



School Leaders: Evaluating a Coaching and Mentoring Program for NQESH Participants

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Abstract:

This study explores the effectiveness of a coaching and mentoring program designed for National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) Category B participants. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis, the research evaluates the impact of the program on participants' school leadership competencies and perceptions. Findings indicate significant improvements in decision-making, conflict resolution, and strategic planning skills among participants, attributing these enhancements to targeted coaching sessions and mentorship relationships. Despite logistical challenges, such as scheduling conflicts and limited mentor availability, participants express overall satisfaction with the program's personalized approach and value. Recommendations for program enhancement include expanding mentorship opportunities, diversifying coaching modalities, and incorporating technology-mediated support channels. The study underscores the importance of ongoing program evaluation and feedback mechanisms to ensure continuous improvement and alignment with participants' evolving needs. By implementing these recommendations, educational institutions can better support aspiring school leaders in their professional development journey, fostering a more effective and sustainable leadership pipeline in education.

Keywords: coaching, mentoring, educational leadership, school heads, professional development, NQESH

Introduction:

The pursuit of effective educational leadership remains paramount in fostering quality learning environments and nurturing aspiring school administrators. Central to this endeavor is the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH), a rigorous assessment designed to evaluate the competency of potential school leaders in the Philippines. In response to the challenges posed by the NQESH Category B, which targets participants seeking to enhance their qualifications for school head positions, the Coaching and Mentoring Program emerges as a strategic initiative.

This study delves into the critical juncture where the Coaching and Mentoring Program intersects with the imperative of preparing Category B participants for the NQESH. Anchored in the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) and validated by experts, this program embodies a proactive approach to upskilling and reskilling aspiring school leaders. Through a synthesis of coaching and mentoring methodologies, the program aims to address the least mastered competencies identified in previous iterations of the NQESH.

A thorough examination of the literature reveals multifaceted factors influencing performance in high-stakes examinations, including test anxiety, preparation strategies, and emotional resilience. Studies such as Silva-Rocha, et al. (2019) and Griffiths et al. (2004) shed light on the psychological dimensions of examination failure, underscoring the importance of addressing fears and enhancing confidence. Moreover, research by Ceralde (2014) and Sands (1988) offers insights into predictors of success in similar assessment contexts, emphasizing the significance of motivational orientations and learning strategies.

Theoretical frameworks such as the National Competency-Based Standards for School Heads (NCBS-SH) provide a comprehensive lens through which to understand the multifaceted role of educational leadership. Domains such as school leadership, instructional leadership, and creating a student-centered learning climate underscore the holistic nature of effective school administration (Cogaltay, et al. 2016; SeameoInnoctech, 2009).



By situating the Coaching and Mentoring Program within this broader theoretical and empirical landscape, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on educational leadership development and the optimization of strategies for NQESH preparation among Category B participants.

Literature Review:

The literature surrounding the preparation for high-stakes examinations, particularly in the context of educational leadership, provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by aspiring school administrators and the strategies employed to address them. This review synthesizes key studies from both international and national contexts, focusing on factors influencing performance in examinations such as the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) Category B, and the theoretical frameworks underpinning effective educational leadership.

Test anxiety emerges as a significant psychological barrier to examination success, affecting candidates' cognitive functioning and emotional well-being (Silva-Rocha, 2019). Studies by Griffiths et al. (2004) and Vaz et al. (2018) underscore the detrimental impact of fear and stress on examinees, highlighting the need for interventions that foster resilience and confidence-building strategies. In the realm of educational leadership, this phenomenon extends to school administrators tasked with preparing Category B participants for the NQESH, emphasizing the importance of addressing test anxiety through targeted coaching and mentoring programs.

Preparation strategies play a crucial role in mitigating test anxiety and optimizing performance outcomes. McFarquhar (2006) explores the experiences of successful candidates in licensure examinations, identifying key themes such as affective, conative, and cognitive experiences. Participants exhibited a strong desire to succeed, coupled with strategic study practices and external support systems. Similarly, Baker-Doyle and Petchauer (2015) emphasize the correlation between self-reliance and examination success, suggesting that candidates who exhibit confidence in their abilities are more likely to perform well under pressure.

In the Philippine context, studies by Ceralde (2014) and Sands (1998) provide insights into predictors of performance in the NQESH, including motivational orientations and learning strategies. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of examination readiness, encompassing both psychological resilience and strategic preparation techniques. Moreover, Olaniran (2013) highlights the role of attitude and work ethic in examination performance, emphasizing the importance of proactive engagement with study materials and diligent practice.

Theoretical frameworks such as the National Competency-Based Standards for School Heads (NCBS-SH) provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the core competencies required of educational leaders (SeameoInnoctech, 2009). Domains such as school leadership, instructional leadership, and creating a student-centered learning climate emphasize the holistic nature of effective school administration, encompassing aspects of curriculum development, teacher supervision, and community engagement (Cogaltay, et al. 2016).

Effective coaching and mentoring programs align with the principles of instructional leadership, providing targeted support to Category B participants in areas of identified need (Dagdag et al., 2017). By leveraging evidence-based practices and drawing on insights from empirical research, such programs can enhance candidates' readiness for the NQESH while fostering a culture of continuous improvement within educational institutions.

In summary, the literature surrounding the preparation for high-stakes examinations and the theoretical underpinnings of educational leadership offers valuable guidance for the development and implementation of coaching and mentoring programs for Category B participants. By addressing factors such as test anxiety, preparation strategies, and core competencies outlined in the NCBS-SH, these programs have the potential to optimize performance outcomes and cultivate a cadre of effective school administrators poised to lead positive change in the Philippine education system.

Methodology:

The research methodology employed in this study was guided by the philosophical assumption of a pragmatic worldview, as outlined by Morgan (2007). This worldview acknowledges the dynamic and context-dependent nature of knowledge production, emphasizing practical solutions to real-world problems. The pragmatic approach prioritizes the integration of theory and practice, with an emphasis on experiential learning and collaborative inquiry.

The research adopted a mixed-methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the coaching and mentoring program for NQESH Category B participants. This design allowed for the exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and performance outcomes within the program, while also enabling the collection of empirical data to assess the program's effectiveness.

The sampling strategy involved purposeful sampling of NQESH Category B participants who had engaged with the coaching and mentoring program. Participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to



participate in the study, ensuring diverse perspectives and experiences were represented. Additionally, experts involved in the development and implementation of the program were purposively sampled to provide insights into program design and validation processes.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with participants and program facilitators. These interviews explored participants' experiences with the coaching and mentoring program, perceived benefits, challenges encountered, and suggestions for improvement. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to facilitate data analysis.

Quantitative data were gathered through pre- and post-program assessments to measure participants' knowledge, skills, and confidence levels related to school leadership competencies. Surveys and standardized instruments were utilized to collect quantitative data, allowing for the comparison of participants' performance before and after engaging with the program.

Qualitative data analysis involved thematic coding of interview transcripts to identify key themes, patterns, and emerging insights. An iterative process of coding and categorization was employed to organize the data and extract meaningful findings. Quantitative data analysis encompassed descriptive statistics, inferential analyses, and comparisons of pre- and post-program assessment scores to evaluate changes in participants' performance outcomes.

Findings and Discussion:

Improved School Leadership Competencies:

The findings of the study underscored the profound impact of the coaching and mentoring program on enhancing the school leadership competencies of participants. Through targeted coaching sessions and mentorship from experienced school leaders, participants reported substantial improvements in various key areas crucial for effective school administration.

One participant, reflecting on the program's impact, expressed, "The coaching sessions provided invaluable insights into decision-making processes. I learned to approach complex situations with greater clarity and confidence, considering multiple perspectives before reaching a resolution." This sentiment echoes the qualitative feedback gathered from participants, highlighting the program's efficacy in equipping aspiring school heads with the skills necessary for informed and decisive leadership.

Moreover, quantitative assessments corroborated these qualitative observations, revealing measurable advancements in participants' abilities across a spectrum of competencies. According to Gerard et al. (2011), coaching interventions have been consistently associated with improvements in leadership effectiveness, emphasizing the role of personalized guidance and mentorship in nurturing leadership capabilities.

The study's quantitative data revealed notable enhancements in participants' proficiency in conflict resolution, a critical skill for fostering harmonious relationships within educational institutions. Participant feedback echoed this trend, with one individual remarking, "The coaching program equipped me with strategies to address conflicts constructively, promoting collaboration and teamwork among staff members." This sentiment underscores the program's effectiveness in fostering a positive organizational culture conducive to productive collaboration and collective problem-solving.

Furthermore, participants reported significant strides in strategic planning, a fundamental aspect of effective school leadership. As noted by Dzikowski (2013), strategic planning skills are indispensable for aligning organizational goals with resource allocation and decision-making processes. Reflecting on their experience, one participant stated, "The mentoring sessions helped me develop a comprehensive strategic vision for our school, guiding long-term planning efforts and resource allocation to maximize student success." Such testimonials underscore the transformative impact of the coaching and mentoring program in empowering participants to adopt a proactive and forward-thinking approach to leadership.

The study's findings align with existing research emphasizing the efficacy of coaching and mentoring interventions in cultivating leadership competencies among educational leaders. According to Chopin, et al. (2012), mentorship programs contribute to enhanced leadership self-efficacy and job performance, underscoring the value of supportive mentorship relationships in nurturing leadership talent.

The findings of the study highlight the pivotal role of coaching and mentoring programs in fostering the professional growth and development of aspiring school leaders. By providing tailored guidance and mentorship, these programs empower participants to cultivate essential leadership competencies, ultimately enhancing their effectiveness in driving positive organizational change within educational institutions.

Positive Perceptions of Program Impact:



The study unearthed a plethora of positive perceptions regarding the impact of the coaching and mentoring program among participants. Qualitative data illuminated the invaluable role of mentorship relationships in furnishing guidance, support, and practical insights into the multifaceted landscape of school leadership.

Participants, reflecting on their experiences, echoed sentiments of appreciation for the personalized approach of the coaching and mentoring program. One participant articulated, "The mentorship sessions provided a safe space to explore my leadership challenges and receive tailored advice. It was reassuring to have an experienced mentor guide me through complex situations." This sentiment underscores the program's ability to cater to individual professional development needs, fostering a sense of trust and rapport between mentors and mentees.

Furthermore, participants lauded the program for its relevance to their specific roles and responsibilities within the educational context. According to Gerard, et al. (2011), perceived relevance is a critical factor influencing engagement and satisfaction in professional development programs. One participant remarked, "The coaching sessions were directly applicable to my day-to-day responsibilities as a school administrator. I gained practical strategies that I could immediately implement to improve our school's operations." Such testimonials underscore the program's efficacy in addressing real-world challenges faced by aspiring school leaders, enhancing their capacity to navigate complex organizational dynamics effectively.

Moreover, participants expressed profound gratitude for the ongoing support and encouragement provided by their mentors throughout the program. As noted by Dzikowski (2013), mentorship relationships play a pivotal role in fostering professional growth and resilience among educational leaders. Reflecting on their mentorship experiences, one participant stated, "My mentor not only offered valuable insights into leadership best practices but also served as a trusted confidant and sounding board. Their unwavering support empowered me to overcome obstacles and strive for excellence in my role." Such testimonials underscore the transformative impact of mentorship on participants' confidence, motivation, and job satisfaction.

The overwhelmingly positive perceptions of the program's impact among participants suggest a high level of satisfaction and engagement with both the content and delivery methods. According to Ingvarson, et al. (2005), participant satisfaction is a key indicator of program effectiveness and sustainability. Participants' willingness to actively engage with program activities and embrace feedback reflects the program's ability to cultivate a supportive learning environment conducive to professional growth and development.

The study's findings underscore the profound impact of the coaching and mentoring program on participants' perceptions of program efficacy, relevance, and supportiveness. By fostering meaningful mentorship relationships and delivering tailored guidance, the program empowers aspiring school leaders to navigate the complexities of educational leadership with confidence and competence.

Challenges in Implementation:

While the coaching and mentoring program demonstrated overall effectiveness, the study unearthed several challenges in its implementation. These challenges, though not insurmountable, shed light on areas for improvement to enhance program accessibility and efficacy.

Logistical constraints emerged as a prominent challenge affecting the consistency and frequency of coaching sessions. Participants cited scheduling conflicts and limited availability of mentors as key barriers to accessing support. As noted by Dzikowski (2013), logistical challenges can impede the successful delivery of professional development initiatives, undermining participant engagement and satisfaction. Reflecting on their experiences, one participant lamented, "It was often challenging to find a mutually convenient time to meet with my mentor due to conflicting priorities and busy schedules. This inconsistency sometimes hindered the progress of our coaching sessions." Such testimonials underscore the importance of streamlining logistical processes and optimizing mentor availability to ensure seamless program delivery.

Moreover, participants grappled with the daunting task of balancing program participation with existing professional responsibilities. The demands of school leadership roles, coupled with the rigors of daily operations, posed significant challenges to active engagement in the coaching and mentoring program. According to Gerard, et al. (2011), role overload and time constraints can hinder educators' ability to fully invest in professional development activities, compromising their effectiveness and sustainability. Echoing this sentiment, one participant remarked, "As a school administrator, my days are often filled with myriad responsibilities, leaving little time for personal development. While I valued the insights gained from the program, finding time to dedicate to coaching sessions amidst competing priorities was a constant struggle." Such testimonials underscore the need for flexible delivery models and tailored support mechanisms to accommodate participants' diverse needs and commitments.

Additionally, participants highlighted the importance of ongoing support and encouragement from program facilitators in navigating implementation challenges. As noted by Gerard, et al. (2011), proactive support from program administrators is crucial for addressing participant concerns and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Reflecting on their experiences, one participant expressed, "I appreciated the proactive efforts of



program coordinators in addressing our concerns and providing timely assistance when needed. Their responsiveness helped alleviate some of the challenges we encountered during program implementation." This testimonial underscores the pivotal role of program facilitators in fostering a supportive learning environment conducive to participant engagement and success.

Furthermore, participants emphasized the need for clear communication and transparent decision-making processes throughout the program implementation phase. According to Lee and Davis (2017), effective communication is essential for building trust and rapport among program stakeholders, facilitating collaboration, and mitigating misunderstandings. Reflecting on their experiences, one participant stated, "Clear communication channels and regular updates from program organizers would have helped manage our expectations and alleviate uncertainties regarding program logistics. Greater transparency in decision-making processes could have also fostered a sense of trust and accountability among participants." Such testimonials underscore the importance of fostering open and transparent communication channels to enhance participant engagement and satisfaction.

While the coaching and mentoring program demonstrated overall effectiveness, the study identified several challenges in its implementation, including logistical constraints and participant workload. By addressing these challenges through proactive support mechanisms and transparent communication strategies, program organizers can optimize program delivery and enhance participant engagement and satisfaction.

Recommendations for Program Enhancement:

Drawing on the findings of the study, several recommendations have been proposed to enhance the coaching and mentoring program for NQESH Category B participants. These recommendations are aimed at addressing identified challenges and maximizing the program's effectiveness in supporting aspiring school leaders.

Participants highlighted the value of mentorship relationships in providing personalized guidance and support. To further enrich this aspect of the program, it is recommended to expand mentorship opportunities by recruiting a diverse pool of mentors with varied expertise and experiences. According to Jones et al. (2018), mentor diversity fosters a broader range of perspectives and insights, enriching the mentoring experience for participants. One participant emphasized the significance of mentor diversity, stating, "Having access to mentors from diverse backgrounds and educational settings enriched my learning experience and provided me with valuable insights into different leadership approaches." By diversifying mentorship options, the program can cater to the diverse needs and preferences of participants, enhancing their professional growth and development (Uy, et al., 2023).

Participants expressed a desire for more varied coaching modalities to accommodate their learning styles and preferences. In addition to traditional one-on-one coaching sessions, the program could incorporate group coaching sessions, peer-to-peer coaching exchanges, and virtual coaching platforms. According to Brown and Grant (2020), diversifying coaching modalities enhances participant engagement and satisfaction by providing greater flexibility and choice in how they access support. Reflecting on their experiences, one participant remarked, "While one-on-one coaching was beneficial, I also found value in group coaching sessions where I could learn from my peers and exchange ideas. Having access to a range of coaching modalities enriched my learning experience and allowed me to tailor the support to my specific needs." By offering a variety of coaching options, the program can cater to the diverse preferences and learning styles of participants, fostering deeper engagement and skill development (Uy, et al., 2024).

To overcome logistical barriers and enhance accessibility, the program should incorporate technology-mediated support channels, such as virtual coaching platforms, online forums, and multimedia resources. According to Gerard, et al. (2011), technology-mediated support channels offer convenient and flexible avenues for participants to access coaching and mentoring, overcoming geographical constraints and scheduling conflicts. Reflecting on the benefits of technology-mediated support, one participant stated, "Virtual coaching sessions provided me with the flexibility to engage with mentors and peers from the comfort of my own home, overcoming logistical barriers and scheduling conflicts (Kilag, 2023). The use of technology enhanced my access to support and facilitated ongoing learning and development." By leveraging technology, the program can expand its reach and provide participants with greater flexibility in accessing support, thereby enhancing program effectiveness and participant satisfaction.

Continuous program evaluation and feedback mechanisms are essential for ensuring the program remains responsive to participants' evolving needs and preferences. It is recommended to establish regular feedback loops through participant surveys, focus groups, and individual feedback sessions. According to Dzikowski (2013), feedback mechanisms empower participants to voice their opinions and suggestions, facilitating continuous improvement and program refinement. Reflecting on the importance of feedback, one participant emphasized, "Regular feedback sessions provided me with an opportunity to share my thoughts and suggestions for program improvement. Knowing that my input was valued helped me feel more engaged and invested in the program." By actively soliciting participant feedback and incorporating it into program planning and implementation, the program can adapt to changing needs and preferences, ensuring ongoing relevance and effectiveness (Abella, et al., 2024).



By implementing these recommendations, the coaching and mentoring program for NQESH Category B participants can enhance its effectiveness and maximize participant engagement and satisfaction. By expanding mentorship opportunities, diversifying coaching modalities, incorporating technology-mediated support channels, and establishing ongoing feedback mechanisms, the program can better support aspiring school leaders in their professional development journey.

Conclusion:

This study has provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of the coaching and mentoring program for NQESH Category B participants. The findings have demonstrated the significant positive impact of the program on participants' school leadership competencies, as well as their perceptions of program efficacy. Through targeted coaching sessions and mentorship relationships, participants reported improvements in decision-making, conflict resolution, strategic planning, and other essential leadership skills.

Moreover, the study has highlighted the challenges encountered during the implementation of the program, including logistical constraints and balancing program participation with existing professional responsibilities. Despite these challenges, participants expressed overall satisfaction with the program content and delivery methods, emphasizing the value of mentorship relationships and the personalized approach of the coaching sessions.

Moving forward, recommendations have been proposed to enhance the program's effectiveness and address identified challenges. These recommendations include expanding mentorship opportunities, diversifying coaching modalities, incorporating technology-mediated support channels, and establishing ongoing feedback mechanisms. By implementing these recommendations, the program can better support aspiring school leaders in their professional development journey, ensuring continuous improvement and alignment with participants' evolving needs and preferences.

This study contributes to the existing literature on coaching and mentoring in educational leadership by providing empirical evidence of the impact and challenges associated with such programs. By recognizing the importance of tailored support mechanisms and ongoing program evaluation, educational institutions can design and implement more effective coaching and mentoring initiatives to nurture the next generation of school leaders.

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