

Improving School Heads' Strategic Leadership: A Call for Policy Makers

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Executive Summary

Strategic heads of elementary schools are sources of competitive and high-end advantage to their respective school. The attainment of school effectiveness in realizing its mandate of providing functional and quality basic education rests upon their shoulders. Successful school leadership is so dependent on their capacity to lead school strategically. From the key findings described in this paper, five policy recommendations are hereby proposed which can be adopted and implemented upon review and approval of the policy makers in the basic education sector.

Introduction

Leading people strategically is the lead domain of professional standards for school heads in the Philippines. In this realm of leading elementary schools, school heads are constantly balancing its key result areas in order to lead efficiently and effectively, come up with a vision for school entrusted to them as area of assignment and adapt or remain competitive amidst the fast-paced and ever-constant paradigm shift in education. Strategic leadership is confined to a school of thought that the school leader's ability to foresee, envision, remain flexible and to capacitate others to create strategic change is very necessary. Further, leading strategically enables

school heads' capability to overtly express and implement a strategic vision for elementary school as an educational organization, or a part of the educational landscape involving Key Stage 1 learners composed of Kindergarten to Grade 3 pupils and Key Stage 2 learners made up of Grades 4 to 6 pupils with their educators and the stakeholders, and to propel and ignite others in the community to acquire that vision.

The Philippine government through the Department of Education institutionalized the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSH) through Department of Education Order Number 24 series 2020. The PPSSH was used as formal and standard means of providing quality school head in the K to 12 basic education with leadership functions. This is a public statement of professional responsibility and accountability of school heads. Through this, school heads exactly demonstrate and portray what they are expected to know, do, and value from one career stage to another career stage. School heads are guided and categorized by well-defined career stages of professional development from beginning to exemplary practice. This engages them to actively explore ways of having continuing effort to attain high levels of proficiency. In this context, they will be able to provide support for professional learning and development, help identify development needs and facilitate uniform assessment of performance. Therefore, good strategic leaders shall have the following characteristics: effective, active listeners, strong communicators, positive, passionate, collaborative, innovative, diplomatic, honest, empathetic, and visionaries. By employing measures to possess and display these qualities, the school heads are already becoming improved in leading strategically and can assist and move the team towards learning success and better performance.

Several laws in the country such as Republic Act No. 4670 otherwise known as the Magna Carta for Public School Teachers, Republic Act No. 10533 or Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, and Republic Act No. 9155 Entitled Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001 underscored the need for sustained efforts to support the professional growth and development of all non-teaching personnel towards higher levels of efficiency and effectiveness. Moreover, at principal's continuous improvement and learning is important as it is a determinant of student and teacher learning, significant in policy implementation and nurturing a healthy and collaborating school stakeholders. In addition, Senol (2019) pointed out that there is a need for professional development of educational leaders to fulfill their roles because the role of educational leaders has been undergoing diverse changes in the era of globalization due to diverse needs and expectations of the stakeholders of education.

With the mentioned premises, it can be concluded that these can be sufficient evidences to make a policy brief to help and assist the policy makers with focus on school heads to improve their performances and reach the higher stages in reference to their careers. Furthermore, this policy brief may be utilized to improve the school heads personally and professionally. This policy brief will provide advancement in the professional capabilities and potentials of elementary school heads, their career stages, and further develop and improve their level of performance in leading strategically.

Key Findings

The kind of leadership gives a notable difference to school, its partners, teachers as well as to learners' outcomes. Lu et al. (2015) stipulated that principal leadership is paramount in schools today. Worldwide, it is a fact that schools require effective leaders and managers to provide the most fit and functional education for their clientele which are the learners. This encompasses strategic leadership of highly able and effective school principals. Mendels (2012) shared that the most effective principals are duty bound for establishing a school-wide vision of commitment to high standards and the success of all students. Leading strategically as the first domain of the PPSSH plays a pivotal role to an effective school head or principal. In relation to the data gathered, the succeeding findings were revealed:

There is a need to develop the professional capabilities and potentials of elementary school heads.

There is a need to develop the professional capabilities and potentials of elementary school heads. Data revealed that there are 7 or 17% among the school heads whose age ranges from 25-35 years, 14 or 34% whose age ranges from 36-45 and 20 or 49% ages from 46 and above. There are 25 or 61% of the school heads are male and 16 or 39% are female. Likewise, there are 33 or 80% are married and 8 or 20% are still single. Twenty-nine or 71% are college graduates with masteral units, 11 or 27% earned masteral degrees with doctoral units, and there is only 1 or 2% earned a doctorate degree. There are 18 or 44% are 10 years in the service, 16 or 39% are 11-20 years in the service and 7 or 17% are 21 and above in the service.

There are 15 or 36% rendered 6 years and below, and 15 or 36% rendered 7-12 years and 11 or 28% rendered 13 and above in the service. There are 15 or 36% are Teachers-in-Charge, 16 or 39 % are Head Teachers, and 10 or 25% are principals. There are 13 or 32% of the respondents passed the principal's test known as national qualifying examination for school heads, and 28 or 68% are non-passers.

There are 3 or 7% underwent the international level, 13 or 32% in the national level and 25 or 61% in the local level. There are 30 or 73% of the school heads are handling 1-10 teachers, 8 or 20% of them are handling 11-20 teachers and 3 or 7% are handling at least 21 teachers. There are 23 or 56% from the local level, 2 or 5% from international level and there are 16 among the respondents did not receive any award.

The dominant age of the school heads is 46 and above. Plurality of data also show that they are males, married, college graduates with masteral units, with a maximum of ten years in the service, 12 years and below prior to the promotion to the next higher school head position, head teachers, non-passers to the national qualifying for school heads, attended local trainings and seminars, handling a maximum of 10 teachers, and received awards in the local levels.

Principals are critical actors in ensuring the desired performance of schools and learners. The need to develop the professional capabilities and potentials of elementary school heads is very evident in the findings on the professional and potential data of the elementary school heads. With this, the findings of Petrovic (2015) on the need for efforts to improve professional

preparation and professional development of leaders in education and point to possible directions of their further development support this in order to avoid emerging issues on their career stages.

The emerging issues on career stage of the elementary school heads were identified.

Emerging issues on the career stage of the elementary school heads were clearly identified. It showed that there were 14 among the school heads who considered themselves under career stage 1 and 17 belong to career stage 2 in leading strategically with respect to the 7 key result areas in leading strategically. Most of the school heads belong to career stage two.

This shows that there is a need to improve the career stage of elementary school heads. Strategic leadership development is crucial to school principals. Appropriate preparation for their role, related in-service professional capacity building and support for active in the service principals or school heads are indispensable. In this sense, strategic school leadership has emerged to be a key policy priority.

Strategic leadership development needs are urgent concerns and issues in education policy agenda in the country as high-quality principals leading strategically is instrumental for school's constant improvement and learners within the standard performances. This delineates an increasing recognition that the type of school heads leading strategically is critical, if schools are to produce the best possible outcomes for their learners, their stakeholders, and the nation. Hence, increasing their level of performance in leading strategically is of prime importance.

Increasing the level of performance of elementary school heads in leading strategically

is a major challenge for professional development.

Increasing the level of performance in leading strategically is a major challenge for professional development among the school heads of elementary schools. As determined by the study, the computed weighted means on the level of performance of the school heads under career stage 1 along the 7 domains in leading strategically are 4.92, 4.14, 4.36, 3.57, 4.36, 4.14 and 4.29 respectively. The computed weighted means on the level of performance of the school heads under career stage 2 along the 7 domains in leading strategically are 4.30, 4.11, 4.07, 3.30, 4.33, 4.15 and 4.20 accordingly. The performance of the school heads along the 7 Key Result Areas of Leading Strategically yielded to a very satisfactory level. This informs that the performance level of school heads in leading strategically did reach the highest performance level. With this, they need to sustain or improve this level of performance in leading strategically. This claim is supported by Carvalho et al. (2021) in their idea that strategic leadership is a critical issue for school leaders. In addition, Di Liberto et al. (2015) underscored the impact of school leaders' leadership on school outcomes.

Referring to the study of Treviño and Arcadia (2015), three categories surfaced as factors of successful principals. First, Individual characteristics composed of traits of the individual exercising the role of school principal, which includes thoughts, feelings, attitudes, habits, and values. Second, skills which are lists of aptitudes that the school principal must carry out the activities derived from his function. Third, knowledge which pertained to the antecedent that school principal possesses about any field, which has acquired by experience or learning, and is linked to his school function.

Strategic leadership in education is about a school head or principal's ability to anticipate, envision, maintain flexibility, and think strategically. This also concerns the ability to work with others to initiate change that will create a school's feasible future. Gathering information on the performance of school principals and acting on the information about their effectiveness as leaders is an essential part of improving school performance (Trinh et al., 2019). It is necessary to determine the level of performance of school heads in leading strategically. More so, it is expedient to determine the relationship between their profile and level of performance in leading strategically.

There is no correlation between the profile and performance level in leading strategically of elementary school heads.

There was no correlation between the profile and performance level along the 7 key result areas in leading strategically of elementary school heads. The computed chi square on the relationships between the profile and the level of performance of the school heads along the 7 domains ranges from 0.03 to 9.38. These did not exceed the tabular values at 2 and 4 degrees of freedom and tested at .05 level of significance.

This is supported by the study of Espiritu (2019) in her findings that majority of the demographic profile of the schools proved that the training programs conducted in the Division of Rizal do not really affect the students' academic performance. School principals moderately agree that the conducted training programs attained the objectives. However, school principals agree that the trainings conducted have weaknesses that need to be investigated. The results commend to conduct more training programs and seminars for the improvement of administrative and supervisory skills of the school heads. Aside from Occupational Competencies, there should be

more training programs and seminars under Professional and Personality Characteristics and on the Attendance and Punctuality. Close monitoring and evaluation mechanism of the on-the-job behavior of the participants after the conduct of the training must be installed to ensure the value and effectiveness of the seminars or training programs.

Key Policy Recommendations

On the light of the discussion given, the following policy recommendations are made.

1. Develop programs and continue professional development of school heads through trainings and seminars or webinars; passing the qualifying examination for school heads, and taking advance studies. Susilowati (2021) explained that school principal is one of the integral players in improving the quality of education. This informs that, in leading the school, the ultimate responsibility of achieving the key result areas in leading strategically depends to them. In this situation, there is always an immediate need to continuously develop programs that will capacitate them on this domain. They need to be updated and abreast of the current relevant, useful, and functional knowledge, skills, and values instrumental in realizing the first domain of national standards for school heads in the Philippines.

School heads, in their early years in the work and even those long enough handling the position, must learn about their roles and responsibilities, handle the many facets and challenges of role transformation, and develop efficient and effective ways of strategically leading the school entrusted to them. Neophyte school heads face work overloads, major role adjustments, isolation, peer pressures, high staff

and stakeholders' expectations. Investing on professional development of school heads through trainings, seminars, and webinars; passing the qualifying examination for school heads, and taking advance studies will provide greater strategic leadership advancement among the school heads. The need to learn, relearn and unlearn on how to lead strategically is always a trend for school heads that never goes out of style.

Sampat & Oomen (2020) recommended in their article to conceptualize programs that will train and connect school heads. They perceived and claimed that it is always necessary and of topmost concern to provide scaffold to school leaders to face the challenges the people or society want them to lead through.

These programs and professional developments may range or vary on duration such as from one-day conference to a two weeks' workshop to a multi-year advanced-degree program. Delivery is either through in person or online, during the school day or outside of normal work hours in the government, through one-on-one interactions or in group situations. Technology will be useful in the delivery of the programs or professional development activities.

2. Take priorities for the school heads' career enhancement and advancement leading to higher stages. Senol (2019) emphasized that educational leaders who join professional development update and extend their knowledge and improve their performance on the job by applying new knowledge and skills to implement the best educational practices in schools which covers leading the entire school organization.

This is in consonance to the policy of the Department of Education on training and development programs which is aligned to the policies and guidelines of the Civil Service Commission (CSC), National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), Department of

Budget and Management (DBM), and Commission on Audit (COA). The Department of Education has the thrust and capacity or capability of providing professional activities to school heads that will further enhance their knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable them to perform their functions effectively in leading the school. The trainings, seminars, workshops, conferences, scholarships, and job-embedded learning that will be provided to them along strategic leadership will redound to their enhanced and advanced career stages.

3. Consider the school heads' continuing higher education and executive trainings to achieve higher level of performance. Susilowati (2020) showed in his research that novice principals assigned for not more than two years found several problems related to adapting with new environment, condition of the school's physical facilities, teaching and non-teaching personnel, school fund and school leadership. One of the ways to address these is the school heads' continuing higher education and executive trainings to achieve higher level of performance. Petrovic (2015) recommended to increase participation of school heads in significant activities of professional preparation and professional development that will contribute to the continuous improvement of their leadership roles, provide a special study program for education and professional preparation of leaders in education, and increase the offer of professional training programs in the field of leadership.

4. Evaluate and review the school heads' profile and terms of references to create varied results of performances. School leaders are expected to possess a higher qualification or profile more than any other of their subordinates. Profile as set of data is considered an accompaniment in carrying out the strategic

leadership role of a school head. Its evaluation and review are important since an outdated school heads need to be refreshed and advanced in his strategic leadership work competence. Reviewing their profile and terms of references are also needed to ensure that nothing is taken for granted. Thus, will realize the key result areas in leading strategically of the school heads.

5. Adopt and implement an action plan on leading strategically for the development of the school heads. An action plan in strategic leadership of school heads will edify and build the knowledge skills, abilities and even values needed in performing the work culminating to the desired end results of leading strategically focusing on the seven key result areas. It will improve the strategic leadership competence and skills of school heads. The learning activities based from the specific goals and objectives in the action plan that focuses on leading strategically of a school organization will help them get better and more improved leaders of the educational institution. They will be ever ready to face significant issues, challenges, problems that beset strategic school leadership. Generally, this will focus on crafting a strategic leadership action plan which will be implemented benefiting school heads. The crafted action plan outlines a tangible professional development plan on leading strategically along the 7 key result areas that is specific, measurable, attainable, resource oriented or realistic and time-bound. This is facile to implement because it is a well-thought-out strategic leadership action plan.

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