



COMPETENCIES OF SCHOOL HEADS IN REGION XII: A SEQUENTIAL EXPLANATORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Weak school leadership structurally compromises school performance. This study determined the competencies of public elementary school heads in Region XII, Philippines, and explained the statistical outcomes in light of their lived leadership realities. Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, Phase 1 collected quantitative data from a stratified sample of 400 school heads across four city divisions (General Santos City, Kidapawan City, Koronadal City, and Tacurong City). This was immediately followed by Phase 2, which used semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with purposively selected school heads to explain the numerical findings. Anchored on Mumford et al.'s Theory of Effective Organizational Leadership, a one-way ANOVA indicated significant differences in competency levels across cities, specifically between General Santos City and Kidapawan City ($p=.026$). Phase 2 qualitative thematic analysis explained these variations through three higher-order meta-themes: (1) Systemic Complexity Straining Individual Competence, (2) The Demand for Objective Operationalization and Uniform Metrics, and (3) Contextual Vulnerability and Resource Dependency. The integrated findings show that what presents quantitatively as superior leadership competency is often the structural reflection of an enriched operational environment that gives school heads the fiscal and professional freedom to maximize their administrative talents. The study concludes that school head efficacy is an environmentally mediated practice. It recommends transitioning from abstract compliance rubrics to simplified administrative guidelines, standardized coaching toolkits, and context-responsive engagement frameworks.

KEYWORDS: School Head Competencies, Leadership Effectiveness, Sequential Explanatory Study, Context-Sensitive Leadership, Public Elementary Schools, Region XII, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Persistent operational and leadership challenges regarding the competencies of school heads in Region XII warrant deliberate scholarly attention (Origines, 2022). As educational demands shift, clear gaps emerge in how leaders align daily administrative behaviors with national standards. Internationally, 21st-century basic education demands advanced strategic, systemic, and creative thinking—competencies that many institutional heads struggle to practice due to constant systemic pressure (Choi et al., 2024; Turhan & Özmen, 2023).

On a global scale, resolving these execution gaps aligns with UN Sustainable Development Goals 4 (Quality Education) and 16 (Strong Institutions). Specifically, SDG Target 4.c calls for a substantial increase in qualified educators alongside upgraded managerial capabilities for school leaders. Establishing this capability baseline ensures inclusive, equitable learning environments. Likewise, SDG Target 16.6 emphasizes building transparent, effective institutions. In basic education, true institutional accountability depends heavily on the fiscal and operational competence of local managers overseeing public resources.

Within the Philippine basic education sub-system, these macro-level concerns extend directly to local administrative divisions and intersect with national priorities for human capital development. Researchers have documented ongoing challenges regarding the upskilling needs of principals in Sorsogon

(Agravante et al., 2023), digital readiness deficiencies in Marinduque (Padolina-Alcantara, 2023), and leadership adaptation struggles in Negros Oriental (Bacalso, 2024).

As these multi-layered concerns emerge across international, national, and regional contexts, unresolved competency deficits directly compromise vital institutional outcomes. Previous scholarship confirms that school heads' instructional mastery and administrative capacity shape teacher morale, organizational resilience, and general school governance performance (Peralta, 2023). Despite this expanding body of literature, very few studies have comprehensively decoded the competencies of public school heads in Region XII using an integrated mixed-methods approach. This creates a distinct methodological and contextual gap (Karakose et al., 2024). This study addresses this gap by investigating school head competencies across seven primary domains: School Leadership, Instructional Leadership, Student-Centered Learning Climate, Human Resource Management and Professional Development, Parent Involvement and Community Partnership, School Management and Operations, and Personal and Professional Attributes and Interpersonal Effectiveness.

Consequently, decoding the multi-layered realities of basic education governance requires a research methodology that goes beyond surface-level statistical averages to expose the underlying institutional mechanisms that drive administrative performance. While quantitative assessments offer a structural macro-perspective of general capability distributions and



geographical variations across regional divisions, they cannot capture the nuanced personal struggles, systemic bottlenecks, and localized coping strategies that school heads encounter daily. Conversely, isolated narrative accounts lack the empirical weight required to inform systematic, region-wide educational policy changes. To bridge this gap, this study employs a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. This approach systematically pairs macro-level statistical trends with raw field narratives to explore how centralized professional standards are operationalized under varied local conditions. By using the quantitative insights to map spatial variance and the subsequent qualitative themes to contextualize real-world execution barriers, this study provides a dual-lens framework to evaluate and optimize educational leadership across the administrative landscapes of Region XII.

Statement of the Problem

To contribute to human understanding of school leadership, this study used a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design to determine the competencies of school heads in public elementary schools in Region XII, Philippines, and explain the quantitative results through their challenges, coping strategies, and lived experiences. Specifically, the study addressed the following objectives:

Phase 1 (Quantitative)

1. To determine the significant difference in the competencies of school heads when analyzed according to the city.

Phase 2 (Qualitative)

2. How do the qualitative findings explain the quantitative results regarding the competencies of school heads in Region XII?

Theoretical Lens

This inquiry is anchored on the *Theory of Effective Organizational Leadership* developed by Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, and Fleishman (2000). The framework consists of five core components: individual attributes, competencies, leadership outcomes, career experiences, and environmental influences. The theory posits that leader performance depends on a person's ability to solve novel, ill-defined organizational problems. Crucially, while a leader's core competencies lead directly to leadership outcomes, they are continually mediated by individual attributes, career experiences, and immediate environmental influences.

In this study, this theoretical claim was contextualized within the public education ecosystem of Region XII. The competency component was examined across seven domains, while the city-level geographical divisions were operationalized as environmental influences. The qualitative themes regarding administrative challenges, coping mechanisms, and field adjustments represented the career experiences dimension, illustrating how competencies operate in actual school settings.

METHODOLOGY

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was utilized in this study to connect macro-level statistical trends with contextualized field realities (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This design was implemented in two distinct, connected phases: Phase 1 focused on collecting and analyzing structured quantitative data to evaluate regional competency levels and geographical differences across city divisions, while Phase 2 gathered qualitative insights to explain, clarify, and deepen the initial statistical patterns. Ethical integrity was maintained by obtaining formal clearance from the official ethics review body, the Society of Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE), as well as formal permissions from the Graduate School and the respective division offices. Prior to data collection, all participants provided written informed consent, ensuring complete confidentiality and voluntary participation throughout both phases of the study (Stadnick et al., 2021).

For Phase 1 (Quantitative), the target population comprised public elementary school heads within Region XII. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to establish a perfectly balanced sample size of $N=400$ respondents across four strategic city-administrative divisions: General Santos City ($n=100$), Kidapawan City ($n=100$), Koronadal City ($n=100$), and Tacurong City ($n=100$). Data were gathered using a modified survey questionnaire designed to measure school head competencies across seven distinct domains: School Leadership, Instructional Leadership, Student-Centered Learning Climate, Human Resource Management and Professional Development, Parent Involvement and Community Partnership, School Management and Operations, and Personal and Professional Attributes and Interpersonal Effectiveness. The instrument was validated by a panel of educational management experts and demonstrated high internal consistency reliability.

For Phase 2 (Qualitative), a purposive sampling technique was used to select a key subgroup of $n = 16$ school heads ($n = 4$ per city division) from the original quantitative participant pool who had completed the survey, had extensive field experience, and were willing to share their leadership narratives. Qualitative data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews ($n = 8$) and two focus group discussions ($n = 4$ per group) guided by open-ended prompts, enabling comprehensive exploration of emerging institutional challenges, operational bottlenecks, and administrative coping strategies. This localized approach provided an interpretive space where administrators could articulate how specific socioeconomic baselines and structural resource streams shape their real-world administrative performance.

Statistical analysis for the quantitative phase involved descriptive and inferential techniques computed through IBM SPSS. Means and standard deviations were used to evaluate the level of manifestation across the seven competency domains, while a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tested at the $\alpha=0.05$ significance level determined whether competencies differed significantly across the four city divisions, followed by a Tukey Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) post hoc test to identify divergent pairs. For the qualitative phase, raw transcripts



were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase reflexive thematic analysis framework to generate initial codes, cluster related codes, and refine overarching meta-themes. The thematic structure was cross-evaluated against regional educational standards and independent methodological review criteria (Fernandez, Fabiania, & Galache, 2019) to ensure analytical rigor and qualitative trustworthiness.

RESULTS

3.1 Phase 1 (Quantitative): Significant Difference in the Competencies of School Heads When Analyzed According to City

To address the third objective of Phase 1, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether statistically significant differences exist in the competencies of public elementary school heads across their city-administrative divisions. Table 2 presents the results of the ANOVA and the corresponding post hoc pairwise comparisons.

The inferential analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in school head competencies across the cities (**3, 396**) = **2.925**, $p = .038$. The Tukey HSD post hoc test confirmed that this variation occurred exclusively between General Santos City and Kidapawan City, with a significant mean difference of 0.097 ($p = .026$). All other pairwise comparisons were statistically uniform, showing no significant differences.

Table 1

One-Way ANOVA and Tukey HSD Post Hoc Test on School Head Competencies by City (N=400)

Analysis Phase	Comparison / Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	p-value	Mean Difference	Decision / Interpretation
One-Way ANOVA	Between Groups	0.115	3	0.038	2.925	.038	—	Significant (Reject H0)
	Within Groups	1.150	396	0.013	—	—	—	—
	Total	1.265	399	—	—	—	—	—
Tukey HSD Post Hoc	Gen. Santos City vs. Kidapawan City	—	—	—	—	.026	0.097	Statistically Significant
	Gen. Santos City vs. Koronadal City	—	—	—	—	.370	0.055	Not Significant
	Gen. Santos City vs. Tacurong City	—	—	—	—	.178	0.069	Not Significant
	Koronadal City vs. Kidapawan City	—	—	—	—	.596	0.042	Not Significant
	Tacurong City vs. Kidapawan City	—	—	—	—	.842	0.028	Not Significant
	Koronadal City vs. Tacurong City	—	—	—	—	.974	0.014	Not Significant

Phase 2 (Qualitative): Explaining the Quantitative Results

The reflexive thematic analysis of the field testimonies revealed three higher-order meta-themes that serve as the primary explanatory mechanisms for the Phase 1 quantitative trends. To meet APA 7th edition text conventions, direct participant expressions of fewer than 40 words are seamlessly woven into the analytical narrative.

Meta-Theme 1: Systemic Complexity Straining Individual Competence

This meta-theme integrates themes showing that school heads possess strong individual capabilities, but their performance is continuously taxed by dense bureaucratic requirements.

Theme 1.1: Highly competent operations need simplified procedures. Expressing frustration with compliance loads, Fanna noted that being "required to accomplish numerous reports and documentation tasks" can become incredibly "overwhelming" (Lines 38–39). Similarly, Jopay noted deep technical friction under existing fiscal routines, stating, "I find financial procedures to be quite technical and complex" (Line 44), which hinders overall administrative execution without proactive intervention.

Theme 1.2: Highly competent instruction needs clearer supervision. Emphasizing the operational challenge of balancing support with administrative intervention, Ana shared, "I sometimes find it difficult to determine how to properly supervise teachers without interfering with their professional autonomy" (Lines 8–10). Lorna expanded upon this structural discrepancy, observing that "feedback practices vary among school heads, which results in inconsistencies" (Lines 18–19) across individual learning centers.

Meta-Theme 2: The Demand for Objective Operationalization and Uniform Metrics

This meta-theme captures the structural friction caused by abstract national performance descriptors. School heads reported that domains such as School Leadership and Personal Attributes are vulnerable to evaluators' subjective interpretations due to a lack of concrete behavioral exemplars.

Theme 2.1: Highly competent leadership needs standardized indicators. Mary Ann pointed to explicit structural inconsistencies in external accountability mechanisms, noting that "different assessors may interpret the same indicator



differently" (Lines 60–61), which often compromises fairness in evaluation.

Theme 2.2: Highly competent attributes needing observable indicators. Highlighting how performance assessments suffer under non-observable rubrics, Luisa claimed that core ethical expectations "are often subjective and difficult to measure, especially during formal performance evaluations" (Lines 66–67).

Meta-Theme 3: Contextual Vulnerability and Resource Dependency

This meta-theme provides the direct explanatory rationale for why competencies differ significantly across city divisions. It exposes how external ecological factors shape and constrain administrative mastery.

Theme 3.1: Competent partnership needing context-specific standards. Marisol documented the socio-demographic fluidity that limits community initiatives, remarking that "engagement practices vary greatly depending on the school's location, available resources, and the culture of the community" (Lines 50–

52). Maribeth agreed, observing that "the indicators for evaluating meaningful participation are not clearly defined" (Lines 55–56), leaving local execution vulnerable to evaluative shifts.

Theme 3.2: Competent HR development needs structured support. Faculty upskilling remains uneven due to procedural ambiguities. Fe observed that "actual procedures for evaluating performance and providing coaching are not clearly defined" (Lines 25–26), creating uncertainty. To solve this baseline problem, Marites suggested that "school heads like me would benefit from more structured approaches and practical tools for mentoring" (Lines 34–35).

DISCUSSION AND MIXED-METHODS INTEGRATION

To meet the rigorous standards of mixed-methods research, this section explicitly integrates the Phase 1 statistical trends with the Phase 2 qualitative meta-themes.

Table 2

Joint Display Matrix of Quantitative Outcomes and Qualitative Explanations

Quantitative Phase 1 Trends	Qualitative Phase 2 Meta-Themes	Integrated Mixed-Methods Finding (The "Why")
School Management & Operations • M=3.36 (Rank 1) • Very High Manifestation	Meta-Theme 1: Systemic Complexity • Documentation overload • Complex fiscal technicalities	Systemic Complexity vs. Individual Effort: High operational scores are achieved through immense individual effort spent clearing bureaucratic workloads, proving compliance is forced rather than effortless.
Instructional Leadership • M=3.24 (Rank 4) • High Manifestation	Meta-Theme 2: Objective Operationalization • Interpretive variance in feedback • Broad leadership rubrics	The Demand for Uniform Metrics: Although instructional capacities are highly active, execution varies across stations due to a lack of standardized documentation formats for evaluation protocols.
Learning Climate & HR Mentoring • M=3.15 (Rank 6.5 - Tied) • Lowest Domain Spectrum	Meta-Theme 1 & Meta-Theme 3 • Compliance deflecting pedagogy • Lack of structured mentoring tools	Administrative Workload Deflection: Heavy bureaucratic demands fragment school heads' schedules, directly limiting their ability to sustain dedicated, uninterrupted teacher coaching.
City-Based Competency Variation • F=2.925, p=.038 • Gen. Santos vs. Kidapawan	Meta-Theme 3: Contextual Vulnerability • Resource allocation stream gaps • Community demographic shifts	Environmentally Mediated Mastery: High leadership competency scores reflect an enriched operational environment. Urbanized hubs provide administrative buffers that allow leaders to focus on strategic growth.



The empirical integration demonstrates that public elementary school heads in Region XII maintain a solid baseline of competence ($M = 3.23$). This validates the core capability dimension of Mumford et al.'s (2000) framework. However, high aggregate scores do not mean trouble-free execution in every domain. School Management and Operations ranked highest ($M = 3.36$), indicating that leaders effectively maintain basic stability, adhere to regulatory guidelines, and manage fiscal resources.

This operational burden directly explains why Student-Centered Learning Climate and Human Resource Management tied for the lowest relative rank ($M=3.15$). This trend aligns with modern literature on bureaucratic intensification, which argues that heavy accountability frameworks divert a leader's focus from instructional coaching and classroom supervision (Gurr, 2021; Hodgen, 2021). When administrative compliance eclipses instructional guidance, long-term teacher motivation and school growth can stagnate (Robinson & Gray, 2022). The lower score in human resource development is not due to a lack of capacity, but is a structural result of administrative workload that compresses pedagogical governance (Louis & Murphy, 2023).

Furthermore, the inferential variation across locations—specifically between General Santos City and Kidapawan City ($p=.026$)—confirms that school leadership is an environmentally mediated practice. This supports Mumford et al.'s (2000) emphasis on Environmental Influences. As shown in Meta-Theme 3, leadership competence is continually shaped by geographic and structural resource streams. Highly urbanized economic hubs, like General Santos City, benefit from robust local government unit (LGU) fiscal allocations, special education funds, and dense corporate partnerships. These affluent conditions provide school heads with administrative buffers and funded training frameworks.

Conversely, school heads in less urbanized areas, like Kidapawan City, face persistent infrastructure gaps and resource limitations. This requires leaders to spend excessive time on basic resource mobilization rather than advanced strategic governance. This demonstrates that while national standards aim to standardize leadership outputs (OECD, 2021; Schleicher, 2021), real-world administrative performance remains dependent on localized environmental equity (Harris & Jones, 2022). High competency scores are often the systemic reflection of an enriched environment that allows administrators to safely transition from basic institutional survival to advanced pedagogical leadership.

The Problem of Objective Operationalization and Uniform Metrics

Finally, the qualitative analysis reveals a major disconnect between macro-level national competency descriptors and localized field tools. As detailed in Meta-Theme 2, core administrative expectations, personal ethics, and human resource protocols rely on broad descriptors. This leaves evaluations vulnerable to the subjective interpretations of individual assessors, causing inconsistent performance ratings across school divisions (Tuytens & Devos, 2021). Leadership execution and

stakeholder engagement cannot achieve uniform fidelity without explicit behavioral exemplars and standardized coaching toolkits that empower school heads to adapt their strategies to fit immediate socio-demographic realities.

Conclusions

Public elementary school heads in Region XII possess a robust baseline of administrative, managerial, and interpersonal capabilities, maintaining a high aggregate level of execution rated *Highly Competent*. This validates the core competency component of Mumford et al.'s (2000) Theory of Effective Organizational Leadership, demonstrating that structured capability domains are directly reflected in leadership performance metrics.

Through an integrated mixed-methods lens, this performance disparity is understood in light of the exploratory field realities documented during Phase 2. The qualitative insights suggest that the lower manifestation of pedagogical support is an operational trade-off driven by bureaucratic intensification. High-stakes accountability metrics force school heads to prioritize heavily audited operational tasks, which systematically diverts time and energy from sustaining classroom observations, providing direct instructional support, and delivering structured teacher coaching.

Furthermore, school leadership execution within the region is an environmentally mediated and context-sensitive practice rather than a static individual trait. The significant differences in competency levels across city divisions confirm the theoretical relevance of Environmental Influences within the organizational leadership model. The data demonstrate that local ecological factors, including localized socioeconomic baselines, varying local government unit (LGU) resource streams, community cultural expectations, and student demographics, profoundly shape and constrain administrative mastery.

Recommendations

Based on the empirical conclusions drawn from the integration of the quantitative and qualitative data streams, the following institutional recommendations are offered to strengthen school head leadership efficacy across Region XII:

Formulate an Administrative Simplification Blueprint: The Department of Education's regional and division offices should collaborate to consolidate mandatory reporting formats and simplify procurement and financial liquidation checklists. Reducing clerical burdens will allow school heads to safely step away from routine bureaucratic tasks and dedicate uninterrupted time to active instructional supervision and to improving the student-centered climate.

Operationalize Abstract Competency Descriptors into Explicit Behavioral Metrics: To eliminate interpretive variance and subjective judgment in performance assessments, policy planners must operationalize abstract competency descriptors into explicit behavioral metrics. It is recommended to create concrete evaluation rubrics containing clear behavioral exemplars for personal professional attributes and structured human resource vision guides. This intervention will ensure that teacher



evaluations, coaching sessions, and feedback loops are implemented uniformly across all school divisions.

Design Targeted, Environmentally Aware Capacity-Building Programs: Future professional development pathways for school administrators should prioritize instructional leadership, learner-centered governance, and strategic resource management under restrictive field conditions. Rather than implementing general, non-contextual training programs, capacity-building initiatives should be explicitly tailored to address the unique ecological challenges faced by school heads across varying city divisions.

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Ethical Considerations

All participating school heads joined voluntarily following a thorough briefing regarding the study's scope, potential risks, and their explicit right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. To safeguard participant confidentiality across both quantitative and qualitative phases, data were anonymized by assigning alphanumeric codes and removing all identifying personal, division, or institutional markers from survey records and interview transcripts. Institutional approval and ethical oversight were secured through the official ethics review body, the Society of Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE). The researcher maintained a meticulous audit trail throughout the research process to document all data management and analytical decisions, ensuring total methodological transparency and integrity. In compliance with the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173), all electronic dataset files, audio recordings, verbatim transcripts, and field notes are kept strictly confidential and securely stored with sole access granted to the principal investigator.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interest regarding the conduct, evaluation, or publication of this study. The research was executed with absolute objectivity, fairness, and academic neutrality, ensuring that all statistical outcomes, qualitative themes, and integrated findings derive directly from the empirical

data collected in the field. This declaration confirms full commitment to international ethical standards and the rigorous integrity of the study's results.

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