

School Heads' Level of Performance in School Improvement Planning Journey: Basis for Enhanced Leadership and Management Program

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Abstract. The school improvement plan encompasses the development of activities to help schools reach the goal of providing access to quality education. Embarking on this initiative, this study aimed to determine the level of performance of select school heads in Dinagat Islands in their journey to developing and crafting school improvement plans. The mixed-methods research design was utilized with frequency, percentage, and weighted mean. The study revealed that most school heads are at the elementary level, aged 31 to 40, and have 6 to 10 years as school heads deployed primarily in small schools, under Head Teacher positions, and with very satisfactory performance. Results revealed that school heads are classified under the Basic Level as having fair performance, with a partial understanding of the guidelines for crafting a school improvement plan. They are also categorized as Emerging school heads who fully implemented school interventions to address key result areas, thereby having a very high level of implementation in their school improvement plan. There are drawbacks and gains in crafting the enhanced school improvement plan based on supporting documents presented, adherence to policies, assessing priority improvement areas, developing projects, and alignment to key result areas. It is further recommended that with additional profile, the school heads may be upskilled with strategic planning by revisiting guidelines stipulated under DepEd Order 44 s, 2015, along with Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads indicated in DepEd Order No. 24 s, 2020, and aligned with access, quality, governance, equity, well-being and resiliency.

Keywords: Leadership; Management; School head; School improvement plan.

1.0 Introduction

Education is an indispensable keystone for development. The success of educational institutions lies in the role of school leaders (Kilag et al., 2023). As the blueprint of a school, the School Improvement Plan starts with initiated detailed programs, activities, and projects as interventions to address issues and concerns along with access, quality, resiliency and well-being, equity, and governance. Such are implemented within three consecutive school years (DepEd Order No. 44 s. 2015). Through this, community stakeholders are actively involved in educational processes and goals. Such undertakings include shared governance and feedback mechanisms to ensure accountability and continuous improvement. It seeks to enhance the three primary essential education outcome areas: access, quality, and governance (Guzman, 2022). In addition, as stated in the DepEd Order No. 29 s. 2022 the school improvement plan will be recalibrated according to the intermediate outcomes and enabling mechanism.

As a mechanism, the School Improvement Plan directs school leaders in identifying, determining, and addressing issues and concerns (Marianno et al., 2023). It has collectively supporting factors in the organization that enhance students' possibilities for learning about a complex world. Moreover, as stated in the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001 (RA 9155), every school head has the authority, accountability, and responsibility to develop the school education program and improvement plan. It envisions creating an environment of collaboration that is communicated and disseminated to stakeholders through a school report card (DepEd Order No. 44, 2015).

School heads are catalysts of change. The quest for quality education depends on the kind of leadership school heads demonstrate (Dellomas & Deri, 2022). Manzano and Illescas (2023) confirmed that school leaders are a significant vehicle for educational change and development in creating a productive, disciplined learning environment. In a school improvement plan, shared governance and feedback mechanisms are evident in coming up with sound decisions aligned with the vision and mission of education, including education goals (Casinillo & Suarez, 2021). Stevenson (2019) assured that an improvement plan is not enough without a strategy. The process of thinking through the proposed actions and how they were supposed to connect to intended results must be evident in school improvement planning. School heads must plan with strategy, including its process and implementation. Carvalho et al. (2022) added the importance of having strong management teams involved to ensure the process of producing efficient interventions for the school's welfare. Moreover, Decir and Paglinawan (2024) confirmed that school heads who effectively apply practices and engage in strategic planning would provide essential and meaningful change in their schools. This will lead to the successful facilitation of the school improvement plan with stakeholders' utmost support and development in pursuit of educational excellence (Balindong et al. 2024).

Finally, this research aims to determine the school leaders' potential in developing the school improvement plan and their challenges, which may require future training that will equip them with management empowerment and leadership skills for better implementation. This includes the profile of the school handled and the personal profile of the school leaders, the level of understanding of the essential concepts relevant to guidelines for the enhanced school improvement plan, and the level of implementation of the school interventions.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a mixed-methods investigation (Creswell, 2018). The qualitative analysis used analysis of school interventions and initiatives to address problems as part of the school improvement planning process. The qualitative study revealed the potential and level of performance in conceptualizing projects. The quantitative research revealed the performance level in the strategic planning process involving the ASSESS-PLAN-ACT stated in Department Order No. 44 s. 2015.

2.2 Research Locale

With the approval of the School Division Superintendent, Department of Education, Division of Dinagat Islands, the study was conducted among Elementary and Secondary school heads in the province of Dinagat Islands with ten (10) districts. This location was chosen because it caters to the potential of school heads in their quest for school improvement planning. This also included challenges and opportunities in their educational leadership and management.

2.3 Research Participants

The respondents were school heads in both elementary and secondary schools who had undergone the process of developing and implementing the 3-year road map of a School Improvement Plan. There were 17 in the elementary level, 8 of whom were males and 9 females. Likewise, 15 were in the secondary level, 8 of whom were males and 7 of whom were females. Both levels came from the division's 10 districts.

2.4. Research Instrument

The researcher constructed a questionnaire with the assistance of the adviser. It included four parts. Part I consisted of the profile of school heads along with sex, age, length of service, office performance commitment

review form rating, position, and school level. Part II covered a 20-item multiple choice type anchored from Department Order No. 44 s. 2015, the Guidelines on the Enhanced School Improvement Plan. Part III includes survey questions with a Likert scale. Part IV had structured questions focused on the experiences, challenges, issues, and concerns relevant to crafting the school improvement plan upon the completion of the contents of the questionnaire validation. With the final questionnaire ready for administration, a dry run was conducted with the 10 school heads randomly chosen in the division via Google Forms. Facilitated and followed up with chosen school heads in the dry run to ensure the completion and validation. After harvesting the answers through spreadsheets, it was subjected to the Cronbach alpha reliability test. The instrument for the school heads gave a value of 0.7, which is interpreted as good, acceptable, and reliable. Finally, the questionnaires were revisited and prepared for administration to the target respondents.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The following course of action was the leading guide of the proponent. First, permission to conduct the study was sought from the Division Superintendent on the recommendation of the Research focal Persons. Second, the researcher introduced herself and explained the study's rationale to school head-respondents. Third, school heads were instructed to answer the questionnaire via Google Forms. The answers were gathered through spreadsheets. Strong internet connectivity was necessary to accomplish the three parts of the questionnaires. Fourth, the researcher facilitated the respondents to answer and complete the questionnaires. Constant communication was done via social media. Fifth, the gathered data was obtained from the spreadsheets. Sixth, the data was analyzed using frequency, percentage, and mean percentage scores. The qualitative analyses were made through open and axial coding systems. Open coding, the first level, looks into distinct concepts and categories in the data (basic unit of analysis) and breaks down data into first-level and second-level categories. Axial coding uses concepts and categories to confirm concepts and categories accurately represent the gathered responses and to explain how concepts and categories are related (Creswell, 2007). Related studies supported interpretations of the results. Lastly, the researcher assured the respondents that all of their responses would be kept strictly confidential and that the findings of the study would only be used for educational purposes.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

This research study followed ethical guidelines. The respondents' participation was voluntary. They were to dismiss themselves from the study whenever they felt uncomfortable. Their participation was protected from harm: physical, social, psychological, and all other forms of harm were kept to an absolute minimum. The dignity and well-being of elementary teachers who responded were always protected. The research data remained confidential throughout the study, and the respondents' rights were protected, ensuring scientific or academic integrity. Furthermore, proper communication of results must be practiced to ensure that this research study is free of plagiarism or research misconduct.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Table 1 indicates the profile of the school according to the school level. There are only 15 (46.88) secondary school heads, while 17 (53.12) elementary school heads actively participated and patiently answered the questionnaire. This implies that there are more school heads in the elementary than in the secondary who responded to the given questionnaire.

Table 1. *Profile of the schools - based on the grade level*

School Level	Frequency	Percentage
Secondary	15	46.8
Elementary	17	53.1
Total	32	100

Table 2 indicates the school profile according to the school size or the population of learners. From the 15 secondary schools, more than half (53.34%) of the school respondents are categorized as small schools having nine (9) and below number of teachers. Likewise, the very least respondents are only two (2) large schools having more than 30 teachers. This implies that many small schools are distributed to various places to access basic education in the province.

Table 2. *Profile of the schools according to their size*

School Size	Secondary (Frequency)	Percentage	Elementary (Frequency)	Percentage
Small	8	53.3	10	58.3
Medium	5	33.3	5	49.4
Large	2	13.3	2	11.7

Table 3 indicates the profile of the respondent school heads according to sex. There are sixteen (16) male school heads and sixteen (16) female school heads in elementary and secondary schools. This implies that the gender perceptions of both males and females are given equal perspectives based on their individual experiences as school heads in their respective assignments.

Table 3. *Profile of the schools according to their sex*

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	16	50.0
Female	16	50.0

Table 4 indicates the profile of school heads according to age ranges. There are 12 (37.50%) school heads whose ages ranged from 30 to 40 years old, while 10 (31.25%) school heads in the same age range from 41-50 and 51 and above, respectively. This implies that there are more school heads in their early workforce stage. The findings were in contrast with the study conducted by Dellomas and Deri (2022), which found that the wisdom of older school heads is more powerful and persuasive than that of young ones due to their belief in maturity and emotional stability.

Table 4. *Profile of School Heads based on age range*

Age	Frequency	Percentage
31 -40	12	37.5
41-50	10	31.2
51 and above	10	31.2

Table 5 indicates the positions of the school heads. Among the respondents, there are 5 (15.63%) Schools in charge (SIC), 21 (65.65%) are Head Teachers (I-IV), and only 6 (18.85%) are full-pledged school heads occupying the item as Principal I-IV. This implies that more than halved (65.63%) are head teachers and still candidates and aspirants for the qualifying examination for school heads.

Table 5. *Profile of school heads based on position*

Position	Frequency	Percentage
School in -charge	5	15.6
HT-I - HT-IV	21	65.6
PI-PIV	6	18.8

Table 6 presents the profile of school heads based on length of service as school heads. There are 10 (31.25%) who are managing as school head in 1-5 years, only 11 (34.38%) are handling school for 6 to 10 years, and only 11 of them are also leading a school for more than 11 years. This implies that the respondents were mostly or nearly equal in the length of service. Egloso and Benavides (2024) assured the findings that school heads with longer tenures have the chance to develop profound institutional backgrounds, establish strong harmonious relationships within the school community, and implement long-term strategic initiatives that contribute to sustaining improvement and innovation.

Table 6. *Profile of school heads based on length of service*

Length of Service	Frequency	Percentage
1-5 years	10	31.25
6-10 years	11	34.38

Table 7 reflects the profile of school heads regarding their Office Commitment and Review Form (OPCRF) Rating according to school level. The secondary school heads had a mean rating of 4.27, higher than elementary school heads with a 4.20 mean rating; both were qualitatively described as Very Satisfactory. This implies that all school head – respondents are on the same performance level. Such findings are supported by Casinillo and Suarez (2021) that school leaders had a very satisfactory rating as reflected in their initiative to improve their leadership traits and style to increase instructional effectiveness as well as the performance of their schools.

Table 7. *Profile of school heads based on OPCRF rating*

Level	Mean	Qualitative Description
Secondary	4.27	Very Satisfactory
Elementary	4.20	Very Satisfactory

Table 8 displays the mean score of the school heads according to grade level in the 20-item test focused on the guidelines for crafting a school improvement plan. The secondary school heads had a mean score of 11.80 (59.00), while elementary school heads had a mean score of 10.41 (52.06). Both are classified as Basic, indicating that the school heads in both levels have Fair Performance, with a partial understanding of crafting school improvement plans based on DepEd Order 44 s, 2015. Such findings are affirmed by Galeposo (2020), who states that school heads should acquire a comprehensive theoretical understanding of the concepts of the school heads' competencies and their practical applications for them to develop, improve, and enhance their ability in school management. In addition, dynamic professional development and more developed critical and analytical skills are needed to pass the examination for full – pledged principal. Moreover, Dellomas and Deri (2022) assured that a leadership enhancement program would improve and sustain the leadership practices of school heads.

Table 8. *Level of understanding of the essential concepts relevant to guidelines to enhanced school improvement plan*

Level	Mean	Mean Percent Scores	Level	Qualitative Description
Secondary	11.8	59.0	Basic	Fair Performance: Have a partial understanding of crafting a school Improvement Plan.
Elementary	10.4	52.0	Basic	Fair Performance: Have a partial understanding of crafting a school improvement plan.

Table 9 considers the level of implementation of the DepEd Order 44 s, 2015 in their journey of crafting the School Improvement Plan. The secondary school heads had a mean rating of 63.28 (10.59), while Elementary school heads had 68.41 (10.80). It can be gleaned that both levels had a Very high level of implementation. This implies that they were emerging school heads who fully Implemented school interventions to address key result areas to their utmost capabilities as school heads. The findings are confirmed by Dacpano (2022) in his study that the high practice of transformational leadership of school heads yielded a way for school improvement and performance marked by the sustained process of stakeholders' participation and significant student learning outcomes. Successful facilitation of the school improvement plan was an offshoot of utmost support and development from stakeholders (Balindong et al., 2024).

Table 9. *Level of implementation of the school interventions implemented to address the intermediate outcomes and enabling mechanism*

School Level	Mean	SD	Level	Qualitative Description
Secondary	63.2	10.5	Very high	Emerging school heads who fully Implemented school interventions to address key result areas
Elementary	68.4	10.8	Very high	Emerging school heads who fully Implemented school interventions to address key result areas

Table 10 presents the experiences of school heads based on the associated theme. The consolidated answers of the school heads were summed up in the table for elementary and secondary school students according to the gathering of supporting documents, adherence to policies, assessing priority improvement areas, developing projects, and alignment to key result areas. Such findings are supported by Manzano and Illesca (2023), who state that school heads encountered various challenges in leadership and governance, curriculum and learning, accountability and continuous learning, and management of resources. These challenges were necessary factors to be addressed for effective school management and improvement. Moreover, Decir and Paglinawan (2024) confirmed that effective practices and engagement in strategic planning provided meaningful change in the schools.

Table 10. *Experiences of school heads in crafting school improvement plan*

Associated themes	Secondary	Elementary
Gathering of supporting data-driven documents for crafting the School Improvement Plan	- Some data lacked details, and completing them entails more time to gather - School planning team was organized for the collection of data	- The collected of data was done with a limited time - Some members of the school planning team were pre-occupied with other responsibilities
Adherence to policies of the DepEd Order 44 s. 2015	- The timeline was not correctly set and organized accordingly - There was a limited walkthrough of the guidelines	- The phases included in the guidelines were followed with some sort of inconsistencies - The previous experience became the basis for crafting
Assessing priority Improvement areas (PIA)	- The criteria for PIAs are all set for very high priority and very few and low priority - There was unequal weight given to areas set as a priority	- Specific areas have the same scale since they were needed in the various projects - Seemingly all PIAs were given high weight
Developing suitable projects	- There were a lot of projects initiated that were focused on one key result area - More projects were focused on access only	- The names of the projects were too specific to the expected output under governance - The names of the projects were not adequately conceptualized and aligned with the key result areas
Aligning of projects to key result areas	The projects were not equally distributed to meet the demands in every key result area	The developed projects were primarily done by school heads and later presented to stakeholders

4.0 Conclusion

This study concluded that the majority of the school heads are at the elementary level, aged 31 to 40 years old, have 6 to 10 years as school heads in small schools, under Head Teacher plantilla positions, and with very satisfactory performance. They are classified under the Basic Level as having fair performance, with a partial understanding of the guidelines for crafting a school improvement plan. They are both Emerging school heads who fully Implemented school interventions to address key result areas, thereby having a very high level of implementation in their school improvement plan. There are drawbacks and gains in crafting the enhanced school improvement plan based on supporting documents presented, adherence to policies, assessing priority improvement areas, developing projects, and alignment to key result areas. It is further recommended that with additional profile, the school heads may be upskilled with strategic planning by revisiting guidelines stipulated under DepEd Order 44 s, 2015, along with Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads indicated in DepEd Order No. 24 s, 2020, and aligned with access, quality, governance, equity, well- being and resiliency.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

The author did the conception, design, analysis, writing, or revision of the manuscript.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest about the publication of this paper.

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