findings revealed that novice school heads experienced leadership struggles, leadership adjustment difficulties, and leadership growth and positive transformation. Their struggles included decision-making pressure, workload and time constraints, conflict in managing people, lack of confidence, role transition challenges, and emotional strain. To cope with these challenges, they used task management, collaborative support, and personal resilience through prioritizing tasks, delegating responsibilities, seeking mentor guidance, partnering with stakeholders, practicing self-care, and reflecting on decisions. The educational insights emphasized practice-oriented leadership preparation, relational and values-based school leadership, and reflective and sustainable leadership growth. These insights show that novice leadership is shaped by struggle, adjustment, support, reflection, and continuous professional learning. The study recommends that leadership development programs for novice school heads be practical, mentoring-based, reflective, and responsive to actual school leadership demands. It further recommends strengthened institutional support, coaching, stakeholder collaboration, and wellness initiatives to help novice school heads become competent, resilient, and sustainable educational leaders.

KEYWORDS: *Coping Strategies; Educational Insights; Leadership Transition; Novice School Heads*

INTRODUCTION

Novice school heads play a pivotal role in shaping the learning environment and advancing their institutions' vision, serving as both instructional leaders and catalysts for positive change. The beauty of being a novice school head lies in the opportunity to grow professionally while fostering innovation, inspiring teachers, and cultivating a collaborative school culture. Their journey, though marked by steep learning curves and high expectations, becomes a powerful testament to resilience, adaptability, and the transformative impact of dedicated leadership on both the school community and their own personal development. However, stepping into a position laden with challenges means mastering administrative duties, managing limited resources, earning the trust of seasoned staff, and navigating the demands of diverse stakeholders. They bring with them fresh perspectives, enthusiasm, and a strong desire to make a difference.

In Mauritius, novice heads suffer from professional isolation; they are overwhelmed by administrative management; they lack the capacity to manage learner discipline due to a lack of parental support in implementing the reform; and they cannot support the implementation of digital education (Jinot & Madhuree, 2020). Tahir et al. (2021) reported that novice principals experience feelings of isolation and loneliness and have to deal with the legacy of previous principals, as well as issues such as workload, time management, school budgeting, facilities, new curricula, and school improvement projects. Lately, novice principals are experiencing challenges such as isolation, limited leadership knowledge, low confidence, socialization issues, and difficulty adopting their new school's culture.

In the National Capital Region of the Philippines, novice academic heads identified paperwork, culture, processes and procedures, expectations of superiors, and teacher supervision as primary challenges. The new principals reported several challenges while in their new roles, ranging from teacher lateness to student misbehavior. Personal challenges arise for novice school heads who are members of religious congregations. They are appointed as principals out of obedience to their superiors, even without the knowledge and experience needed to manage schools (Arrieta & Ancho, 2020).

In Bukidnon, the main challenges faced by newly promoted school heads in school leadership include supervising staff, maintaining work-life balance, managing the school, and dealing with the legacy of their predecessors. A newly promoted school head faces challenges as they practice their vocation. It is difficult for them to handle all the tasks at the start of the school year, such as dealing with stakeholders, establishing school policies, and others. One reason newly promoted school heads can overcome these challenges is that they understand their calling as school heads (Castañero et al., 2023).



While existing studies documented the challenges faced by novice school heads in various contexts, such as professional isolation, administrative overload, and lack of parental support, no research has been conducted in the local context, particularly regarding the experiences of novice school heads in Davao de Oro. This absence of localized studies limited understanding of how the province's unique socio-cultural, economic, and educational contexts shape the challenges and adaptive strategies of these new leaders. Addressing this gap was essential to generate insights that were relevant and responsive to the needs of novice school heads in Davao de Oro, ultimately contributing to more targeted leadership development programs and policy interventions.

Conducting this study was crucial as it would provide an in-depth understanding of the unique challenges and adaptive strategies of novice school heads in Davao de Oro. This context remained unexplored in existing literature. By capturing their lived experiences, the study would offer valuable insights to inform targeted leadership training programs, strengthen support systems, and guide policy reforms to ease their transition into the role. The findings would be disseminated through academic conferences, seminars, and workshops for school leaders and education supervisors in the province, as well as through research publications and policy briefs shared with the Department of Education. This approach ensured that the results would reach key stakeholders who could translate the recommendations into actionable strategies for improving leadership effectiveness and, ultimately, school performance in Davao de Oro.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of novice school heads as they transition into their leadership roles. This study conducted in-depth interviews (IDI) with fifteen (15) novice school heads to capture rich, detailed narratives about how they navigated the challenges and responsibilities during their initial years in leadership. The study generated insights that could inform the design and improvement of leadership development programs, ultimately providing more effective support for novice school heads in their crucial roles within educational settings.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study applied the phenomenological approach to explore the following central research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of novice school heads as they transition into their leadership roles?
2. How do novice school heads cope with the challenges of leadership roles?
3. What educational insights can be drawn based on the shared experiences of novice school heads?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study was significant because it provided a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of novice school heads as they transitioned into leadership roles. By examining their leadership struggles, coping mechanisms, and educational insights, the study provided insights that may help educational leaders, school administrators, teachers, and policymakers design support systems grounded in the actual experiences of beginning school leaders. The study was viewed as significant for the following:

School Heads. This study would hold particular significance for school heads as it sheds light on the lived experiences of novice leaders during their critical transition into leadership roles. By understanding how new school heads navigated the complexities, challenges, and responsibilities of their early years, current and aspiring leaders could gain valuable perspectives on effective leadership practices and strategies for overcoming common obstacles. Furthermore, the insights drawn from these experiences could inform the development and refinement of leadership training and support programs.

Teachers. This study would be beneficial to teachers because it helps them understand the challenges novice school heads face in managing people, making decisions, and sustaining school programs. Through this understanding, teachers may become more supportive, cooperative, and responsive in working with newly appointed school heads. The findings may also promote professional respect, shared responsibility, and open communication within the school community.

Educational Leaders and Supervisors. This study would be useful to educational leaders and supervisors because it provides evidence on the kind of support needed by novice school heads. The findings may guide the development of mentoring programs, coaching systems, technical assistance, and leadership preparation activities that respond to actual school leadership demands.

Department of Education. This study may support the Department of Education in designing policies and programs for newly appointed school heads. The results may serve as a basis for strengthening induction programs, leadership training, wellness support, and institutional mechanisms that help novice school heads become competent, resilient, and sustainable leaders.

Future Researchers. This study may serve as a reference for future researchers examining novice leadership, school leadership transitions, coping mechanisms, mentoring, leadership development, or school governance. The findings may also provide a basis for comparative, longitudinal, or expanded studies in other educational contexts.



METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the study's methodology. It discusses the philosophical and qualitative assumptions, research design, ethical considerations, research participants, research instrument, data collection procedure, data analysis, and the trustworthiness of the study. The discussion was organized to clarify how the lived experiences of novice school heads were gathered, protected, analyzed, and interpreted in accordance with the prescribed qualitative phenomenological format.

Philosophical Assumptions

The philosophical assumptions of qualitative phenomenological research guided this study. It recognized that the lived experiences of novice school heads are subjective, personal, and shaped by their school contexts. Knowledge in this study was constructed from participants' narratives gathered through in-depth interviews. At the same time, the researcher interpreted the meanings of their experiences with respect, fairness, and awareness of possible biases. Thus, the study employed a qualitative, narrative approach to present the participants' experiences, coping mechanisms, and educational insights.

Axiology

The axiological assumption acknowledged the role of values in qualitative research. Since the study involved personal leadership experiences, the researcher valued respect, confidentiality, empathy, and fairness throughout the research process. The researcher also practiced bracketing by being aware of personal biases and by focusing on the participants' descriptions of their lived experiences.

Methodology

The study's methodological assumption was grounded in qualitative inquiry. It employed an inductive process in which meanings, patterns, and themes were developed from the participants' narratives. This allowed the study to capture the essence of the leadership transition of novice school heads based on their actual experiences.

Rhetoric

The rhetorical assumption of this study was that descriptive and narrative language were appropriate for qualitative phenomenological research. The presentation of findings emphasized participants' voices, significant statements, and thematic descriptions rather than statistical generalizations. This approach allowed the experiences of novice school heads to be presented with depth and authenticity.

Qualitative Assumptions

This study employed qualitative research, specifically phenomenology. Qualitative research is appropriate when the purpose of the study is to understand how individuals interpret and give meaning to their experiences. Instead of measuring variables numerically, qualitative inquiry provides rich descriptions of human experiences, perceptions, and reflections in their natural context (Tenny et al., 2022).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained that qualitative research begins with philosophical assumptions and interpretive frameworks that guide the exploration of meanings individuals or groups assign to social or human problems. In this study, the qualitative approach was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to explore the experiences of novice school heads as they adjusted to their leadership roles, managed challenges, and developed insights from their transition.

The study employed phenomenology to examine the essence of novice school heads' shared experiences. Through their narratives, the study examined how they understood their leadership transition, the challenges they encountered, how they coped with them, and the educational insights that emerged from their experiences.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology is a qualitative approach that seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring the perspectives of individuals who have directly experienced it. It focuses on both what was experienced and how participants understood the experience (Neubauer et al., 2019).

In this study, the phenomenon under investigation was the experience of stepping into leadership among novice school heads. The design was appropriate because the study aimed to understand their personal narratives, emotions, challenges, coping strategies, and reflections during the early years of their leadership roles. The phenomenological approach enabled the researcher to identify common meanings and themes across participants' experiences while preserving the uniqueness of each account.

The use of in-depth interviews enabled the researcher to gather detailed descriptions from the participants. These interviews provided the basis for identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, and describing the essential structure of the phenomenon. Thus, the design supported the purpose of exploring the lived experiences of novice school heads in a systematic and meaningful manner.



Research Participants

The participants of this phenomenological inquiry were fifteen (15) novice school heads who were serving in public elementary schools in New Bataan, Davao de Oro Division. They were selected because they had direct experience with the phenomenon under study and could provide rich descriptions of their transition into leadership roles. The interviews were conducted after the necessary ethical clearance and institutional permissions were secured, at a time and place convenient to the participants. Follow-up and probing questions were asked during the interview when clarification or further explanation was needed.

In determining the number of participants, the researcher considered Creswell's (2018) recommendation that phenomenological studies may involve a small group of participants who have experienced the same phenomenon. The fifteen participants were considered sufficient because the data reached saturation, meaning that the responses began to show recurring patterns and no substantially new information emerged.

Purposive sampling was used in selecting the participants. This sampling technique was appropriate because the study required participants who possessed specific characteristics relevant to the research problem. The participants were chosen not randomly but based on their ability to provide meaningful information about the lived experiences of novice school heads.

The inclusion criteria required that participants be currently serving as public elementary school heads in the New Bataan, Davao de Oro Division, and have at least 1 year but not more than 3 years of leadership experience. This timeframe was used because school heads within three years of service are still considered novice leaders and are still undergoing the early transition stage of school leadership. The exclusion criteria removed individuals who had more than three years of school head experience, those who were not actively serving as school heads during the study, and those who were not assigned to the identified research locale. These criteria ensured that the participants' experiences aligned with the study's focus.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument used in this study was a researcher-made interview guide, which is presented in Appendix A. The interview guide contained open-ended questions aligned with the study's research questions. It allowed the participants to describe their lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and educational insights as novice school heads. The interview guide served as the primary instrument for data collection and was used consistently throughout the interviews. The interview guide was prepared to encourage the participants to answer in their own words. During the interviews, the researcher used follow-up and probing questions to clarify responses, deepen the discussion, and obtain richer descriptions of the participants' experiences. The researcher avoided leading questions and ensured that no hints or clues were given that could influence the participants' responses.

To ensure the validity of the research instrument, the interview guide was reviewed by qualified experts in educational leadership and qualitative research. The validators examined the clarity, relevance, appropriateness, and alignment of the questions with the study's purpose and research questions. Suggestions from the validators were incorporated before the final interview guide was used. The validated researcher-made interview guide is attached as Appendix A.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with the fifteen novice school heads. Before the interviews, the researcher secured approval from the Ethics Review Committee and obtained formal permission from the Dean of the Graduate School of Rizal Memorial Colleges and the Schools Division Superintendent of the Davao de Oro Division. After the required approvals were granted, the researcher coordinated with the identified participants, explained the study's purpose and procedures, and obtained their written informed consent. The data collection documents and related approval materials are presented in Appendix B.

The interviews were conducted in a private, comfortable setting, based on participants' availability and convenience. With permission, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate documentation of the responses. The researcher asked open-ended questions and used probing questions when further explanation was necessary. The interview guide in Appendix A was maintained, but the order and flow of questions were adjusted when needed to allow a natural and meaningful conversation.

After the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. Statements expressed in the local language were translated into English while preserving the meaning of the participants' responses. All files, recordings, transcripts, and translated data were handled with strict confidentiality and stored securely in accordance with the study's ethical and data privacy safeguards.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the in-depth interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis guided by Colaizzi's phenomenological method. This method was appropriate because it provided a systematic process for identifying



significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, and describing the essence of the participants' lived experiences. The analysis focused on preserving the participants' voices while developing clear, meaningful themes that addressed the research questions.

The first step involved reading and rereading the interview transcripts to gain a general understanding of the participants' experiences. The researcher immersed herself in the data to become familiar with the content and context of each narrative. This process helped ensure that the analysis was grounded in the participants' actual words and meanings.

The second step involved identifying significant statements that directly related to the research questions. These statements described the challenges, coping strategies, and insights of the novice school heads. The third step involved formulating meanings from the significant statements. The researcher carefully interpreted the meanings while avoiding distortion of the participants' intended messages.

The fourth step involved organizing similar meanings into clusters of themes. Related codes and ideas were grouped into subthemes and main themes. The fifth step involved developing a comprehensive description of the phenomenon based on the emerging themes. The sixth step involved identifying the fundamental structure of the phenomenon, which represented the essence of the participants' shared experiences as novice school heads.

To validate the findings, the researcher used member checking and expert review. Selected participants were asked to verify whether the interpretations accurately reflected their experiences. In addition, the themes and interpretations were reviewed by qualified individuals to ensure clarity, coherence, and alignment with the data. Constant comparison was also used to compare statements across participants and to ensure consistency in the emerging themes. Data saturation was considered when no new major themes emerged from the interviews.

Ethical Consideration

This study strictly observed ethical principles to protect the rights, dignity, privacy, and welfare of the participants. The study adhered to the ethical protocols required by the Rizal Memorial Colleges Ethics Review Committee and obtained the necessary permissions prior to data collection. Before the interviews, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study, procedures involved, expected duration of the interview, and their rights as participants. Their participation was voluntary, and they were informed that they could refuse to answer any question or discontinue their participation at any time without penalty. Written informed consent was obtained before data collection.

The study also recognized that although the participants were professionals, discussing leadership struggles, self-doubt, and workplace challenges could make them emotionally vulnerable. Thus, the researcher maintained a respectful, supportive, and non-judgmental interview environment. Participants were allowed to pause, skip questions, or stop the interview whenever they felt uncomfortable. Possible risks, such as discomfort with sharing sensitive experiences, were minimized through respectful questioning, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and secure data handling.

Confidentiality and data privacy were incorporated as major ethical safeguards in the study. The identities of the participants and their schools were protected using codes and pseudonyms. Audio recordings, transcripts, consent forms, and other research files were stored in password-protected folders and were accessed only by the researcher and authorized research personnel. The data were used solely for research purposes and were not disclosed in a way that could identify the participants. Participant selection was conducted fairly in accordance with the study's inclusion and exclusion criteria. The researcher also maintained transparency, declared no conflict of interest, sought expert guidance, and ensured that interviews were conducted in safe, private, and comfortable settings.

Trustworthiness of the Study

This study ensured trustworthiness by applying the four criteria of qualitative rigor: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. These criteria were observed throughout the research process to ensure that the findings were accurate, consistent, meaningful, and grounded in participants' actual experiences.

Credibility was established by ensuring that the findings accurately reflected the lived experiences of novice school heads. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews to gather detailed and meaningful responses from the participants. Their answers were carefully documented, transcribed, and reviewed to preserve the accuracy of their statements. Member checking was also conducted by allowing the participants to review or confirm the meanings of their responses. In addition, the findings were validated through careful comparison of participants' statements and consultation with experts to ensure that the themes reflected the real experiences shared during the interviews.

Dependability was maintained by following a systematic and clearly documented research process. The researcher maintained an audit trail detailing the procedures used to select participants, conduct interviews, transcribe responses, translate Bisaya statements into English, code the data, cluster similar meanings, and develop themes. This documentation helped ensure that the study followed a consistent process from data collection to data analysis. The research procedures were also reviewed to ensure that the findings were not random but were based on organized and transparent steps.

Transferability was addressed by providing rich, detailed descriptions of the participants, the research setting, and the leadership experiences of novice school heads. The study described the participants as public elementary school heads in



New Bataan, Davao de Oro Division, who had served in their leadership roles for at least one year but no more than three years. By presenting participants' experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and educational insights in detail, readers can determine whether the findings apply to or relevant to similar school leadership contexts.

Confirmability was ensured by minimizing researcher bias and grounding the findings in participants' actual narratives. The researcher practiced reflexivity and bracketing by being aware of personal assumptions and by focusing on the participants' own descriptions of their experiences. Proper documentation of transcripts, codes, formulated meanings, and themes was maintained to show how the findings were developed from the data. Expert review was also used to check whether the participants' responses supported the interpretations. Through these measures, the study ensured that the findings reflected the voices of novice school heads rather than the researcher's personal views.

Results

The study explored the lived experiences, coping strategies, and educational insights of novice school heads during their transition into leadership roles. The findings revealed three major themes. First, novice school heads experienced **leadership struggles**, including decision-making pressure, workload and time constraints, and challenges in managing people. They also faced **leadership adjustment difficulties** such as self-doubt, role transition challenges, and emotional strain. Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated **leadership growth and positive transformation** through increased confidence, improved leadership relationships, and support from mentors and professional development opportunities.

Second, novice school heads coped with leadership challenges through **task management, collaborative support, and personal resilience**. They managed responsibilities by prioritizing tasks, delegating duties, seeking guidance from mentors and stakeholders, practicing self-care, and engaging in reflective decision-making. These strategies helped them sustain leadership performance and address school-related challenges effectively.

Third, the educational insights emphasized the importance of **practice-oriented leadership preparation, relational and values-based leadership, and reflective and sustainable leadership growth**. Participants highlighted the need for experiential training, mentorship programs, decision-making exercises, open communication, integrity, stakeholder collaboration, resilience, self-care, and reflective practice. Overall, the findings suggest that novice school heads require structured preparation, strong support systems, and continuous professional learning to become effective and sustainable educational leaders.

Summary of Findings

The findings revealed that novice school heads experienced leadership struggles as they transitioned into their leadership roles. These struggles included decision-making pressure, workload and time constraints, and conflict in managing people. The participants were expected to make sound decisions, accomplish multiple administrative and instructional tasks, and manage different personalities within the school community despite being new to the role. These experiences show that novice school heads are immediately exposed to complex responsibilities that require confidence, sound judgment, patience, and organizational skills.

The study also revealed that novice school heads experienced difficulties with leadership adjustment. These difficulties were reflected in their lack of confidence and self-doubt, role transition challenges, and emotional strain. As they moved from being followers or classroom-based professionals to becoming school leaders, they had to adjust to new expectations, decision-making responsibilities, and relational dynamics. The transition was not merely administrative but also emotional and professional, as the participants had to develop a stronger sense of leadership identity while coping with pressure and uncertainty.

Despite these difficulties, the findings further showed that novice school heads experienced leadership growth and positive transformation. Their actual leadership experiences helped them develop confidence and competence, improve leadership relationships and approaches, and recognize the value of support systems and learning opportunities. Through mentoring, collegial support, training, and continuous exposure to school leadership realities, the participants gradually became more reflective, people-centered, and capable in handling school concerns.

In addressing leadership challenges, the participants used three major coping strategies: task management, collaborative support, and personal resilience. Task management helped them prioritize urgent responsibilities, delegate technical tasks, and organize their workload. Collaborative support enabled them to seek guidance from mentors and colleagues and to engage stakeholders in addressing school needs. Personal resilience allowed them to practice self-care, reflect on their decisions, manage stress, and sustain their motivation despite the demands of school leadership.

The educational insights drawn from the participants' shared experiences emphasized practice-oriented leadership preparation, relational and values-based school leadership, and reflective and sustainable leadership growth. The participants recognized that leadership preparation should include practical experience, real-world application, mentorship, and decision-making exercises. They also learned that open communication, integrity, consistency, sincerity, and stakeholder collaboration are essential in building trust and sustaining school programs. Finally, they realized that



resilience, self-care, and reflection are important in sustaining leadership effectiveness and strengthening leadership identity.

Implications

In light of the analysis and discussion of the results of the study, the following implications are drawn:

Implications for School Leadership Practice. The findings imply that novice school heads need practical and contextualized leadership support during their transition into school leadership. Since they experience decision-making pressure, workload demands, role adjustment, and emotional strain, school leadership practice should emphasize guided decision-making, task prioritization, delegation, conflict management, and reflective leadership. School heads may be encouraged to use structured planning systems, distribute responsibilities among capable personnel, and establish open communication channels with teachers and stakeholders. These practices can help reduce leadership pressure while promoting a collaborative and responsive school environment.

The findings also suggest that novice school heads should not be left to learn leadership only through trial and error. Their leadership struggles highlight the need for practical coaching, peer consultation, and school-based mentoring to help them make informed decisions in real-world situations. School leadership practice should therefore provide opportunities for new school heads to observe experienced leaders, participate in problem-solving discussions, and receive constructive feedback. Such support can strengthen their confidence, improve their leadership judgment, and help them manage school concerns with greater clarity and direction.

Implications for Teacher Development. The study implies that teachers play an important role in supporting novice school heads during leadership transition. Since the findings showed that conflict in managing people and adjustment to interpersonal relationships were part of the participants' experiences, teacher development programs should also promote collaboration, professional respect, shared responsibility, and constructive communication. Teachers may be oriented to working with newly appointed school heads by actively participating in decision-making, supporting school initiatives, and maintaining professional relationships that contribute to a positive school climate.

Teacher development should also emphasize teamwork and shared leadership. When teachers understand the challenges novice school heads face, they may become more responsive and cooperative in implementing school programs. Professional learning communities, mentoring groups, and collaborative planning sessions can help teachers and school heads work together in addressing instructional and administrative concerns. These practices can strengthen trust, lessen misunderstanding, and contribute to a more unified school culture.

Implications for Leadership Development Programs. The findings strongly imply that leadership development programs for novice school heads should be practice-oriented rather than purely theoretical. Since the participants identified the importance of actual practice, mentorship, and decision-making readiness, leadership training should include simulations, case analysis, role-playing, problem-based learning, and guided exposure to real school situations. These activities can help aspiring and newly appointed school heads develop practical skills before they are placed in complex leadership contexts.

Leadership development programs should also include modules on task management, collaborative support, personal resilience, values-based leadership, and reflective practice. These areas align directly with the study's revised findings and can address the actual needs of novice school heads. By integrating these components, leadership preparation can become more responsive to the realities of school leadership, especially in managing workload, building relationships, engaging stakeholders, practicing self-care, and making ethical and informed decisions.

Implications for Policy and Institutional Support. The study implies that educational institutions and policymakers should institutionalize structured support systems for novice school heads. Since the participants experienced leadership struggles and adjustment difficulties, formal induction programs, mentoring arrangements, coaching systems, and continuing professional development opportunities should be made available during the early years of leadership. These supports can help novice school heads adjust more smoothly, reduce feelings of isolation, and strengthen their capacity to manage leadership responsibilities.

Policy support should also address workload management and leadership well-being. Institutions may consider providing administrative assistance, peer support networks, and regular monitoring mechanisms to ensure that novice school heads are not overwhelmed by the demands of the position. Policies that promote stakeholder collaboration, school-community partnership, and resource support can further help new leaders respond to school needs more effectively. In this way, institutional support can contribute to sustainable leadership performance and improved school governance.

Implications for the Department of Education and School Governance. The findings suggest that the Department of Education and school governance bodies may use the results of this study as a basis for strengthening programs for newly appointed school heads. Since the participants emphasized practice-based preparation and mentoring, division offices may design localized leadership support programs that respond to the actual contexts of novice school heads. These programs may include orientation on school operations, decision-making protocols, conflict management, stakeholder engagement, financial and resource management, and instructional leadership.



The results also imply that supervision of novice school heads should be developmental rather than merely evaluative. Education supervisors and experienced administrators may provide regular technical assistance, feedback, and emotional support to help new school heads build confidence and competence. A structured monitoring and mentoring system can ensure that novice school heads receive timely guidance while still having opportunities to develop independence and a leadership identity.

Implications for the Researcher. For the researcher, the findings imply the importance of understanding leadership transition as a human, professional, and contextual process. The experiences of novice school heads revealed that leadership is not only about performing administrative duties but also about managing emotions, building relationships, reflecting on decisions, and sustaining personal resilience. These insights can guide the researcher in further exploring leadership development and advocating for support systems grounded in the actual voices and realities of school leaders.

Connection of Findings to the Theoretical Lens

The study's findings affirm the relevance of Role Transition Theory, which explains how individuals adjust as they move into new professional roles. The novice school heads in this study experienced role adjustment, self-doubt, decision-making pressure, and emotional strain as they transitioned into leadership. These experiences reflect the identity shifts and learning processes involved in assuming a new role. At the same time, their gradual development of confidence, competence, and leadership identity shows that role transition can lead to professional growth when supported by experience, mentoring, reflection, and institutional guidance.

The findings also support the Leader-Member Exchange Theory, as the participants emphasized the importance of open communication, trust, collaboration, and positive relationships with teachers, colleagues, and stakeholders. Their experiences showed that an effective leadership transition depends in part on the quality of relationships built within the school community. Moreover, the findings are consistent with Transformational Leadership Theory, particularly in the participants' recognition of values-based leadership, stakeholder collaboration, resilience, and reflective growth as essential in sustaining school improvement and inspiring others toward shared goals.

Future Directions

Based on the study's findings, future directions may be considered for novice school heads, teachers, learners, school administrators, stakeholders, and future researchers. Since the study revealed that novice school heads experience leadership struggles, adjustment difficulties, and emotional strain during their transition, they may continue to develop their leadership competence through mentoring, coaching, reflective practice, and continuous professional development. They may also strengthen their decision-making skills, time-management practices, communication strategies, and emotional resilience to become more confident and effective in their leadership roles.

For teachers, future directions may focus on strengthening collaboration and shared responsibility with novice school heads. Since the findings emphasized the importance of relational and values-based leadership, teachers may actively support newly appointed school heads by maintaining open communication, participating in school planning, sharing constructive ideas, and helping build a positive school culture. Teachers may also engage in professional learning communities and collaborative activities that promote teamwork, trust, and shared commitment to school improvement.

For learners, future directions may emphasize the importance of fostering a supportive, well-managed learning environment. Since school leadership affects school climate, teacher motivation, and learner outcomes, students may benefit when novice school heads are properly guided and supported in their leadership transition. Schools may continue promoting programs that support learner welfare, academic development, discipline, and participation in school activities. This ensures that leadership growth among school heads also contributes to better learning experiences for students.

For school administrators and the Department of Education, future directions may include developing structured induction programs, mentoring systems, and practice-oriented leadership training for novice school heads. These programs may include real-world applications, case studies, role-playing, coaching, and problem-based learning to prepare new leaders for real-world school situations. DepEd officials and education supervisors may also provide regular technical assistance, monitoring, and emotional support to help novice school heads adjust more smoothly and perform their duties effectively.

For parents, community members, LGUs, NGOs, and other stakeholders, future directions may involve stronger school-community partnerships. Since the findings showed that stakeholder collaboration helps address school needs and sustain programs, external partners may continue supporting novice school heads through resource assistance, community participation, and active involvement in school initiatives. Strong stakeholder engagement can help reduce resource limitations and strengthen the implementation of school programs.

For leadership development institutions and training providers, future directions may focus on designing practical, context-responsive programs. Since the participants emphasized the need for actual practice, mentorship, and decision-making readiness, leadership preparation should go beyond theoretical discussion and include hands-on experiences, simulation activities, apprenticeship, and exposure to real school leadership concerns. These programs may help aspiring and newly appointed school heads become better prepared, more confident, and more resilient.



For future researchers, further studies may examine the experiences of novice school heads over a longer period. A longitudinal study may be conducted to determine how leadership struggles, adjustment difficulties, coping strategies, and leadership growth develop from the first year of appointment to the succeeding years of school leadership. Future studies may also explore the effectiveness of mentoring and coaching programs, compare the experiences of novice school heads across rural and urban schools, and investigate how leadership practices influence teacher motivation, school culture, and learner outcomes.

Lastly, future research may also investigate the role of personal resilience, self-care, and reflection in sustaining school leadership. Since novice school heads experience emotional strain and workload demands, studies may examine how resilience-building programs, wellness initiatives, and reflective leadership practices help prevent burnout and sustain leadership effectiveness. These future directions may contribute to the development of more humane, supportive, inclusive, and sustainable leadership systems for novice school heads.

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