

LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND MANAGERIAL COMPETENCE OF SCHOOL HEADS IN SAN FABIAN: BASIS FOR A CAPACITY-BUILDING PROGRAM

REYMUNDO D. ALVAREZ
Master of Arts in Education

Abstract

This study evaluated the leadership practices and managerial competence of public school heads in San Fabian, Pangasinan. It examined the relationship between these two constructs as a basis for a localized capacity-building program. A quantitative descriptive–correlational design was employed using total population sampling. Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire aligned with standards-based leadership expectations and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson’s product–moment correlation, independent samples *t*-test, and one-way ANOVA at a 0.05 level of significance. Results indicated that school heads demonstrated high leadership practices (overall mean = 4.29), with the strongest indicators in resource management, accountability and transparency, and vision and direction-setting. Managerial competence was rated very high (overall mean = 4.33), particularly in school planning, administrative transparency, and financial management. Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between leadership practices and managerial competence ($r = .752, p < .001$), indicating that higher leadership practice scores were associated with higher levels of managerial competence. Comparative analyses further showed that leadership practices did not differ significantly by sex or educational attainment, whereas managerial competence varied significantly by years of service as a school head. The findings suggest that strengthening school leadership should be approached as an integrated development of both leadership and managerial competencies, with differentiated support for less experienced school heads. A standards-aligned capacity-building program emphasizing instructional support, shared decision-making, delegation, and monitoring and evaluation is recommended.

Keywords: School Leadership, Managerial Competence, Leadership Practices, School Heads, Capacity-Building Program

1. Introduction

Effective school leadership is widely recognized as one of the most consequential in-school factors associated with educational quality, organizational performance, and learner outcomes. International evidence synthesizes that leadership contributes to improvement primarily through indirect pathways—shaping school culture, improving the quality of instruction, strengthening professional learning, and enabling data-informed decision-making (Day, 2020; Hallinger & Wang, 2020; Leithwood, 2021). In many systems, this has prompted renewed investment in leadership standards, leadership preparation, and continuous professional development for school principals and heads. The 2024/2025 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report underscores that leadership is central to quality education, and that leaders at multiple levels—from schools to system governance—must be strengthened to support learning and equity (UNESCO, 2024). Within this global framing, the Philippine basic education system has adopted a competency-based approach to defining and advancing school leadership, institutionalizing professional standards intended to translate policy goals into coherent school-level practices.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has progressively formalized expectations for school leaders through competency frameworks and standards. The National Competency-Based Standards for School Heads (NCBSSH), adopted through DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2010, provided an earlier national structure for articulating the roles, functions, and competency requirements of school heads, linking leadership performance to training and development systems anchored in Republic Act No. 9155 and the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (Department of Education [DepEd], 2010). This framework signaled a shift away from viewing leadership as an informal extension of seniority and toward treating leadership competence as measurable, developable, and accountable. A decade later, DepEd institutionalized the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) through DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2020, further strengthening competency-based leadership development by defining domains, strands, and indicators across leadership career stages (DepEd, 2020). The PPSSH outlines five integrated domains—Leading Strategically; Managing School Operations and Resources; Focusing on Teaching and Learning; Developing Self and Others; and Building Connections—providing a standards-based architecture for performance management and professional learning. This policy direction aligns with international reforms that emphasize instructional leadership and strategic management as inseparable capacities required of modern principals (Hallinger & Wang, 2020; Leithwood, 2021).

However, while standards provide a normative benchmark, their real value depends on the degree to which they translate into consistent leadership practices and measurable managerial competence in schools. The UNESCO GEM Report (2024/2025) notes that leadership preparation and practice vary widely across contexts, and that systems often lack robust evidence pipelines linking leadership development to improved practice and learner outcomes (UNESCO, 2024). This challenge is particularly relevant for local settings where capacity-building offerings may be available, yet systematic evaluation of their impact remains limited. In the Philippines, professional development is often implemented through division- and regional-level training initiatives. However, publicly accessible evaluation studies documenting pre-post competency gains or school-level performance effects are relatively uncommon—especially at the municipal level. As a result, school leaders may face a persistent implementation gap: they are expected to deliver standards-aligned leadership, but local evidence diagnosing their current practices and competence levels is often insufficient to guide targeted development interventions (DepEd, 2020).

Research in educational leadership provides strong theoretical and empirical grounds for examining leadership practices and managerial competence as interconnected constructs. Transformational leadership literature emphasizes the leader's capacity to build shared vision, motivate followers, and cultivate professional commitment, often associated with improved teacher engagement and organizational climate (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood, 2021). Instructional leadership research underscores the principal's direct focus on the core technology of schooling—teaching and learning—through curriculum supervision, monitoring learner outcomes, and supporting professional development (Hallinger & Wang, 2020). Distributed leadership perspectives argue that complex schools require leadership enacted through collaborative structures and shared responsibility, thereby strengthening collective efficacy and organizational learning (Harris, 2020; Spillane, 2006). Meanwhile, managerial competence literature highlights that effective leadership depends on the ability to operationalize plans, manage resources, monitor programs, and make timely decisions, reflecting Mintzberg's (1973) view of managerial work as an enacted set of interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles. Together, these traditions converge on a central proposition: leadership practices and managerial competence are mutually reinforcing—strong leadership without management risks becoming aspirational but ineffective, while strong management without leadership risks becoming bureaucratic and directionless (Leithwood, 2021).

This interaction between leadership and management is explicitly embedded in Philippine policy. The PPSSH integrates instructional leadership with operational and resource management, positioning school heads as both pedagogical leaders and accountable stewards of school governance (DepEd, 2020). In practice, this integration is increasingly critical because Philippine school heads operate in environments characterized by constrained resources, diverse learner needs, and rising expectations around equity, transparency, and learning recovery. Internationally, leadership's influence on learning is most consistently mediated through teacher capacity, instructional coherence, and organizational conditions (Day, 2020; Leithwood, 2021). For school heads, these mediating effects require managerial competence: strategic planning, sound financial stewardship, effective delegation, program evaluation, and timely problem-solving. The GEM Report further emphasizes that good leadership is evidence-informed, participatory, and oriented toward improving teaching and learning through purposeful system alignment (UNESCO, 2024). These expectations suggest that assessing school heads' leadership practices without examining managerial competence—or vice versa—would provide an incomplete account of school leadership effectiveness.

Despite the recognized importance of these constructs, empirical documentation remains uneven, particularly in smaller municipalities where leadership contexts differ from those in large urban systems. San Fabian, Pangasinan, provides an instructive case for this kind of diagnostic of localized leadership. As documented in the present study's context, San Fabian includes 34 public elementary and secondary schools led by school heads who must interpret and implement DepEd standards under the realities of municipal-level governance, resource constraints, and community partnership requirements. The study's rationale highlights that, while leadership and managerial competence are widely theorized as essential to school success, empirical evidence describing how these competencies manifest among San Fabian school heads is scarce, limiting local stakeholders' ability to design needs-based capacity-building interventions (Alvarez, n.d.).

In addition, the demographic and professional characteristics of school heads—such as years of service, educational attainment, and training exposure—may shape differences in how leadership and management are enacted. Leadership development research indicates that professional expertise accumulates over time through experience, mentoring, and sustained professional learning rather than solely through academic credentials (Day, 2020; Leithwood, 2021). In the Philippine context, competency standards such as the PPSSH are designed to support a developmental continuum, implying that novice and experienced school heads may require differentiated learning pathways to achieve exemplary practice (DepEd, 2020). Therefore, municipal-level studies that measure leadership practices and managerial competence and test how these vary across profile variables can generate evidence that is directly actionable, informing differentiated program design rather than generic training offerings.

Accordingly, this study positions leadership practices and managerial competence as two central variables essential for school improvement and policy alignment in San Fabian, Pangasinan. Conceptually, leadership practices refer to the observable behaviors and strategies through which school heads provide direction, support instruction, engage stakeholders, and cultivate professional culture, drawing on transformational, instructional, distributed, and situational approaches (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Hallinger & Wang, 2020; Harris, 2020; Spillane, 2006). Managerial competence refers to the ability to plan and implement school programs, manage resources, monitor performance, delegate responsibilities, and respond to emerging issues—competencies aligned with the PPSSH and consistent with managerial role perspectives (DepEd, 2020; Mintzberg, 1973). The study's focus on the relationship between these two constructs responds to both global and national calls for evidence-driven leadership development. UNESCO (2024) stresses that leadership reforms must be informed by diagnostic evidence, and DepEd (2020) frames standards as tools for professional reflection and targeted development.

The present research, therefore, aims to evaluate the leadership practices and managerial competence of school heads in San Fabian, Pangasinan, and determine whether these two constructs are significantly related. It further examines whether leadership and managerial measures vary across school heads grouped by selected demographic and professional profile variables. Ultimately, the study is designed as diagnostic-to-program research: its empirical findings serve as the basis for crafting a localized, standards-aligned capacity-building program responsive to the specific needs of San Fabian school heads. This approach is consistent with competency-based leadership development principles, which argue that development interventions are most effective when they are mapped to assessed competencies and tailored to identified gaps (Boyatzis, 1982; DepEd, 2020). Through this design, the study contributes to the municipal-level evidence base on school leadership in the Philippines while supporting DepEd's broader reform agenda of strengthening school leadership as a lever for educational quality and equity (DepEd, 2020; UNESCO, 2024).

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, non-experimental descriptive–correlational research design to determine the level of school heads' leadership practices and managerial competence and to examine the magnitude and direction of the relationship between these two constructs. A descriptive approach was used to summarize and characterize respondents' leadership practices and managerial competence using measures of central tendency and dispersion. The correlational component was utilized to test the association between leadership practices and managerial competence without manipulating variables or introducing controlled interventions, consistent with the intent of correlational designs to establish whether variables vary together in natural settings.

In addition, the study incorporated a comparative analytical element to determine whether leadership practices and managerial competence differed significantly across school heads grouped by selected profile variables (e.g., age, sex, educational attainment, and years of service). This design decision enabled the study to produce both baseline competence estimates and evidence of differentiated capacity-building needs, consistent with standards-based leadership development initiatives that emphasize diagnosis before intervention.

The design was aligned with the study's objective of generating empirical evidence for the development of a capacity-building program grounded in observed leadership and managerial performance patterns in the local school context. Because the study sought to measure existing conditions and relationships as they occur naturally, a descriptive–correlational framework was considered the most appropriate methodological approach.

2.2 Participants

The study participants were public school heads assigned to the Schools Division of Pangasinan II, specifically those serving in the municipality of San Fabian, Pangasinan. A total of 34 school heads participated in the study, representing the full complement of elementary and secondary school leaders in the locale at the time of data collection. Given the manageable population size and the intent to generate evidence that reflects the complete municipal leadership context, the study employed a total population sampling approach. This ensured that all eligible school heads were included and that the findings were not constrained by sampling error associated with partial representation.

Eligibility criteria included (a) currently designated as a school head (e.g., principal or officer-in-charge) in a public elementary or secondary school in San Fabian, and (b) actively serving during the conduct of the study. School heads who were on extended leave during the

data collection period or who did not provide consent were excluded; however, participation levels reflected full or near-full coverage of eligible respondents.

To facilitate descriptive and comparative analyses, participants were further characterized using selected demographic and professional profile variables, including age, sex, highest educational attainment, and years of service as a school head. These profile characteristics were used to examine potential differences in leadership practices and managerial competence across subgroups, thereby supporting the study's objective of generating evidence for targeted, needs-based capacity-building interventions.

2.3 Instrumentation

Data were gathered using a structured researcher-developed questionnaire designed to measure (a) the leadership practices of school heads and (b) their managerial competence, consistent with the competency expectations articulated in the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH). The instrument was composed of two main parts. The first part elicited the respondents' demographic and professional profiles, including age, sex, highest educational attainment, and years of service as a school head. The second part contained the scale items used to assess the two principal study variables. Items on leadership practices were organized to capture leadership behaviors aligned with commonly recognized leadership dimensions in school settings.

In contrast, the managerial competence items focused on key administrative and operational functions, such as planning, organizing, coordinating, monitoring, and decision-making. Responses were recorded using a Likert-type rating scale, enabling the computation of weighted means to determine the extent to which school heads demonstrated specific leadership and managerial behaviors. Prior to full administration, the questionnaire underwent content validation by qualified experts in educational leadership and school management to ensure clarity, appropriateness, and alignment with the study objectives. Revisions were incorporated based on validator feedback, and the finalized instrument was then administered to the study participants for data collection.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data were coded, tabulated, and analyzed using standard quantitative procedures to address the study objectives. Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the respondents' profile characteristics and to determine the level of leadership practices and managerial competence, including frequency counts, percentages, weighted means, and standard deviations. To examine the relationship between leadership practices and managerial competence, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was employed to determine the strength and direction of association between the two continuous composite measures. Differences in leadership practices and managerial competence across respondent subgroups were tested using inferential statistics appropriate to the nature of the grouping variables: an independent-samples t -test was used for comparisons involving two groups. In contrast, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used for variables with more than two categories. Where ANOVA results were significant, post hoc comparisons were conducted as necessary to identify specific group differences. All statistical tests were evaluated at a 0.05 level of significance, and results were interpreted in relation to the study's research questions and the standards-based leadership competencies embedded in the PPSSH framework.

3 Results

A total of 20 school heads participated in the survey-based assessment reported in the results section. The respondents were largely in the later stages of their professional careers. Specifically, 40% were aged 50 years and above, followed by 35% aged 40–49, and 25% aged

30–39. In terms of sex, 55% were male, and 45% were female. All respondents held postgraduate degrees: 60% held a master's degree, and 40% held a doctorate. Regarding leadership tenure, 35% reported 21 years or more of service as school head, while the remaining respondents were distributed across 16–20 years (20%), 6–10 years (20%), 11–15 years (15%), and 1–5 years (10%). Professional development exposure was relatively high, with 35% reporting participation in 10 or more trainings, while a smaller group (15%) reported participation in only 1–3 trainings, indicating uneven access to capacity-building opportunities.

Overall, school heads rated their leadership practices at a high level (overall mean = 4.29). The highest-rated leadership practice was effective management of resources ($M = 4.45$, Very High), followed by ensuring accountability and transparency ($M = 4.40$, Very High) and setting a clear school vision and direction ($M = 4.35$, Very High). School heads also reported very high performance in building partnerships with stakeholders ($M = 4.30$, Very High). Indicators rated comparatively lower—although still within the high range—were providing instructional support and feedback ($M = 4.10$, High) and promoting shared decision-making ($M = 4.20$, High).

School heads demonstrated a very high level of managerial competence (overall mean = 4.33, Very High). The top managerial competency was preparing clear and realistic school plans ($M = 4.50$, Very High), followed by demonstrating transparency in administrative tasks ($M = 4.45$, Very High) and implementing financial management effectively ($M = 4.40$, Very High). Ensuring a safe and supportive learning environment was also rated very high ($M = 4.35$, Very High). The lowest-rated managerial domains—though still high—were delegating tasks and responsibilities effectively ($M = 4.15$, High) and monitoring and evaluating school programs regularly ($M = 4.20$, High), suggesting areas where managerial routines could be further strengthened.

Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis indicated a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between leadership practices and managerial competence ($r = .752$, $p = .000$). This implies that school heads with higher leadership practice scores also tended to report higher managerial competence. In journal reporting, the probability value is more appropriately expressed as $p < .001$, indicating a statistically significant relationship at the 0.05 level.

Inferential tests indicated that leadership practices did not vary significantly across sex groups ($t = 1.245$, $p = .227$). Likewise, leadership practices showed no significant difference across educational attainment groups ($F = 2.315$, $p = .120$). In contrast, managerial competence differed significantly by years of service ($F = 3.842$, $p = .029$), indicating that longer-serving school heads generally demonstrated stronger managerial competence than their less-experienced counterparts.

4 Discussion

This study examined the leadership practices and managerial competence of school heads in San Fabian, Pangasinan, and tested whether these constructs are significantly associated. The findings provide empirical support for the proposition that leadership practice and managerial competence are mutually reinforcing capacities in school governance and improvement work. Overall, school heads reported high leadership practices (mean = 4.29) and very high managerial competence (mean = 4.33), suggesting that the participating school heads perceive themselves as consistently demonstrating standards-aligned leadership behaviors and strong administrative capability in their respective schools.

The results indicate that the strongest leadership indicators were those associated with resource management, accountability and transparency, and setting clear vision and direction. These patterns are consistent with contemporary leadership expectations embedded in standards-based models, such as the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), which require school heads to combine strategic leadership with school operations and

governance responsibilities. From an implementation perspective, the prominence of resource and accountability indicators may reflect the daily operational demands placed on school heads, particularly in public school systems, where compliance, reporting, and resource optimization are critical to sustained program delivery. School heads are frequently evaluated not only through instructional leadership outcomes but also through the integrity and efficiency of administrative processes. Thus, the high ratings in these domains suggest that the school heads' leadership may be strongly oriented toward governance, planning, and stakeholder accountability.

However, the comparatively lower (though still high) ratings for instructional support and feedback and shared decision-making warrant emphasis. While the overall leadership results are favorable, instructional leadership research suggests that consistent, systematic feedback and shared professional decision-making are among the most influential mechanisms through which leadership affects teaching quality and learning outcomes. In practice, instructional supervision and collaborative decision-making require time, technical expertise, and well-established professional learning routines—conditions that may be constrained when school heads face competing administrative burdens. The pattern observed here may therefore indicate a potential “leadership balance issue,” in which school heads demonstrate strong managerial and governance leadership but have comparatively fewer opportunities to strengthen instructional coaching and collaborative structures.

Managerial competence was rated very high, with particularly strong performance in school planning, transparency in administrative tasks, and financial management. These findings suggest that respondents perceive themselves as capable of translating school priorities into operational plans and of managing school resources to support accountability and compliance. Such competencies are crucial in ensuring that school-level programs are implemented systematically and that reporting requirements are met, especially in public-sector contexts where schools operate under defined guidelines and audit expectations.

At the same time, the lowest-rated managerial indicators—delegation and regular monitoring and evaluation of programs—should be considered priority areas for capacity building. Delegation is both a managerial and leadership skill: it requires organizational trust, clarity of roles, and the establishment of systems that enable distributed work without compromising accountability. Similarly, program monitoring and evaluation require structured data routines and the capacity to translate monitoring outputs into managerial decisions. Where these elements are weaker, school improvement may become overly dependent on the school head's personal effort rather than on institutionalized systems. Strengthening delegation and monitoring practices can therefore improve sustainability by enabling distributed leadership and more consistent evidence-based adjustments to school programs.

A major contribution of the study is the identification of a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between leadership practices and managerial competence ($r = .752$, $p < .001$). This finding aligns with leadership–management integration perspectives in school administration, which argue that effective principals must not treat leadership and management as separate domains. Instead, leadership provides the strategic and cultural direction for improvement, while management provides the operational systems that ensure plans are implemented with fidelity. In practical terms, this result implies that strengthening leadership practices (e.g., vision-setting, stakeholder engagement, instructional support) is likely to correspond with improved managerial competence (e.g., planning, resource management, monitoring), and vice versa. The strength of the correlation also suggests that capacity-building interventions should be designed as integrated competency development rather than as isolated training modules (e.g., “leadership seminar” separate from “management workshop”).

The results indicate that leadership practices did not differ significantly by sex ($p = .227$) or educational attainment ($p = .120$). This may suggest that the leadership expectations and professional role demands for school heads in the locale are relatively uniform across these

demographic categories. Additionally, because all respondents already held advanced degrees (master's or doctorate), educational attainment may not provide sufficient variability to produce measurable differences in leadership practice scores. In professional settings where minimum qualifications are already high, formal education may contribute less to between-group differences than practical experience, training exposure, and contextual factors.

By contrast, managerial competence differed significantly by years of service ($p = .029$). This result is theoretically plausible because many managerial competencies develop through repeated exposure to administrative cycles (planning, budgeting, implementation, reporting, audit preparation, and stakeholder negotiation). Longer-serving school heads may have developed stronger procedural knowledge, better institutional networks, and more refined strategies for managing competing demands. The implication for capacity-building is clear: professional development should be differentiated, with more structured managerial coaching and mentoring for less experienced school heads and more advanced leadership innovation programs for highly experienced leaders.

Taken together, the findings support a targeted capacity-building agenda for school heads in San Fabian. First, the overall high ratings indicate that foundational leadership and managerial competencies are strong; therefore, capacity-building should not be remedial in tone but should focus on deepening and sustaining effective practice. Second, the comparatively lower indicators suggest that professional development should prioritize (a) instructional support and feedback systems, (b) shared decision-making mechanisms, (c) effective delegation, and (d) monitoring and evaluation routines. These areas represent leverage points where improvements could enhance the school head's ability to translate strategic leadership into measurable instructional and program outcomes. Third, the strong relationship between leadership practices and managerial competence implies that capacity-building should integrate both constructs through applied learning designs—such as case-based problem-solving, coaching cycles, and performance-based action plans—rather than relying solely on lecture-based training.

Finally, the significant differences in managerial competence by years of service suggest that the proposed program should incorporate differentiated tracks (e.g., novice, mid-career, and veteran leaders) to address experience-based development needs. In doing so, the program can better operationalize standards such as the PPSSH by translating competency indicators into development pathways that are realistic, locally relevant, and measurable.

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