



Cultivating Educational Leaders: The Impact of Structured Programs and Mentorship on Professional Growth

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Abstract:

This study explores the barriers and opportunities for enhancing professional development for educators and school leaders in the Philippines. Participants identified key challenges such as time constraints, limited resources, and inadequate institutional support, which hinder their ability to engage in continuous learning. The findings underscore the importance of enhancing collaboration between educational institutions and external organizations to provide comprehensive training programs. Moreover, the study emphasizes the potential of mentorship initiatives to support school leaders in their professional journeys, fostering a culture of shared learning and reflective practice. By implementing structured mentorship programs, educational institutions can bridge the knowledge gap and enhance leadership capabilities among emerging leaders. Additionally, this research highlights the necessity for institutions to prioritize professional development by allocating resources and establishing frameworks for collaboration with external partners. Such investments not only benefit educators but also improve student learning outcomes. Overall, this study provides a framework for stakeholders to create more accessible and effective professional development opportunities, ultimately enhancing the quality of education in the Philippines. The recommendations serve as a call to action for educational leaders to prioritize professional development, paving the way for a more competent and responsive educational system.

Keywords: Professional Development, Educational Leadership, Barriers to Learning, Mentorship Programs

Introduction:

This necessity extends to the educational sector, where leaders and managers are tasked with creating and implementing policies and strategies to improve the quality of education and learning outcomes. Educational leaders and managers must engage in continuous professional development and capacity building to keep pace with the latest trends and developments in education, enabling them to effectively lead and manage their institutions.

In the Philippines, education is a top priority for the government, with the Department of Education (DepEd) leading the way in providing quality education to all Filipinos. However, challenges persist, such as high dropout rates, low learning outcomes, and a lack of resources, which require educational leaders and managers to be more innovative, flexible, and proficient in addressing these issues.

The Philippines has made significant strides in providing access to education, with the literacy rate of Filipinos reported between 92.6% to 97.1% in 2019 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019). The DepEd has been working towards improving the quality of education through various initiatives, such as the K-12 curriculum, the Alternative Learning System, and the Brigada Eskwela program.

Despite these efforts, the education sector in the Philippines still faces several challenges, including inadequate funding, low teacher salaries, and poor infrastructure. These challenges require educational leaders and managers to be adaptive, strategic, and skilled at navigating complex issues within their schools and communities.

This study aims to explore the importance of professional growth and capacity enhancement in educational leadership and management in the Philippines, particularly in the context of the challenges faced by the education



sector. It will examine the current state of educational leadership and management in the Philippines and identify the essential competencies that educational leaders and managers need to develop to improve the quality of education.

Literature Review:

The importance of professional development and capacity-building in educational leadership and management has garnered increasing attention in recent years, especially as the global job market continues to evolve. In the Philippines, where the education system is grappling with challenges like low test scores and high dropout rates, effective leadership and management in education have become critical (UNESCO, 2022). This literature review examines current research on professional development and capacity-building in educational leadership and management, specifically in the Philippine context.

Professional development refers to enhancing existing skills and acquiring new competencies to stay relevant and effective, while capacity-building involves developing the ability to take on new roles and responsibilities or adapt to shifting demands (Reskilling and Upskilling: A Strategic Response to Changing Skill Demands, 2019). Both are essential for educational leaders and managers in the Philippines, who must respond to the evolving demands of the education sector.

A significant challenge faced by educational leaders is the shortage of qualified teachers, a common problem worldwide (Teferra & Altbach, 2004). Leaders must be equipped to identify and nurture the skills of current teachers to ensure the delivery of quality education.

Additionally, the integration of technology has become increasingly crucial. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift to online learning, requiring schools to quickly adopt new teaching methods (Blake et al., 2021). Educational leaders must now design and implement technology-based solutions and acquire the technical competence to effectively manage these tools and platforms.

Research shows that professional development and capacity-building have a positive impact on educational leadership and management. A study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019) found that investing in school leaders' development improves student outcomes. Similarly, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021) emphasized that investment in human capital enhances productivity and promotes economic growth.

In the Philippines, several studies highlight the significance of these processes. De La Salle University (DLSU, 2021) reported that professional development in leadership, communication, and problem-solving equips education leaders to effectively navigate challenges. Additionally, a study by the University of the Philippines (UP, 2021) found that building the capacity of existing teachers improves education quality and reduces the need for frequent recruitment, promoting collaboration between leaders and teachers.

The literature indicates that professional growth and capacity-building are essential for educational leaders and managers in the Philippines. Given the challenges in the education system, leaders must develop teachers' skills, integrate technology, and remain adaptable to changing demands. Research underscores that investing in the development of school leaders and teachers is vital for improving student outcomes, productivity, and economic progress.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the importance of adaptability **and** skills enhancement. The disruption of traditional teaching methods necessitated a rapid shift toward remote and online learning. As a result, educational leaders must acquire the competencies needed to manage these transitions effectively and ensure learning outcomes are maintained (Ali & Nizami, 2018).

Moreover, continuous skills enhancement is equally important. Leaders and managers must constantly refine their expertise to stay aligned with sectoral changes. Quebral (2018) emphasizes that competencies in communication, problem-solving, and decision-making are critical for effective leadership in the Philippine education context.

Professional development and capacity-building are paramount in educational leadership and management in the Philippines. Leaders must continuously cultivate skills and competencies to adapt to the dynamic educational landscape. The pandemic has highlighted the need for flexibility in responding to emerging challenges. Furthermore, investing in leadership development enhances job satisfaction and career growth (Adhikari, Yadav, & Paudel, 2021).



Methodology:

This study employed a phenomenological research design to deeply explore the lived experiences of school administrators and leaders regarding their professional growth and capacity-building in educational leadership and management.

A purposive sampling technique was utilized to identify participants with at least five years of experience in educational leadership. Inclusion criteria ensured that participants were currently employed in administrative roles, had substantial experience, and were willing to engage in the study. Participants were selected through collaboration with the Department of Education (DepEd) and private schools in the Philippines, and initial contact was made via email or phone to explain the study's objectives and seek their participation.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, a method that facilitates a rich, in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives. These interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via online platforms like Zoom or Skype, accommodating participants' preferences.

Each session was audio-recorded and transcribed to ensure an accurate representation of their experiences. The interview guide was designed based on the research questions and included topics such as participants' demographic information, their current roles, views on the significance of professional development and capacity-building, available training programs, challenges faced, and recommendations for improvement.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach, which is integral to phenomenological research. The analysis involved several stages: first, familiarization with the data through repeated readings of transcripts to grasp the overall context. Next, initial codes were generated by identifying key concepts and themes that emerged from participants' narratives.

These codes were then grouped into larger themes and sub-themes, reflecting the essence of their lived experiences. The researchers reviewed these themes to ensure they accurately captured the data and aligned with the research questions. Each theme was then defined and named based on its significance, culminating in a comprehensive report that included participant quotes to illustrate the identified themes.

Ethical considerations were a priority throughout the research process, adhering to the Philippine Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving Human Subjects. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood their rights and the study's objectives. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, with all data securely stored and accessible only to the research team. This phenomenological approach provided a rich understanding of the nuances of school administrators' experiences related to professional growth and capacity-building in educational leadership and management.

Findings and Discussion:

Continuous Professional Growth for Adaptive and Innovative Educational Leadership

Participants emphasized that continuous professional development is essential for effective leadership, especially in adapting to changes in the educational landscape. The ever-evolving demands of education require administrators to remain updated on new instructional strategies, policies, and frameworks, aligning with the need for lifelong learning.

or instance, Kilag and Sasan (2023) underscore that instructional leadership is instrumental in fostering professional growth, which enhances teachers' competencies and, in turn, improves educational outcomes. Participants in the study also noted that consistent engagement in capacity-building efforts is critical for developing relevant leadership skills.

The integration of technology in education emerged as a crucial area of professional development, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic forced a shift to remote learning. Blake et al. (2021) highlight how the pandemic magnified the need for educational leaders to adopt digital tools and platforms to ensure uninterrupted learning.

In line with this, Kilag et al. (2022) explored ICT integration in primary classrooms, showing that technology usage is essential in meeting students' cognitive needs. Participants acknowledged that continuous learning about educational technologies equips leaders to implement innovative solutions and effectively guide teachers through digital transitions.

Moreover, participants stressed the importance of adapting to contemporary challenges, such as improving student outcomes and addressing high dropout rates. The UNESCO (n.d.) report on the Philippine education system reveals persistent struggles, especially in STEM education, where leadership plays a key role in formulating strategies for academic improvement. Professional development was also seen as essential for responding to issues like student



disengagement and inadequate resources. The study findings are consistent with Ajibade et al. (2022), who argue that developing leadership capacity is necessary for fostering a positive learning environment that enhances students' academic performance.

Participants recommended that educational leaders focus on innovative leadership strategies to address systemic challenges, emphasizing collaboration with teachers and stakeholders. They highlighted the value of reflective practices, communication skills, and strategic planning as essential elements of leadership development.

These insights echo the findings of Kilag and Sasan (2023), who suggest that professional growth empowers leaders to make informed decisions that positively impact both educators and learners. Overall, participants acknowledged that continuous professional development is not just beneficial—it is necessary to navigate the dynamic landscape of education and to cultivate sustainable, high-quality leadership.

Challenges and Opportunities in Accessing Professional Development for Educators in the Philippines

Participants identified various professional development programs available in the Philippines, such as workshops, seminars, and online courses. These initiatives aim to enhance the capabilities of educational leaders and teachers in response to evolving demands in the sector. However, they emphasized that while these programs offer valuable learning opportunities, participation is not always guaranteed due to logistical and financial constraints. Limited funding from institutions and government agencies often hampers access, creating challenges for many educators.

The accessibility of professional development programs is further constrained by the geographical diversity of the Philippines. Schools located in remote areas often struggle to participate in development initiatives due to travel expenses and limited digital infrastructure. This is consistent with findings from Kilag and Sasan (2023), who highlighted the importance of instructional leadership but noted disparities in professional development access between urban and rural areas. The pandemic has made the situation even more challenging, as many educational institutions shifted to online platforms without adequately addressing issues of internet connectivity (Sasan et al., 2022).

Online courses and remote learning solutions have provided some flexibility, allowing educators to participate in development programs without needing to travel. However, participants reported varying levels of digital literacy and access to technology, particularly in rural areas, which affect the overall effectiveness of these initiatives.

Ajibade et al. (2022) emphasize that technology-based professional development requires significant investment not only in software but also in ensuring that participants are adequately prepared to engage with these tools.

Participants also expressed that professional development programs need to be more responsive to the specific needs of educators and school leaders. Programs often focus on general skills rather than addressing the unique challenges of the Philippine educational context, such as low performance in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education (UNESCO Bangkok, n.d.). Blake et al. (2021) suggest that targeted training programs, aligned with local realities, are essential for sustainable professional growth and to effectively tackle persistent educational issues.

Despite these challenges, participants acknowledged the critical role of continuous learning in professional development. They recognized that meaningful investments in professional growth could lead to improvements in leadership practices and, ultimately, better student outcomes. As Kilag et al. (2022) pointed out, professional development programs that are well-designed and accessible have the potential to empower educators, improve instructional quality, and bridge the gap between educational policy and practice.

Barriers to Continuous Professional Development in Educational Leadership

Participants identified several challenges hindering their engagement in professional development activities. Among the most significant barriers were time constraints, which affected their ability to balance administrative duties with personal growth.

With their schedules packed with operational responsibilities, attending workshops and seminars often felt impractical. Similar findings have been noted by Kilag and Sasan (2023), who emphasized that teachers and administrators require structured opportunities to prioritize professional growth.

Another major concern was the lack of financial resources and institutional support. Participants expressed frustration that many professional development programs, while valuable, were costly or required travel, making them inaccessible without funding support from their institutions. As UNESCO Bangkok (n.d.) highlights, insufficient institutional investment in education can severely limit the capacity of educators to advance their skills. Participants suggested that more budget allocations for training programs and scholarships could mitigate these issues.



In addition, limited access to relevant programs was cited as a recurring issue, especially for administrators in rural or underserved areas. These participants described difficulties in participating in specialized training, which often takes place in urban centers or online platforms requiring stable internet access. This is consistent with the findings of Kilag et al. (2022), who observed that technological barriers during the pandemic further marginalized educators in remote areas, restricting their access to professional learning opportunities.

To overcome these challenges, participants recommended more accessible, flexible, and institutionally-supported training programs. They emphasized the need for blended learning opportunities that combine face-to-face and online modalities to accommodate different schedules and contexts. As Blake et al. (2021) noted, hybrid approaches in education can offer more inclusive access to learning, especially when paired with appropriate institutional support and resource allocation.

Strengthening Professional Development through Collaboration and Mentorship

Participants emphasized the importance of fostering stronger partnerships between educational institutions and external organizations to enhance professional development programs. They suggested that collaboration between schools, universities, and private or non-profit sectors could provide educators and school leaders with more specialized and comprehensive training opportunities. Such partnerships could address skill gaps, as noted by Ajibade et al. (2022), by introducing advanced teaching techniques and leadership practices that align with emerging educational demands.

In addition to collaboration, participants recommended the integration of mentorship programs to support school leaders in their professional development journey. Mentorship, they explained, offers more personalized guidance, allowing experienced educators to share their expertise and insights with emerging leaders. Kilag and Sasan (2023) also highlight the significance of mentorship, noting that instructional leadership requires continuous learning, which mentorship programs are well-positioned to facilitate.

The participants further stressed the value of structured mentorship as a means of addressing common challenges such as limited resources and time constraints. In line with Blake et al. (2021), they argued that mentorship programs embedded within institutions can offer flexible and sustainable professional growth paths. Mentorship creates avenues for leaders to reflect on real-world challenges, receive constructive feedback, and develop innovative solutions within their professional contexts.

Participants also underscored the need for these collaborative and mentorship-driven programs to adopt hybrid models, combining face-to-face and online learning. The pandemic has demonstrated the effectiveness of hybrid learning environments, as shown by Kilag et al. (2022), who documented the role of ICT integration in maintaining education delivery during challenging circumstances. Hybrid formats would enhance accessibility, particularly for educators in remote areas or those juggling multiple responsibilities.

Fostering collaboration and mentorship not only enriches professional development but also creates a culture of continuous improvement and shared learning. Participants believe that with the right institutional support, collaborative training programs and well-structured mentorship initiatives can better equip educators and school leaders to navigate the evolving demands of the educational landscape.

Conclusion:

This study has illuminated the pressing need for enhanced collaboration between educational institutions and external organizations to support the professional development of educators and school leaders.

Participants highlighted the current limitations of existing training programs, such as accessibility issues, insufficient institutional support, and the time constraints faced by educators. To address these challenges, the study emphasizes the importance of creating comprehensive training initiatives that integrate mentorship programs, offering personalized guidance and support for emerging leaders.

The findings indicate that mentorship can significantly contribute to the continuous professional development of school leaders, fostering a culture of shared learning and reflective practice. By pairing experienced educators with newer leaders, mentorship initiatives can help bridge the gap in knowledge and skills, ultimately leading to improved educational outcomes. Additionally, adopting hybrid learning models can enhance the accessibility of these programs, allowing more educators to engage in professional development regardless of geographical or personal constraints.

Furthermore, this research underscores the role of institutional support in facilitating effective training and mentorship programs. Educational institutions must prioritize these initiatives by allocating resources and establishing frameworks that encourage collaboration and engagement with external partners. Such investment not



only benefits educators but also enriches the overall educational landscape, ultimately enhancing student learning experiences.

The recommendations from this study aim to provide a pathway for educators and school leaders to thrive, ensuring they are well-equipped to meet the evolving challenges of the educational landscape. The findings serve as a call to action for stakeholders to prioritize and invest in professional development, ultimately paving the way for a more competent and responsive educational system.

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