

Assessing the Long-Term Impact of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) on Leadership Effectiveness and Emerging Educational Demands

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100400017>

Received: 01 April 2026; Accepted: 07 April 2026; Published: 24 April 2026

ABSTRACT

This study assessed the long-term impact of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) on leadership effectiveness and readiness for emerging educational demands. It examined the demographic profiles of school heads, the perceived effectiveness of NQESH in leadership preparation, and its role in addressing contemporary challenges. The research explored factors influencing NQESH effectiveness, demographic differences in perceptions, the relationship between efficacy and preparedness, and challenges in applying NQESH competencies. A mixed-methods design was used, with quantitative data collected through structured surveys on demographics, perceived effectiveness, and preparedness, and qualitative data gathered via interviews on leadership experiences and application challenges. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, correlation tests, and group comparisons, supplemented by thematic analysis of qualitative data. Findings showed most respondents were mid-career school heads from rural schools who recently qualified through NQESH. Generally, NQESH effectively built foundational leadership skills in instructional leadership, crisis management, and teacher development. However, gaps existed between theoretical training and practical application. Significant differences in perceived effectiveness by location and experience emerged, as did strong correlations between perceived leadership effectiveness and preparedness for emerging issues. Qualitative insights highlighted challenges such as resource constraints, heavy administrative workloads, and the need for ongoing mentoring. The study recommends enhancing practical training, sustained professional development, and post-certification support to bridge the gap between theory and practice, ultimately improving school leadership effectiveness in dynamic educational contexts.

Keywords: Emerging educational demands, leadership effectiveness, NQESH, school heads

INTRODUCTION

The National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) is key to developing educational leadership in the Philippine education system. As the primary tool for selecting effective principals and assistant principals for public elementary and secondary schools, the NQESH underscores the Philippines' commitment to educational excellence. The Department of Education (DepEd, 2024) requires all prospective school heads to undergo and pass this stringent test to ensure they possess the knowledge and skills needed for successful school administration.

The test designs to gauge a range of skills necessary for leadership positions in schools, including strategic planning and resource management, instructional leadership, and the ability to cultivate a healthy school culture. The identification of prospective leaders who will lead schools toward development is an effort by NQESH to promote student outcomes and teacher improvement, and, indirectly, to improve overall education quality nationwide.

Notwithstanding its intended purpose, the NQESH has come under attack for its efficacy and impartiality. Its critics maintain that the examination does not always capture the dynamic and complex reality of school leadership, especially given the changing requirements of contemporary education. There are also debates

surrounding the availability of preparation materials and the possibility of biases in the examination process that might disadvantage some candidates (Galleposo, 2021).

Emerging leaders need to place great importance on principals' and assistant principals' ability to address challenges such as technological innovation, inclusive education, and community participation. As the education landscape continues to change, the NQESH must keep pace and remain relevant to accurately identify leaders who can serve the needs of the education system now and in the future.

Despite the widespread use of the NQESH to determine school leadership appointments, the gap in empirical research on the performance of NQESH passers on the job over extended periods remains. While there is a body of research examining preparation methods and the short-term effects of exam passage, little research offers longitudinal evidence of how NQESH-certified school leaders affect school performance, instructional quality, or school culture in the long run. This creates a severe gap in determining the ongoing effectiveness of the test as a school reform policy instrument. In addition, there is growing concern about the alignment between the competencies examined in the NQESH and the demands that school leaders encounter in a 21st-century learning environment (Galleposo, 2021).

For instance, Lacanaria (2024) found that while most Region VIII NQESH passers exhibited excellent work performance for 3 years, almost all had very poor or poor NQESH ratings in school leadership, instructional leadership, and school management. It also found no significant correlation among self-efficacy, motivation, and NQESH ratings, suggesting that exam performance does not necessarily translate into effective school leadership in practice. Also, there is growing concern about whether the competencies measured by the NQESH align with the real demands that school leaders encounter in a 21st-century learning setting. As schools increasingly need leaders with expertise in digital transformation, mental health services, crisis management, and equity-based leadership, it is crucial to examine whether the NQESH design and content appropriately capture these emerging leadership requirements (JSSERS, 2025). The existing literature calls for consideration of whether the test actually measures the competencies that are most important in today's educational environments. As schools increasingly need leaders skilled in digital transformation, mental health care, crisis management, and equity-driven leadership, it becomes essential to determine whether the existing structure and content of the NQESH adequately capture these changing leadership needs. It invites one to ponder if the assessment tests the competencies that actually count in present-day education.

Besides, there is limited research identifying how socio-economic and geographical disparities affect the accessibility, preparation, and pass rates of candidates undertaking the NQESH. For example, future school leaders from rural settings have limited equitable access to review schemes and mentoring services compared to those in urban areas. This structural imbalance can perpetuate leadership disparities, as fewer qualified candidates from underrepresented or marginalized regions can clear the exam, thereby curtailing the inclusiveness and diversity of school leaders across the nation.

Republic Act No. 9155, the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, establishes the foundation for implementing the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) and underscores the importance of competent school leadership in improving educational standards and school performance. DepEd Order No. 32, series of 2010, reinforces this by establishing policies for leadership development and emphasizing the need for a rigorous assessment system, such as NQESH, to ensure that school leaders have the skills and knowledge required to lead effectively. More recently, DepEd Memorandum No. 013, series of 2024, reaffirms the ongoing importance of the NQESH in preparing school heads to address complex educational challenges through continuous professional development. Collectively, these legal frameworks stress the necessity of regularly reviewing and updating the NQESH to maintain its relevance, fairness, and effectiveness, thereby promoting a cycle of development and accountability that benefits school leaders, schools, and ultimately, students by supporting high-quality education.

Although the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) serves as a key requirement for appointing school leaders in the Philippines, significant research gaps persist regarding its long-term impact on leadership effectiveness. Existing studies primarily emphasize exam preparation and immediate post-

qualification outcomes, leaving limited empirical evidence on how NQESH competencies translate into sustained leadership performance. This gap is critical because essential leadership functions—such as curriculum delivery and instructional supervision—require deeper investigation into the real-world application of NQESH-acquired skills (Eliophotou Menon, 2020). Research has also not sufficiently examined how school heads use these competencies amid rapid social change and crises, despite evidence highlighting the importance of crisis-responsive leadership (Leithwood et al., 2019).

Moreover, concerns regarding equitable leadership selection persist, particularly regarding regional and socioeconomic disparities that may affect access to preparation resources and opportunities for leadership roles (Ultra, 2021). Equally unexplored is the alignment between NQESH competencies and 21st-century leadership demands, including crisis management, digital literacy, and climate resilience (De Castro, 2023). Given these gaps, further research is needed to determine whether the NQESH effectively identifies leaders capable of driving educational improvement and whether its competency framework corresponds to the evolving realities of school leadership. Such inquiries can inform more responsive policies and strengthen leadership preparation and development in Philippine education.

At the national level, the Department of Education (DepEd) is also actively developing its educational policies to better align with the evolving needs of leadership in the education sector. This constant endeavor is important because it seeks not only to improve the performance of school administrators but also to ensure that these leaders can cope with the dynamics of contemporary education. Nonetheless, concerns are emerging about the NQESH framework's capacity to examine in depth key competencies beyond conventional managerial capabilities. Particularly, stakeholders are asking whether the framework adequately addresses key areas such as adaptive leadership—a necessary attribute for effectively responding to evolving education environments—and digitalization, which integrates technology into learning and management, as well as climate resilience, which prepares school leaders to handle environmental issues that affect education (De Castro, 2023).

At the division level, the analysis indicates stark differences in NQESH pass rates across regions. In urban settings, potential school heads are often given more opportunities to prepare through exposure to review programs, training materials, and guidance from seasoned leaders. Those in rural or geographically remote settings, however, are confronted with significant challenges, usually without the same resources and opportunities to prepare well for leadership positions. This extreme disparity highlights serious concerns about equal access to leadership positions in the education sector, posing a risk of becoming a stumbling block to the development of diversity and inclusiveness in school leadership. The stakes of this imbalance could result in a homogeneous leadership pool that fails to represent the multifaceted needs and perspectives of diverse communities (Ultra, 2021).

At the district level, it is no easier for newly appointed school heads who have successfully qualified for the NQESH. Even though they are formally recognized through assessment, most of these leaders face tremendous hurdles in converting their competence as assessed into actual, effective leadership practices. Reports from local school monitoring and evaluation systems indicate that a significant number of NQESH passers are struggling in key areas of educational leadership, including curriculum leadership, teacher supervision, and crisis management. These reports indicate a disconcerting disconnect between the content tested in the NQESH exam and actual expectations and skills needed to be an effective school leader (Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). The necessity for more support and targeted professional development for these leaders is apparent to close this gap and ensure effective school leadership.

The Philippine school leadership's competence, responsiveness, and ability to address today's challenges are ensured by the NQESH, which remains a successful tool. However, studies are still underway to examine its long-term impact on selection equity and school leadership effectiveness. In conclusion, this research aims to advance the Philippine education system by providing valuable insights for policy changes, leadership development, and improved school management through a methodical evaluation.

The main purpose of this study was to assess the long-term impact of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) on leadership effectiveness and its alignment with emerging educational demands, with

the end view of providing insights to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of NQESH in developing competent school leaders. Specifically, this study aimed to describe the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of school location, years of service as school head, and year of passing the NQESH. It further sought to determine the perceived effectiveness of NQESH in preparing school heads for leadership roles with respect to instructional leadership, school performance metrics, stakeholders' engagement, crisis and change management, and teacher development.

In addition, the study aimed to determine the extent to which NQESH prepares school heads to address emerging educational demands such as digital leadership, mental health and well-being, inclusive education, climate and crisis resilience, and equity and access. It also examined the factors that influence the effectiveness of NQESH in preparing school heads for leadership roles and in addressing these emerging educational demands. The study further aimed to determine whether there are significant differences in the perceived effectiveness of NQESH and in the extent of preparation for emerging educational demands when respondents are grouped according to their profile, as well as to examine the significant relationship between the perceived effectiveness of NQESH in leadership preparation and the extent to which it equips school heads to address emerging educational demands.

Moreover, the study sought to describe how school heads perceive the relevance of passing the NQESH to long-term leadership effectiveness, particularly in curriculum implementation and instructional supervision, and how NQESH certification contributes to their professional growth and career progression. It also aimed to identify the key challenges encountered by NQESH passers in applying the competencies assessed in the examination to actual educational leadership practice, aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) domains, namely leading strategically, managing school operations and resources, focusing on teaching and learning, developing self and others, and building connections.

Finally, the study aimed to integrate quantitative and qualitative findings by explaining and expanding the quantitative results through qualitative insights, and by determining how the lived experiences and reflections of school heads support, clarify, or contradict the quantitative findings on the relationship between NQESH effectiveness and long-term leadership performance across different demographic profiles.

LITERATURE SURVEY

The literature situates the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) as a standardized policy instrument for identifying and preparing school leaders in the Philippines, formally institutionalized in 2011 through DepEd Memorandum No. 143, s. 2010, and later aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) to reflect evolving leadership expectations (DepEd Order No. 97, s. 2011; DepEd Memo No. 9, s. 2012). Grounded in global leadership frameworks emphasizing instructional leadership, operational management, and interpersonal competencies (Leithwood et al., 2019), the examination has continued to evolve, most notably with the shift to a fully digital format during the COVID-19 pandemic using PPSSH-aligned, higher-order assessment frameworks (Malipot, 2021). Despite these reforms, empirical studies consistently report low national passing rates—30.6% in 2015 (Surwela, 2019), 36.9% in 2022 (DepEd, 2022), and 26% in 2023 (Servallos, 2024)—reinforcing international concerns that standardized leadership examinations may inadequately capture the multidimensional and context-dependent nature of effective school leadership (Eliophotou Menon, 2020). Qualitative evidence further reveals that NQESH performance and preparedness are heavily influenced by contextual factors such as access to resources, workload, and institutional support systems, suggesting that leadership readiness extends beyond individual knowledge mastery (Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). Collectively, the literature indicates that while the NQESH has adapted to policy reforms, professional standards, and technological advances, persistent performance challenges highlight the need for more holistic leadership development approaches that integrate assessment with sustained capacity building, contextual support, and continuous professional development to better cultivate future-ready school leaders.

The National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) as both a certification requirement and a developmental milestone for aspiring school leaders in the Philippines, symbolizing alignment with DepEd leadership standards and serving as a gateway to career advancement (Duma, 2022; Galleposo, 2021). However,

empirical evidence reveals a persistent gap between perceived leadership readiness and actual competence, as school heads with high self-efficacy often demonstrate weak performance in critical leadership domains, alongside declining national and regional pass rates that signal systemic preparation challenges (Lacanaria, 2024; Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2024; Galleposo, 2021). Qualitative studies further show that success in the NQESH depends on holistic preparation involving theoretical knowledge, practical experience, mentoring, and psychosocial support, highlighting that leadership development extends beyond cognitive mastery (Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). While some studies associate NQESH certification with stronger strategic planning and decision-making skills (Fernandez, 2019), others document difficulties among passers in applying theoretical knowledge to real-world, context-sensitive leadership problems (Cruz & Bautista, 2022), particularly in rural and resource-constrained settings where collaboration and continuous professional development play a greater role in leadership effectiveness (Mendoza, 2022). Overall, the literature underscores enduring mismatches between NQESH-assessed competencies and the realities of school leadership, compounded by limited post-certification mentoring and professional support, thereby reinforcing the need to critically examine the examination's effectiveness in developing competent, practice-ready school leaders (Cruz & Bautista, 2022; Lacanaria, 2024).

The growing misalignment between the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) and the emerging demands of contemporary school leadership, particularly the tension between theoretical assessment and practical application. While the Department of Education (2020) recognizes the need to regularly review and update the NQESH, empirical studies reveal that the examination remains predominantly theory-oriented, insufficiently capturing competencies essential for modern educational contexts such as digital leadership, inclusive education, trauma-informed practice, and community collaboration (Galleposo, 2021). This gap is evident in regional findings where school heads demonstrate strong workplace performance yet score poorly on NQESH-aligned management indicators, suggesting a disconnect between assessed knowledge and actual leadership practice (Galleposo, 2021). Additional studies document limited post-certification capacity in key emerging domains, including technology integration and stakeholder engagement, despite these being widely recognized in both local and international literature as critical to 21st-century school leadership (Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). Comparative scholarship further reinforces that adaptability, collaboration, and crisis-responsive decision-making are underrepresented in the current NQESH framework, prompting calls for more context-sensitive and practice-based assessment approaches such as simulations and case-based evaluations to better reflect authentic leadership capability (Galleposo, 2021; Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024).

Research on leadership effectiveness indicates that passing the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) is generally associated with positive school leadership outcomes, particularly in aligning instructional practices with national education priorities and sustaining curriculum reform implementation (Garcia & Ramos, 2020; Delos Reyes, 2022). Studies further show that high-performing NQESH passers tend to exercise stronger instructional supervision through structured teacher coaching and data-driven decision-making, which has been linked to improvements in student academic performance over time (Bautista, 2023). However, the literature also cautions that NQESH certification alone does not ensure leadership effectiveness across all contexts, as successful school outcomes remain heavily influenced by collaborative relationships, community engagement, and continuous professional development, especially in rural and resource-constrained settings (Mendoza, 2022). Overall, the literature positions the NQESH as a valuable indicator of leadership readiness and policy alignment, while underscoring the importance of contextual, relational, and adaptive competencies to sustain long-term school improvement.

The National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) as a decisive mechanism shaping the professional growth, credibility, and career advancement of aspiring school leaders in the Philippine education system. As the formal gateway to principalship, NQESH certification validates competencies in school administration, instructional leadership, policy implementation, and community relations, thereby enabling promotion and access to broader leadership and professional development opportunities (Ibañez & Salmon, 2024). Beyond promotion, the literature consistently highlights the examination's role in enhancing professional credibility and legitimacy, fostering trust and respect among peers, stakeholders, and Department of Education officials, and contributing to a culture of professional confidence and institutional authority (Galleposo, 2021). Collectively, these studies portray NQESH as both a career-defining credential and a catalyst for leadership

identity formation; however, they also reveal notable gaps in post-certification support, mentoring, and sustained leadership development, as well as limited alignment with emerging 21st-century leadership competencies such as data-driven decision-making, inclusive leadership, and emotional intelligence (Ibañez & Salmon, 2024; Galleposo, 2021). This thematic convergence underscores the need to reconceptualize NQESH not only as a qualifying examination but as part of a continuous leadership development framework that supports long-term professional growth and leadership excellence.

A substantial gap between the competencies assessed by the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) and the practical leadership demands faced by certified school heads in real-world school contexts. Across studies, NQESH passers—particularly in Region VIII—demonstrate persistent weaknesses in critical operational domains such as financial management, human resource leadership, instructional supervision, and technology integration, despite having obtained certification (Lacanaria, 2024; Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). This gap is largely attributed to the examination's strong emphasis on theoretical knowledge, which inadequately prepares school heads for adaptive instructional leadership practices, effective mentoring of teachers, conflict management, and data-informed decision-making. Compounding this mismatch are systemic constraints, including limited school resources, inadequate training in soft skills such as emotional intelligence and adaptive problem-solving, and the absence of structured mentoring and post-certification support, with only a small proportion of passers receiving formal coaching (Galleposo, 2021; Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). Collectively, the literature underscores that while NQESH certification signifies academic rigor, it falls short in equipping school heads with the applied, context-sensitive competencies necessary for effective school leadership, thereby reinforcing the need to reconfigure the examination within a practice-based and sustained leadership development framework.

While effective school leadership across domains requires strategic vision, collaborative capacity, sound operations management, instructional expertise, continuous professional growth, and strong stakeholder engagement, NQESH-certified school heads in the Philippines face persistent challenges in enacting these competencies in practice. Studies emphasize that strategic leadership demands vision-driven planning and the ability to mobilize stakeholders; however, many newly appointed principals struggle to translate theoretical planning into actionable school improvement and to lead high-performing teams, often encountering resistance rooted in school culture and limited practical experience (Leithwood et al., 2019; Bernardo, 2018; Velasco et al., 2024; Sumapal, 2024). In the domain of operations and resource management, evidence shows severe deficiencies, particularly in under-resourced and rural contexts, where more than 90% of school heads were found ineffective in operational leadership due to gaps in financial management skills, infrastructure shortages, and constraints in applying policy knowledge to real fiscal and organizational challenges (Rizada, 2024; Amancio, 2023). Instructional leadership likewise emerges as a critical weakness, with an overwhelming majority of NQESH-certified school heads rated poorly in data use, teacher coaching, curriculum differentiation, and inclusive education, undermining teaching quality and student learning outcomes (Pana, 2024; Tañiza, 2024). Compounding these issues are limited opportunities for post-certification professional development and mentoring, which restrict leaders' capacity to develop themselves and others despite high motivation and self-efficacy (Perez, 2023; Department of Education, 2020). Finally, the literature highlights persistent challenges in stakeholder engagement and community collaboration, particularly in rural settings, where culturally responsive leadership training and collaborative governance skills remain underdeveloped (Sumapal, 2024). Collectively, these studies underscore a pronounced theory–practice gap across leadership domains, reinforcing the need to realign NQESH and related leadership preparation systems toward practice-based, context-sensitive, and continuous professional development approaches to strengthen real-world leadership effectiveness.

Persistent systemic issues in the preparation and development of NQESH-certified school heads, particularly the pronounced gap between theoretical training and real-world leadership application. Although NQESH certification is positioned by national policy as a comprehensive readiness and diagnostic tool aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (DepEd, 2020; 2023; Cervantes & Santos, 2023; National Educators Academy of the Philippines, 2024), empirical evidence indicates that many school heads remain insufficiently prepared for complex leadership demands such as crisis management, technology integration, adaptive decision-making, and stakeholder conflict resolution, challenges that have become more acute in the post-pandemic context (Velasco et al., 2024; Rizada, 2024). Both local and international literature emphasize

that assessment systems overly focused on knowledge recall fail to capture competencies in emotional intelligence, situational judgment, and contextual leadership, which are critical in navigating uncertainty and change (Twining et al., 2018; Briones, 2022). In response, scholars widely recommend shifting toward holistic, practice-oriented leadership frameworks that provide structured post-certification support through mentoring, coaching, scenario-based assessments, modular continuous professional development, and micro-credentials in digital and relational leadership (Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024; Aquino & Mendoza, 2022). Collectively, these studies call for a reconceptualization of the NQESH as part of an integrated leadership development system—one that not only screens for readiness but also meaningfully strengthens school leaders' capacity to respond to diverse, evolving, and context-specific educational challenges.

METHODS

The study employed an Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods Research Design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This entailed two separate yet complementary phases: initially, a quantitative phase, followed by a subsequent qualitative phase informed by the quantitative results. By combining both methods, there is richer, more detailed insight into the long-term effects of the NQESH, and statistical trends are contextualized by participants' lived experiences.

During the quantitative phase, information was collected using standardized survey tools to assess the NQESH's perceived and actual performance in school head preparation. Variables such as instructional leadership, curriculum implementation, stakeholder participation, and career progression were measured, as were perceptions of exam difficulty and relevance.

Following the analysis of the quantitative data, the research moved to the qualitative stage, during which interviews with some NQESH-certified school heads were conducted. This stage gave further illumination of the themes that were evident from the quantitative results, more specifically, how school leaders explain the role of the examination in contributing to their professional development and to meeting the challenges of the PPSSH areas—leading strategically, managing operations and resources, emphasizing teaching and learning, developing self and others, and building connections.

The explanatory sequential mixed-methods design enhanced the research by combining evaluative rigor with contextual richness. The mixed-methods approach enables triangulation and verification of findings through both numerical and narrative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Combined, these approaches ensure that the study captures the full impact of the NQESH and provides policy recommendations for enhancing leadership certification in the Philippine education system.

Two research tools were employed within the Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods Design: a structured survey questionnaire for the quantitative stage and a semi-structured interview guide for the qualitative stage.

For quantitative data, a researcher-constructed survey questionnaire is used to elicit perceptions and actual effectiveness of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads in preparing school leaders for their roles. The questionnaire was based on the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads domains, namely leadership effectiveness and congruence with emerging educational needs. It comprised four-point Likert-scale items across the five PPSSH domains: leading strategically, managing school operations and resources, focusing on teaching and learning, developing self and others, and building connections. To ensure content validity, the instrument was expert-validated by a panel consisting of five experts. All five experts were doctoral degree holders holding administrative positions in the Schools Division Office and in schools, such as Chief, Schools Governance and Operations Division, Senior Education Program Specialist – Planning and Research, Principal IV, Principal II, and Principal I. Comments from these validators were considered to refine the items that are clearer, more relevant, and comprehensive. After which, the instrument underwent pilot testing with 20 school heads from the Pagbilao 2 district, who were not included in the primary study. The instrument underwent pilot testing to assess its internal consistency before its actual administration to the respondents. The computed Cronbach's alpha was 0.81. This indicates that the items are consistent in measuring the intended constructions and that the instrument demonstrates good internal reliability. After thorough item refinement and expert

validation, the instrument was confirmed to be valid, reliable, and ready for complete administration to the target respondents.

For qualitative data, a semi-structured interview guide was developed to explore further the experiences and reflections of the chosen NQESH passers. The interview guide included open-ended questions about how the examination affected their professional development and career advancement, as well as the challenges of implementing NQESH competencies in actual school leadership settings. Similar to the survey, the interview guide was validated by experts in educational leadership and qualitative research to ensure its relevance to the study's goals and theoretical framework.

The use of these two instruments ensured that the research fully captured measurable trends and in-depth information, thereby contributing to a richer understanding of the NQESH's impact on school leadership in Philippine education.

To facilitate ethical practices and compliance with institutional guidelines, the researcher obtained administrative approval from the Department of Education first. The researcher formally submitted a request letter to the concerned Schools Division Superintendent, accompanied by the approved research proposal and an endorsement letter from the academic institution. After approval, the researcher communicated with school heads or Public Schools District Supervisors to obtain access to the target respondents and to schedule data collection.

After the DepEd clearance, the researcher obtained informed consent from all participants. Each respondent and interviewee was given a written informed consent form outlining the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, confidentiality of the responses, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. The form was signed before any data were collected.

For quantitative data collection, the instrumented survey questionnaire was sent via an online platform (Google Forms) to the respondents. The survey quantified respondents' experiences and perceptions of NQESH's effectiveness and its alignment with PPSSH leadership needs. Respondents were given ample opportunity to respond, and the researcher monitored and followed up to achieve a high response rate. The collected data were downloaded and subjected to statistical analysis to establish perceived and actual effectiveness and to determine whether there is a significant difference.

For the qualitative data collection, following the analysis of the quantitative findings, purposeful sampling was employed to select key informants—specifically, school heads who demonstrated either significantly high or low correspondence between NQESH preparation and leadership effectiveness. These participants were approached to take part in semi-structured interviews. The interviews were held via an online platform (Messenger). All sessions were transcribed for thematic analysis. The interviews sought to provide deeper insights into the challenges and real-life experiences of school heads in applying the competencies measured in NQESH in the dynamic school leadership context.

This two-stage method enabled the researcher to initially identify patterns using quantitative methods and subsequently clarify them using qualitative research, resulting in a better understanding of the research issue.

The research engaged school heads who have sat and passed the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) and were already working in different public elementary and secondary schools. These were the primary sources of data for both the quantitative and qualitative stages of the research. For the quantitative aspect, 258 school heads who passed the NQESH from 2011 to 2023 were surveyed to determine their perceived and actual leadership efficacy and the pertinence of NQESH relative to forthcoming educational needs. For the qualitative component, a smaller sample of 15 NQESH-certified school heads was drawn from the initial quantitative sample to participate in semi-structured interviews. These participants offered rich, contextual information on the challenges they encountered in implementing the competencies tested in the examination, as well as their experiences with professional development and leadership practice.

This research employed stratified random sampling for the quantitative phase and purposive sampling for the qualitative phase to ensure a representative and varied sample was selected for each phase of the study.

For the quantitative phase, the study employed stratified random sampling to ensure that the sample of 258 school heads was representative of the various backgrounds and contexts within the Schools Division of Quezon. The stratification was based on several key characteristics, including geographic location (central school, población, and barrio schools), school size, and years of leadership experience since NQESH certification. This enabled a balanced selection of school heads from various school environments and leadership backgrounds.

During the quantitative phase, questionnaires were administered to all selected school heads to gather information on their effectiveness in curriculum implementation and instructional supervision, as well as their perceptions of the NQESH's contribution to leadership preparation. In the qualitative phase, purposive sampling was used to select respondents for in-depth interviews. This sub-group included school principals with considerable leadership experience after NQESH certification to gain an in-depth understanding of the long-term effect of the examination. This multi-phased sampling technique ensured the reliability and completeness of the study's findings.

For the qualitative phase, purposive sampling was used to select 15 school heads for interviews. The aim is to identify school heads with considerable leadership experience post-NQESH certification and who can provide insightful information on the long-term effect of the examination.

This purposive sampling technique enabled the collection of rich data from a focused group of veteran leaders with deep insight into the long-term implications of the NQESH.

This research was undertaken in the Province of Quezon's Schools Division, covering a broad spectrum of schools located in urban, rural, and geographically remote settings. The reason for choosing SDO Quezon, rather than more urbanized provinces such as Tayabas or Lucena, was the province's particular diversity in school leadership contexts. SDO Quezon offers a wide range of educational environments, ranging from metropolitan areas to remote, isolated places. This variance is essential to measure the long-term effect of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) on the quality of leadership. School heads in these diverse environments face unique challenges in resource availability, community outreach, and the development of educational methods that suit local conditions. By choosing SDO Quezon, the study sought to conduct a comprehensive assessment of how NQESH-certified leaders perform across various school settings. These leaders are responsible for addressing challenges in both highly accessible and geographically challenging areas. Carrying out the study in this location, rather than in more homogeneous urban centers such as Tayabas or Lucena, ensured a well-rounded understanding of the NQESH's role in equipping school heads to manage diverse and often challenging educational environments. The research gave meaningful insights into the effectiveness of the NQESH in equipping school leaders to manage the intricacies of urban and rural education environments, which will be a significant contribution to the general debate on school leadership development in the Philippines.

This research draws on a range of hypotheses and assumptions aligned with both the quantitative and qualitative strands. These align with the general objective of assessing the long-term effects of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) on leadership effectiveness and its alignment with emerging educational needs. Meanwhile, it is assumed in this study that:

The NQESH has been intended to assess the core competencies of school leadership, such as instructional supervision, stakeholder management, and school performance. It is assumed that success in the NQESH indicates a degree of readiness to take leadership roles in schools.

School heads can evaluate and reflect upon their perceived effectiveness in school leadership following the passage of the NQESH. It is presumed that they can render valid and reliable feedback on how the examination prepared them for actual school leadership, particularly in instructional leadership, performance measures, and teacher development.

New educational needs—such as e-leadership, mental health support, and inclusive schooling—are among the realities of school leadership. It is assumed that school administrators are expected to address these challenges in their roles, regardless of whether they were explicitly scrutinized in the NQESH.

The heads of schools who underwent NQESH certification can explain how the exam impacted their leadership journey. It is presumed that their experiences share valuable insights regarding the applicability of NQESH to long-term success in curriculum delivery and instructional monitoring.

It is assumed that school heads can honestly and objectively state their impressions about the relevance of NQESH passing to their long-term effectiveness as leaders in curriculum implementation and instructional supervision.

It is presumed that certified school heads under the NQESH have experience-based learning and understanding that enable them to validly assess the role of the examination in promoting their professional development and career advancement.

It is presumed that examinees who passed the NQESH meet discernible and context-dependent difficulties in translating competencies tested in the examination into real school leadership practices consistent with the domains of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), namely leading strategically, managing school operations and resources, directing teaching and learning, and developing self and others.

In line with the objectives of this study, hypotheses were formulated to guide the statistical analysis and interpretation of findings. These hypotheses were developed based on the research questions and the theoretical framework underpinning the study. (H_{01}): There is no significant difference in the perceived effectiveness of NQESH in preparing school heads for leadership roles, or in the extent to which NQESH prepares school heads to address emerging educational demands, across respondents' profile variables. (H_{02}): There is no significant relationship between the perceived effectiveness of NQESH in preparing school heads for leadership roles and the extent to which NQESH prepares school heads to address emerging educational demands.

The study employed an Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods Design, in which quantitative data were collected and analyzed before qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews. This sequential approach enabled the researcher to use qualitative findings to explain further and clarify quantitative results, leading to a holistic understanding of the long-term effects of NQESH on school leadership effectiveness and its congruence with future educational requirements.

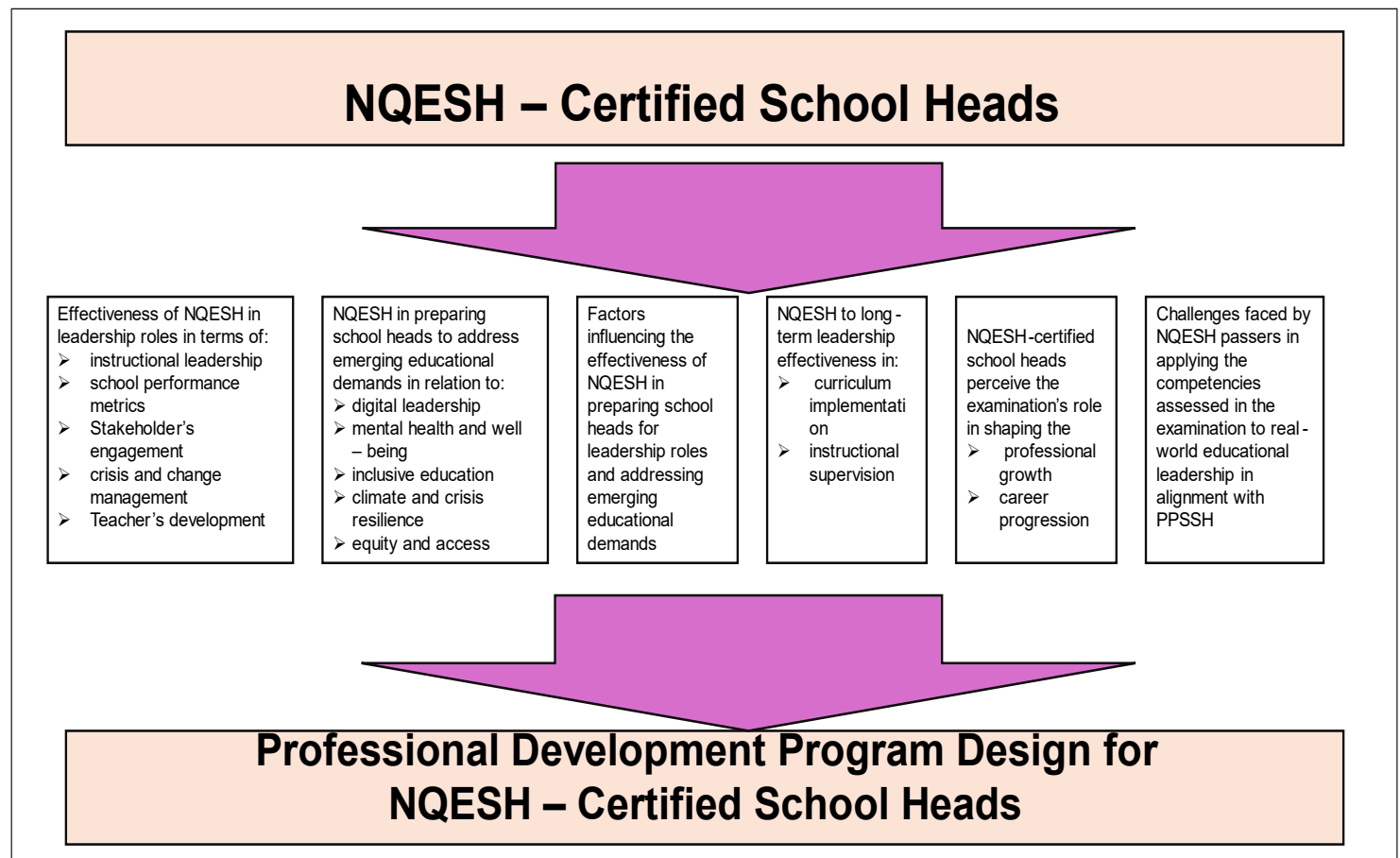
The quantitative data collected from structured survey questionnaires were analyzed with SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The analysis answered the first five research questions.

For the respondents' profile variables, frequency and percentage were used as the statistical treatments. These descriptive statistics were used to summarize and present the distribution of respondents by demographic and professional characteristics, such as location, years of service, and year of passing the NQESH. This approach helped provide a clear overview of the respondents' composition and their corresponding categorical data. The Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U tests were used to determine whether there were significant differences in perceived effectiveness of NQESH and in the extent of preparedness across different respondent profiles. These nonparametric tests were appropriate because they assessed differences between groups without assuming normality of the data distribution. The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to compare three or more groups (e.g., location and years of service), while the Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare two independent groups (e.g., year of passing the exam). For the qualitative component, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 NQESH-certified school heads to gauge their views on how the exam influenced their professional development and career advancement, and how they use the tested competencies in actual teaching contexts (RQ7, RQ8, and RQ9).

Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2019) six-phase Thematic Analysis framework, supported by NVivo qualitative data analysis software (QSR International, 2023) to ensure methodological rigor and systematic coding. First, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. The researcher read the transcripts repeatedly to become thoroughly familiar with the data, thus facilitating a nuanced understanding (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In the open-coding phase, significant excerpts were identified and coded in NVivo without constraining emerging ideas (Saldaña, 2021). Subsequently, axial coding was used to organize the initial codes into coherent thematic categories. These categories reflected recurring patterns across participant

responses. Then, selective coding was applied to refine and integrate the open and axial codes developed during the earlier stages of analysis, to identify core, overriding themes that encapsulate the essence of the data. Therefore, it involves a systematic examination and comparison of categories in terms of their relationships and hierarchical structures. Through selective coding, broader themes are distilled by merging related categories, including a focus on those most relevant to the research question. This ensures that the thematic framework is coherent, concise, and meaningful, providing a clear narrative thread to drive interpretation. This mixed-methods data analysis ensured that both quantifiable patterns and rich personal experiences were considered, resulting in more informed and practical recommendations for enhancing the NQESH as a leadership development tool.

Research Paradigm/Conceptual Framework



The research paradigm focuses on assessing the effectiveness of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) in preparing newly appointed school leaders. The input section emphasizes salient areas of investigation: the perceived and actual effectiveness of NQESH in promoting leadership effectiveness and adapting to emerging educational needs; the long-term effect of NQESH passing on leadership effectiveness in curriculum implementation and instructional supervision; the perceptions of certified school heads on the role of the examination in influencing their professional development and career advancement; and the difficulties encountered by NQESH passers in utilizing competencies measured in the examination to actual educational leadership situations. The research process uses a mixed-methods design, starting with a quantitative stage of surveys and statistical analyses (descriptive statistics and t-tests) to measure perceptions and actual leadership outcomes. This is complemented by a qualitative stage using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis (adopting Braun and Clarke's 2006 framework) to provide greater insights into leadership issues. Integration of results is done through triangulation to enable a fuller picture of the problems. The study's output is a Professional Development Program tailored for new NQESH-certified school heads to address gaps between exam competencies and authentic leadership needs. This paradigm is grounded in Adult Learning Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory, with a focus on ongoing professional development, reflective practice, and adaptive leadership in evolving educational settings. It directly addresses the research questions on perceived and actual effectiveness, leadership issues, and the relationship between examination success and actual leadership performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section analyzes and interprets the data collected in relation to the study's objectives. It presents the findings in the sequence of the aforementioned research questions, combining quantitative and qualitative results to provide a comprehensive understanding of how NQESH shapes the leadership skills and professional practices of school heads. The discussion also links the results to relevant literature and theory, highlighting their significance for educational leadership, management, and ongoing professional growth within the Department of Education.

Part I. Demographic Profile of the Respondents in Terms of Location of School, Years in Service as School Head, and Year of Passing NQESH.

Table 2. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Categories	Frequency (n = 180)	Percent
Location of School		
Along the Población Area	24	13.3
Barrio School	143	79.4
Central School	13	7.2
Years in Service as School Head		
0 to 3 years	34	18.9
4 to 7 years	30	16.7
8 to 11 years	42	23.3
12 to 15 years	45	25.0
16 to 19 years	24	13.3
20 years and above	5	2.8
Year of Passing NQESH		
2011	16	8.9
2013	9	5.0
2015	11	6.1
2016	1	.6
2017	1	.6
2021	80	44.4
2023	62	34.44

Table 2 presents a summary profile of the respondents by school location, years in service as school head, and year of passing the NQESH. The distribution of respondents indicates that the majority come from barrio schools (79.4%), followed by those in the población area (13.3%) and central schools (7.2%). This implies that a greater number of school heads serve in rural or remote areas where leadership challenges and resource limitations are usually more severe. The data show that the most significant proportion of respondents falls within the service range of 12 to 15 years (25%), indicating a relatively mature group of school leaders. However, the most crucial observation is that the highest proportion of respondents passed the NQESH in 2021 (44.4%) and 2023 (34.4%), indicating a recent batch of newly certified school heads. This demographic feature means that the current implementation and relevance of NQESH have been evaluated by those who have undergone its revised framework; hence, their views are of utmost value in assessing whether this licensure examination meets the demands of the present education system. Generally, these data indicate that the leaders trained through NQESH are both seasoned and emerging administrators, with a largely rural provenance, underscoring the need for contextualized leadership preparation and support for sustainability across disparate school ecologies.

The demographic profile of a majority of respondents from barrio or rural schools is consistent with widely documented concerns about Philippine rural education systems. Information from the Department of Education (DepEd, 2024; Nebres, 2024) indicates limited access to quality facilities, limited resources, and socio-economic constraints that impact school leadership and teacher development in rural areas. The predominance of rural school informants compounds the existing inequalities in school facilities, teacher recruitment, and community

participation, which studies recognize as essential obstacles to effective school leadership and good teaching (Reyes, 2022; Aguliera, 2022). These demographics highlight the value of contextualized leadership development, such as NQESH, which has to respond to the specific needs of rural and underserved schools, such as resource limitations, community issues, and infrastructural challenges, to promote balanced and efficient school management and teaching quality.

Part II. Perceived Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles in Terms of Instructional Leadership, School Performance Metrics, Stakeholders' Engagement, Crisis and Change Management, and Teachers' Development

Table 3. Perceived Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles in Terms of Instructional Leadership

Indicators	Descriptive Summary	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	Verbal Interpretation
Champion a school-wide culture of instructional excellence.	3.69	Highly Effective
Implement inclusive instruction strategies.	3.68	Highly Effective
Integrate 21st-century learning skills into school instruction.	3.67	Highly Effective
Analyze learning outcomes for instructional decision-making.	3.67	Highly Effective
Align classroom practices with national curriculum standards.	3.66	Highly Effective
Facilitate Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in school.	3.66	Highly Effective
Set clear academic targets for instructional improvement.	3.66	Highly Effective
Promote research-based teaching strategies among faculty.	3.64	Highly Effective
Monitor lesson planning and implementation efficiently.	3.63	Highly Effective
Lead the implementation of learning recovery and catch-up plans.	3.63	Highly Effective
Conduct classroom observations that improve teaching quality.	3.60	Highly Effective
Guide teachers in using differentiated instruction techniques.	3.59	Highly Effective
Use data to identify and address instructional gaps.	3.58	Highly Effective
Supervise and evaluate instructional delivery effectively.	3.57	Highly Effective
Develop school-based INSETs (in-service training) grounded in teacher needs.	3.56	Highly Effective
Average	3.63	Highly Effective

Legend: 3.26 – 4.00 Highly Effective, 2.51 – 3.25 Effective, 1.76 – 2.50 Moderately Effective, 1.00 – 1.75 Not at all Effective

As shown in Table 3, NQESH is perceived as highly effective in the capacity building of school heads regarding leadership roles in instructional management, with an average mean of 3.63. All indicators were rated “Highly Effective,” indicating that NQESH has successfully built school heads' capacity to lead instruction, analyze learning outcomes, and uphold curriculum standards. The most important finding concerns the highest-rated indicator, “Champion a school-wide culture of instructional excellence” (M = 3.69), indicating that school heads trained through NQESH recognize the importance of building a shared vision and commitment to high-quality teaching and learning. This suggests that the examination effectively instills the mindset and competencies needed to pursue academic excellence throughout the school. In contrast, the lowest-rated indicator, “Develop school-based INSETs grounded in teacher needs” (M = 3.56), although still “Highly Effective,” suggests areas for improvement; thus, professional development planning would be more targeted and data-driven. Findings indicate that while NQESH effectively strengthens instructional leadership competencies, further support for contextualized training design and teacher capacity-building will go a long way toward enhancing school leaders' capability to sustain quality and continuous improvement in instruction.

The data fit with the significant findings from the theoretical framework and literature review. Based on Transformational Leadership Theory, the high scores on measures like championing a school culture of instructional excellence, employing inclusive practices, and embedding 21st-century skills are indicative of the transformational leadership attributes of inspiring innovation, inclusiveness, and data-driven decision-making

that are necessary for school improvement (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Leithwood et al., 2019). But lower scores in school-based in-service training (INSETs) and in the successful supervision of instructional delivery indicate gaps aligned with the literature, suggesting a theory-practice gap in the actual implementation of instructional supervision and teacher-coaching competencies of NQESH-certified leaders (Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024; Lacanaria, 2024). Messick's Validity Theory identifies shortcomings in the NQESH's context for practical leadership competencies, resonating with a greater emphasis on context-sensitive, practice-focused leadership training, as also stressed by Adaptive Leadership Theory, which calls for responsiveness to evolving educational issues (Messick, 2021; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Experiential Learning Theory also justifies the need for ongoing professional development and mentorship after certification, complementing the literature on poor post-certification support that restricts leadership development in teaching fields (Kolb, 2018; Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). In general, the evidence supports the literature's plea for NQESH reform to close the gap between tested knowledge and effective instructional leadership practice, facilitating the transformational, adaptive, and experiential development of school heads to improve teaching quality and learning outcomes.

Table 4. Perceived Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles in Terms of School Performance Metrics

Indicators	Descriptive Summary	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	Verbal Interpretation
Foster accountability among staff using performance standards.	3.74	Highly Effective
Regularly review and assess compliance with Key Performance Indicators.	3.73	Highly Effective
Address learning loss through data-informed decisions.	3.71	Highly Effective
Adjust leadership strategies based on quarterly performance reports.	3.71	Highly Effective
Manage the timely submission of performance reports to supervisors.	3.70	Highly Effective
Set realistic and measurable school targets.	3.69	Highly Effective
Evaluate school-wide teaching impact based on metrics.	3.68	Highly Effective
Analyze school performance indicators (e.g., NAT, MPS, ELLNA).	3.67	Highly Effective
Lead performance-based reward systems in school.	3.67	Highly Effective
Track learner progress through relevant benchmarks.	3.66	Highly Effective
Monitor and evaluate the implementation of performance improvement plans.	3.66	Highly Effective
Use data visualization tools (e.g., dashboards) to present performance results.	3.66	Highly Effective
Identify performance gaps and design responsive interventions.	3.64	Highly Effective
Align school performance targets with SIP and AIP.	3.64	Highly Effective
Use performance data to inform school improvement plans.	3.63	Highly Effective
Average Mean	3.68	Highly Effective

Legend: 3.26 – 4.00 Highly Effective, 2.51 – 3.25 Effective, 1.76 – 2.50 Moderately Effective, 1.00 – 1.75 Not at all Effective

Table 4 presents respondents' perceptions of the NQESH's effectiveness in preparing school leaders to manage and enhance school performance metrics. With an average of 3.68, all items fall under the "Highly Effective" verbal interpretation, suggesting that NQESH-certified school heads generally believe the examination significantly contributed to their competence in evaluating and improving school performance through measurable indicators. The most notable finding is that the highest-rated indicator, "Foster accountability among staff using performance standards" (M = 3.74), highlights that NQESH-trained leaders strongly value accountability systems as a cornerstone of effective school management. This emphasis on accountability aligns with the evolving trend in educational leadership toward results-oriented management. Interestingly, even the

lowest-rated indicators—“Use performance data to inform school improvement plans” ($M = 3.63$) and “Align school performance targets with SIP and AIP” ($M = 3.64$)—still received “Highly Effective” interpretations, suggesting consistent competence across all performance domains, albeit with room for deeper application of data analytics in planning.

These findings imply that the NQESH effectively builds foundational leadership competencies in data-informed decision-making and performance management. The uniformly high ratings indicate that school heads are well-equipped to use quantitative data in sustaining accountability and continuous school improvement. However, the slightly lower means in areas related to strategic data integration suggest the need for more advanced post-certification training in data analytics, visualization, and translating performance metrics into actionable school improvement plans. This indicates that while the NQESH fosters strong accountability and evaluative practices, further capacity-building in data interpretation and evidence-based planning could enhance school leaders' long-term impact on educational performance.

The literature review aligns closely with the data in Table 4 on the perceived effectiveness of the NQESH in equipping school heads with the capacity to manage school performance indicators. Research consistently emphasizes the role of data-based decision-making, accountability, and utilization of performance indicators for effective school leadership (Leithwood et al., 2019; Department of Education, 2020). The strong scores on enabling accountability, ensuring compliance with KPIs, tackling learning loss, and responding to performance reports in the data align with the fundamental leadership skills highlighted in the literature. Nonetheless, there is a gap noted in the literature, critically, between certification and practical implementation, where, according to research, numerous passers of NQESH are not able to translate into action tested knowledge as school improvement plans, data convergence to strategic plans, and meaningful use of data visualization software (Cruz & Bautista, 2022; Lacanaria, 2024; Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). Such a gap is usually blamed on a lack of post-certification support and mentorship, as well as systemic resource limitations that impede effective real-world leadership. Further, the literature emphasizes the necessity of NQESH reforms to a more context-sensitive, practical preparation that focuses on applying data and leadership competencies to continuous school performance improvement (Galleposo, 2021; Department of Education, 2023). These observations collectively confirm that, although NQESH enhances core competencies in performance metrics management, greater experiential learning, ongoing professional development, and strengthened support systems are needed to realize these competencies in effective school leadership practice fully.

Table 5. Perceived Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles in Terms of Stakeholders' Engagement

Indicators	Descriptive Summary	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	Verbal Interpretation
Leverage community resources for school improvement.	3.75	Highly Effective
Involve alumni in school projects and activities.	3.74	Highly Effective
Promote transparency and inclusivity in school decision-making.	3.73	Highly Effective
Conduct effective stakeholder orientation programs.	3.73	Highly Effective
Handle conflicts among stakeholders with diplomacy.	3.73	Highly Effective
Use social media and ICT to communicate with the community.	3.73	Highly Effective
Represent the school professionally in public forums.	3.73	Highly Effective
Build trust and a collaborative culture among school stakeholders.	3.73	Highly Effective
Communicate school goals clearly to all stakeholders.	3.72	Highly Effective
Engage local government and barangay officials in school activities.	3.72	Highly Effective
Strengthen SPTA participation in planning and implementation.	3.72	Highly Effective
Establish strong partnerships with parents and guardians	3.71	Highly Effective

Encourage parents to support learner development at home.	3.71	Highly Effective
Mobilize the School Governing Council (SGC) effectively.	3.64	Highly Effective
Average Mean	3.72	Highly Effective

Legend: 3.26 – 4.00 Highly Effective, 2.51 – 3.25 Effective, 1.76 – 2.50 Moderately Effective, 1.00 – 1.75 Not at all Effective

Table 5 shows that NQESH is perceived as highly effective in preparing school heads to focus on stakeholders' engagement, with an average of 3.72. All indicators were rated "Highly Effective," suggesting that the examination successfully develops leaders' abilities to enhance instructional quality and foster community involvement. The highest-rated item, "Leverage community resources for school improvement" (M = 3.75), highlights the importance of external partnerships in strengthening teaching and learning. At the same time, the lowest rated, "Mobilize the School Governing Council (SGC) effectively" (M = 3.64), points to areas needing further improvement in stakeholder governance. These findings imply that NQESH effectively instills collaborative and participatory leadership competencies among school heads but would benefit from deeper emphasis on maximizing formal stakeholder engagement and governance structures to sustain instructional excellence.

Studies emphasize that effective collaboration with parents, participation in school governing councils, clear communication of school aims, and tapping into community resources are significant for enhancing school performance and co-governance (Hoang, 2025; Lopez, 2025). The literature also points to the importance of inclusivity, transparency, and stakeholder conflict resolution as key to establishing trust and a collaborative culture, both of which are essential for long-term improvement in teaching and learning (Trammell, 2025; Knox, 2025). In addition, research emphasizes that effective stakeholder engagement entails systematic orientation programs and the use of communication technologies, which align with the high scores in these areas, supporting the NQESH's focus on preparing school heads with these skills. Nevertheless, the need for ongoing capacity building to mobilize school councils and intensify parental engagement, reflected in marginally lower scores, is echoed in the literature, which advocates stronger leadership support and professional development, with practical engagement strategies in focus (Lopez, 2025). In general, the literature supports the idea that NQESH adequately orients school heads in stakeholder management, which is necessary for prioritizing teaching and learning, but also hints at areas that need further strengthening to maximize effects.

Table 6. Perceived Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles in Terms of Crisis and Change Management

Indicators	Descriptive Summary	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	Verbal Interpretation
Facilitate school reopening and transition plans.	3.70	Highly Effective
Create contingency plans for technology and connectivity failures.	3.69	Highly Effective
Respond effectively to COVID-19-related school disruptions.	3.68	Highly Effective
Support teacher and learner well-being during crises.	3.68	Highly Effective
Manage budget adjustments during emergency situations.	3.68	Highly Effective
Oversee school operations during lockdowns or class suspensions.	3.68	Highly Effective
Develop a School Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (SDRRM) Plan.	3.67	Highly Effective
Lead the shift to distance and blended learning	3.67	Highly Effective
Communicate calmly and clearly during crises.	3.67	Highly Effective
Apply changing leadership models to manage school transitions.	3.67	Highly Effective
Collaborate with LGUs and DRRM offices during calamities.	3.66	Highly Effective

Lead during emergencies such as typhoons or earthquakes.	3.64	Highly Effective
Prioritize student and staff safety during emergencies.	3.64	Highly Effective
Make data-informed decisions during unexpected changes.	3.63	Highly Effective
Reflect on and improve post-crisis responses and protocols.	3.60	Highly Effective
Average Mean	3.66	Highly Effective

Legend: 3.26 – 4.00 Highly Effective, 2.51 – 3.25 Effective, 1.76 – 2.50 Moderately Effective, 1.00 – 1.75 Not at all Effective

Table 6 shows that NQESH is perceived to be highly effective in training school heads for leadership roles relevant to crisis and change management, with an average mean of 3.66. It can be seen that all indicators are rated “Highly Effective,” demonstrating that school heads feel confident in their ability to lead during emergencies and adapt to unexpected educational disruptions. By far, the highest-rated indicator is “Facilitate school reopening and transition plans,” with a mean of 3.70, underscoring the high level of preparedness of NQESH-trained leaders to manage post-crisis recovery. The examination is relevant for developing adaptive and responsive leadership competencies during the pandemic. On the other hand, the item which received the lowest rating, though still highly rated, was “Reflect on and improve post-crisis responses and protocols” with a mean of 3.60, suggesting that systematic evaluation and refinement of crisis strategies remain areas for improvement. These results indicate that NQESH effectively equipped school heads with crisis management competencies, but that continuous professional development focused on reflective practice and post-crisis evaluation would further strengthen leaders' capacity for sustained resilience and institutional adaptability.

A survey of the literature finds strong congruence with the outcomes in Table 8. The literature consistently highlights the cross-cutting nature of crisis leadership, emphasizing the importance of proactive planning, effective communication, interagency collaboration, and adaptive decision-making for school leaders to navigate emergencies successfully (Grissom & Condon, 2023; Urick et al., 2021). The attention to high scores in enabling school reopening, technological failure contingency planning, and well-being support in the literature speaks to resilience development and business continuity amid crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. But lower reflective practice scores and inter-agency collaboration reinforce the literature's calls for increased post-crisis learning and more robust partnerships with local government and disaster risk management offices to enhance future responses (James & Wooten, 2011; Beilstein et al., 2021). Research indicates that proactive professional development in crisis leadership, such as scenario planning, communication training, and experiential learning, is critical to increasing school heads' readiness and responsiveness in uncertain educational climates (Grissom & Condon, 2023; Rise Journals, 2024). Therefore, although the NQESH successfully equips school leaders with critical crisis management skills, the literature emphasizes the need for sustained training and structural support to build reflexive, data-driven leadership and inter-organizational coordination necessary to manage school crises and change effectively.

Table 7. Perceived Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles in Terms of Teachers' Development

Indicators	Descriptive Summary	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	Verbal Interpretation
Ensure that teacher development aligns with school goals and learner outcomes.	3.72	Highly Effective
Support teachers in career progression and promotion.	3.71	Highly Effective
Provide mentoring and coaching to struggling teachers.	3.70	Highly Effective
Promote reflective teaching practices.	3.70	Highly Effective
Lead school-based LAC (Learning Action Cell) sessions effectively.	3.69	Highly Effective
Recognize and reward excellent teacher performance.	3.68	Highly Effective
Facilitate teachers' access to continuing professional development (CPD).	3.68	Highly Effective

Encourage collaboration and teamwork among teachers.	3.68	Highly Effective
Build a strong induction program for new teachers.	3.67	Highly Effective
Identify teachers' training needs using observation data.	3.66	Highly Effective
Foster a growth mindset among faculty.	3.66	Highly Effective
Provide feedback that promotes instructional improvement.	3.65	Highly Effective
Conduct meaningful teacher performance appraisals.	3.64	Highly Effective
Encourage innovation and research among teaching staff.	3.64	Highly Effective
Average Mean	3.68	Highly Effective

Legend: 3.26 – 4.00 Highly Effective, 2.51 – 3.25 Effective, 1.76 – 2.50 Moderately Effective, 1.00 – 1.75 Not at all Effective

Table 7 shows that NQESH is perceived to be highly effective in preparing school heads for leadership roles in teacher development, with an average score of 3.68. All indicators were rated "Highly Effective," showing that NQESH effectively equipped school heads with competencies to mentor, support, and motivate teachers toward professional growth and improved instructional performance. Perhaps the most critical finding is the highest-rated indicator, "Ensure that teacher development aligns with school goals and learner outcomes" ($M = 3.72$), which shows that school heads who have undergone training under the NQESH can make strategic linking of initiatives in teacher growth with broader institutional objectives to ensure that professional growth directly contributes to student achievement. On the contrary, the lowest-rated indicators, "Conduct meaningful teacher performance appraisals" and "Encourage innovation and research among teaching staff" ($M = 3.64$), may be areas that need further emphasis in training, particularly in fostering evidence-based practice and evaluative feedback, respectively. Overall, the findings indicate that NQESH strengthens leadership competencies in teacher growth, but sustained teacher excellence and innovation require continued enhancement in instructional coaching, performance evaluation, and research mentoring.

These findings are consistent with research highlighting that impactful teacher professional development involves organized evaluation processes, evidence-based feedback, and a culture of innovation and collaboration to enhance the teaching practice and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2025; Kirsten, 2023). The implication is that although NQESH establishes a strong foundation for teacher development leadership, improving instruments for teacher evaluation, feedback, and research promotion can further enhance school heads' ability to promote teacher effectiveness and learning quality.

Table 8. Summary Data on Perceived Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles

Indicators	Descriptive Summary	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	Verbal Interpretation
Instructional Leadership	3.63	Highly Effective
School Performance Metrics	3.68	Highly Effective
Stakeholder's Engagement	3.72	Highly Effective
Crisis and Change Management	3.66	Highly Effective
Teacher's Development	3.68	Highly Effective
Average	3.67	Highly Effective

Table 8 summarizes the perceived effectiveness of NQESH in preparing school heads for different leadership roles, consolidating the results across five key domains. With an overall average of 3.67, all areas are rated "Highly Effective," indicating that NQESH is highly effective in equipping school heads with basic competencies in managing instruction, performance, stakeholders, crises, and teacher development. The most striking finding is that "Stakeholders' Engagement" had the highest mean score ($M = 3.72$), indicating that school heads trained by NQESH perform best in engaging different school stakeholders and building their involvement—a very critical aspect of school leadership today. "Instructional Leadership," on the other hand,

showed the lowest mean score, with a rating of $M = 3.63$, indicating that, while already highly effective, there is still a need for much deeper capacity-building in instructional supervision and curriculum implementation. These results suggest that NQESH provides a strong foundation for holistic leadership. Still, continuous professional development should be pursued to further its long-term impact on school performance and the quality of education.

The National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) is widely perceived as highly effective in preparing school heads for key leadership roles, with top ratings in stakeholder engagement and slightly lower but still strong ratings in instructional leadership. This reflects its foundational role in certifying leadership competencies such as instructional management, crisis handling, and teacher development (Department of Education, 2020; Galleposo, 2021). However, research also identifies practical gaps in which many NQESH-certified leaders struggle to apply their knowledge effectively, especially in instructional leadership and community engagement, highlighting the need for continuous professional development and enhanced support systems (Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024; Lacanaria, 2024). Overall, while the NQESH establishes essential leadership standards, literature suggests improvements are needed to help school heads translate these into real-world effectiveness and better educational outcomes (Bautista, 2023; Mendoza, 2022).

Part III. Level of Preparing School Heads to Address Emerging Educational Demands in Relation to Digital Leadership, Mental Health and Well-Being, Inclusive Education, Climate and Crisis Resilience, and Equity and Access

Table 9. Extent of NQESH Preparation for School Heads to Address Emerging Educational Demands in Relation to Digital Leadership

Indicators	Descriptive Summary	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	Verbal Interpretation
Establish a school-wide digital transformation roadmap.	3.70	Very Well Prepared
Advocate for equitable access to technology for all learners.	3.69	Very Well Prepared
Manage cybersecurity risks and protect digital information in the school.	3.68	Very Well Prepared
Promote digital citizenship among learners and teachers.	3.67	Very Well Prepared
Use learning management systems (LMS) effectively for school operations.	3.67	Very Well Prepared
Supervise blended and remote learning implementation.	3.67	Very Well Prepared
Lead the integration of ICT in teaching and learning.	3.66	Very Well Prepared
Encourage teachers to use online platforms and educational apps.	3.65	Very Well Prepared
Facilitate digital skills training for teachers and staff.	3.64	Very Well Prepared
Implement data-driven decision-making using digital tools.	3.56	Very Well Prepared
Average Mean	3.66	Very Well Prepared

Legend: 3.26 – 4.00 Very Well Prepared, 2.51 – 3.25 Well Prepared, 1.76 – 2.50 Slightly Prepared, 1.00 – 1.75 Not Prepared at All

Table 9 shows how well NQESH prepares school heads to engage with emerging educational demands in digital leadership, with a mean of 3.66, which is verbally described as “Very Well Prepared.” This implies that school heads think they are highly capable of leading the digital transformation in schools. The most critical result is the highest-ranked indicator, “Establish a road map for digital transformation in the entire school” ($M = 3.70$), suggesting that the leaders trained by NQESH have the vision and capacity to integrate technology into school systems strategically. Conversely, the lowest-ranked indicator, “Begin using digital tools to promote data-informed decisions” ($M = 3.56$), while still “Very Well Prepared,” indicates a need to improve the analytical and evaluative dimensions of digital leadership. These findings imply that while NQESH effectively prepares school

heads with basic competencies for integrating technology and advocating digitalization, there is still a need for continuous professional development in digital leadership.

These findings are supported by Transformational Leadership Theory, which validates the position of digital leadership as a catalyst for innovation and adaptation in the teaching environment, where school heads are tasked with motivating and leading the integration of technology (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Adaptive Leadership Theory also emphasizes the need for flexibility in the face of rapidly changing digital needs, with a focus on ongoing learning and problem-solving skills needed to drive digital change (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). The literature on successful teacher and school leader professional development also identifies the need for coaching, collaborative learning, and continuous capacity-building to develop digital skills and a culture of technology use that lead to enhanced learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2025; Digital Promise, 2016). The alignment with these frameworks ensures that, although NQESH establishes essential foundations for digital leadership, complementary professional development and support systems are critical for the full realization of its potential in schools.

Table 10. Extent of NQESH Preparation for School Heads to Address Emerging Educational Demands in Relation to Mental Health and Well-being

Indicators	Descriptive Summary	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	Verbal Interpretation
Promote mental health awareness among teachers and students.	3.67	Very Well Prepared
Create a safe and supportive school environment.	3.67	Very Well Prepared
Respond to signs of stress or emotional distress among staff.	3.67	Very Well Prepared
Facilitate school-based wellness programs for employees.	3.67	Very Well Prepared
Support teachers' work-life balance and stress management.	3.67	Very Well Prepared
Refer students with mental health concerns to appropriate services.	3.66	Very Well Prepared
Lead crisis recovery efforts with a focus on mental well-being.	3.66	Very Well Prepared
Integrate socio-emotional learning into school initiatives.	3.64	Very Well Prepared
Promote psychological safety in the workplace.	3.64	Very Well Prepared
Implement mental health policies in school settings.	3.63	Very Well Prepared
Average Mean	3.66	Very Well Prepared

Legend: 3.26 – 4.00 Very Well Prepared, 2.51 – 3.25 Well Prepared, 1.76 – 2.50 Slightly Prepared, 1.00 – 1.75 Not Prepared at All

Table 10 indicates that NQESH has prepared school heads very well to address emerging demands in education related to mental health and wellbeing, with an average score of 3.66. All indicators were rated "Very Well Prepared," indicating that school heads feel confident in promoting wellness in schools. Perhaps the most critical finding is that "Promote mental health awareness among teachers and students" (M = 3.67) was rated highest, indicating that NQESH-trained school heads have increased awareness of the importance of mental health in sustaining appropriate teaching and learning environments. The lower-rated indicator "Implement mental health policies in school settings" (M = 3.63) indicates that, although school heads may understand the principles of wellness, they need more substantial support for policy implementation and inter-agency collaboration. Overall, the findings suggest that NQESH has established strong foundational elements for promoting well-being and emotional resilience among educational stakeholders. However, it is equally essential to provide additional training in policy implementation, monitoring, and mental health intervention frameworks to ensure a holistic, sustainable wellness program in schools.

Research underscores the pivotal role of school leaders in shaping school climate and culture that support mental health promotion and intervention (Daly et al., 2025). Transformational Leadership Theory highlights leadership behaviors such as empathy, emotional intelligence, and supportive engagement as crucial for fostering positive mental health environments (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Moreover, the implementation of science literature stresses strategic leadership practices, including clear communication, staff support, and accountability, as essential for successful mental health program uptake in schools (Lyon et al., 2022). Empirical studies also reveal that

supportive leadership directly influences teacher capacity to implement socio-emotional learning and mental health initiatives effectively (Hudson et al., 2020). Thus, NQESH's focus on mental health leadership aligns with the critical leadership dimensions necessary to foster well-being and inclusivity. Yet, ongoing capacity-building in policy implementation and psychosocial safety remains imperative for maximizing impact.

Table 11. Extent of NQESH Preparation for School Heads to Address Emerging Educational Demands in Relation to Inclusive Education

Indicators	Descriptive Summary	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	Verbal Interpretation
Train teachers to differentiate instruction for diverse learners.	3.69	Very Well Prepared
Align school improvement plans with inclusive education principles.	3.68	Very Well Prepared
Advocate for inclusive policies in curriculum and instruction.	3.67	Very Well Prepared
Engage parents of learners with diverse needs.	3.65	Very Well Prepared
Promote inclusive practices for learners with special needs.	3.64	Very Well Prepared
Ensure gender responsiveness in school programs.	3.64	Very Well Prepared
Eliminate discriminatory practices within the school.	3.64	Very Well Prepared
Monitor and support inclusive classroom practices.	3.62	Very Well Prepared
Promote a culture of acceptance and belonging.	3.62	Very Well Prepared
Ensure the school is accessible to all learners, regardless of ability.	3.58	Very Well Prepared
Average Mean	3.64	Very Well Prepared

Legend: 3.26 – 4.00 Very Well Prepared, 2.51 – 3.25 Well Prepared, 1.76 – 2.50 Slightly Prepared, 1.00 – 1.75 Not Prepared At All

Table 11 shows that NQESH prepares school heads very well to address emerging educational demands related to inclusive education, with an average score of 3.64. All indicators were rated “Very Well Prepared,” reflecting that school leaders are confident in implementing inclusive policies, practices, and programs that cater to diverse learners. The most significant finding is the highest-rated indicator, “Train teachers to differentiate instruction for diverse learners” ($M = 3.69$), which highlights that NQESH-trained school heads recognize the importance of equipping teachers with strategies to address varied learning needs, ensuring equity and quality in education. Meanwhile, the lowest-rated indicator, “Ensure the school is accessible to all learners, regardless of ability” ($M = 3.58$), suggests that while inclusivity is well-practiced in instruction, there may still be structural and resource-related barriers to be addressed. These findings imply that NQESH has effectively instilled in school heads the competencies and values necessary to promote inclusive education; however, greater emphasis on physical accessibility, resource allocation, and systematic support is needed to fully realize inclusive and equitable learning environments across all school settings.

The findings are supported by studies that highlight the central importance of school leaders in developing inclusive education settings through transformational leadership practices such as vision-setting, advocacy, and empowering educators to embrace inclusive pedagogies (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Literature further emphasizes that preparedness to engage with inclusive education is contingent on ongoing professional development, stakeholder participation, and systemic support for accessibility and anti-discrimination (Loreman, 2021; Sharma et al., 2022). Incorporating inclusive education objectives into school planning aligns with adaptive leadership principles that promote flexible, context-guided action in response to varied learners' needs (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Empirical research indicates a lack of practical implementation, particularly in physical accessibility and in promoting an inclusive school culture, thereby affirming the necessity of sustained capacity development beyond certification to maintain inclusive practices effectively. Generally, NQESH's training of school leaders is consistent with classical leadership theories and meets essential literature-identified needs for supporting inclusive education, whilst also indicating areas for strategic practice and policy improvement.

Table 12. Extent of NQESH Preparation for School Heads to Address Emerging Educational Demands in Relation to Equity and Access

Indicators	Descriptive Summary	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	Verbal Interpretation
Ensure that school programs are accessible to learners in remote areas.	3.71	Very Well Prepared
Lead with fairness and justice in decision-making processes.	3.70	Very Well Prepared
Identify and address barriers to learning among marginalized students.	3.69	Very Well Prepared
Allocate school resources equitably across grade levels and needs.	3.69	Very Well Prepared
Monitor attendance and participation gaps among vulnerable groups.	3.68	Very Well Prepared
Facilitate programs that support learners at risk of dropping out.	3.68	Very Well Prepared
Advocate for gender-sensitive and culturally responsive education.	3.67	Very Well Prepared
Ensure that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are supported.	3.66	Very Well Prepared
Involve underrepresented communities in school governance.	3.66	Very Well Prepared
Promote equal opportunities for academic success among all learners.	3.58	Very Well Prepared
Average Mean	3.67	Very Well Prepared

Legend: 3.26 – 4.00 Very Well Prepared, 2.51 – 3.25 Well Prepared, 1.76 – 2.50 Slightly Prepared, 1.00 – 1.75 Not Prepared At All

Table 12 shows that NQESH prepares school heads well to respond to emerging demands for equity and access in education, with a mean score of 3.67. All the individual indicators scored as "Very Well Prepared," indicating that school heads are capable of creating an environment that promotes inclusivity, fairness, and equal opportunities for every student. The most striking observation is the highest-rated indicator, "Ensure that school programs are accessible to learners in remote areas" (M = 3.71), reflecting the strong commitment of school heads trained under NQESH to reach out with education services to geographically and socially disadvantaged learners, a very critical tenet of equitable education. On the other hand, the lowest-rated indicator, "Promote equal opportunities for academic success among all learners" (M = 3.58), though highly rated, still indicates that equity in learning outcomes poses a challenge, likely due to contextual differences in resources and support for learners. This confirms that while NQESH is effective in fostering leadership competencies grounded in equity, particularly for schools serving disadvantaged and remote communities, they do need further support in marshalling their schools to close achievement gaps and ensure sustained and equitable access to quality education.

These results align with successful equity-focused school leadership, which corresponds with Transformational Leadership Theory's focus on vision, advocacy, and empowerment to remedy systemic injustices (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Adaptive Leadership Theory also affirms responsiveness and flexibility in addressing different learners' needs and situational complexities (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Inclusive education and equity literature emphasizes that leaders need to engage communities, implement culturally responsive policies, and strategically allocate resources to break down barriers (Lynch & Lodge, 2023; UNESCO, 2024). The NQESH's preparation of school administrators parallels these leadership values. Still, it underscores the vital need for sustained professional learning and community engagement strategies to strengthen commitment and effectiveness in promoting equity and access in schools.

Table 13. Summary Data on the Extent of NQESH Preparation for School Heads to Address Emerging Educational Demands

Indicators	Descriptive Summary	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	Verbal Interpretation
Digital Leadership	3.66	Very Well Prepared
Mental Health and Well-Being	3.66	Very Well Prepared
Inclusive Education	3.64	Very Well Prepared
Equity and Access	3.67	Ver Well Prepared
Average Mean	3.66	Very Well Prepared

Table 13 summarizes the extent of NQESH preparation among school heads for addressing emerging educational demands, with an overall average of 3.66, interpreted as “Very Well Prepared.” It has been established that NQESH equips school leaders with the competencies to respond to emerging challenges in education, particularly in digital transformation, mental health promotion, inclusivity, and equity. The most important aspect is that the “Equity and Access” aspect garnered the highest mean score ($M = 3.67$), implying that NQESH - trained school heads are most confident in ensuring a just, inclusive, and equitable learning opportunity for all learners, which is one of the critical dimensions of 21st-century education leadership. On the other hand, “Inclusive Education” had the lowest mean, $M = 3.64$. However, it was rated as highly prepared, suggesting that even though leaders are prepared, more focused training on managing diverse learner needs and access could further strengthen inclusion practices. Overall, NQESH provides a sound and comprehensive foundation for developing adaptive, equitable, and socially responsive school leaders; however, continuous professional growth is key to maintaining the quality of leadership amid the emerging emphasis on education.

Part IV. Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles and Addressing Emerging Educational Demands

Table 14. Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles and Addressing Emerging Educational Demands

Indicators	Descriptive Summary	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	Verbal Interpretation
The competencies assessed were clearly connected to the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH).	3.74	Strongly Agree
The content of the NQESH reflected current trends, including digital leadership, inclusive education, and mental health awareness.	3.72	Strongly Agree
The NQESH provided practical scenarios similar to those encountered in actual school-based settings.	3.71	Strongly Agree
I had prior experience in performing leadership roles before taking the NQESH.	3.70	Strongly Agree
The exam environment (online or physical) was conducive and fairly administered.	3.70	Strongly Agree
I was motivated and personally committed to becoming a school leader	3.69	Strongly Agree
My school or division office supported my preparation through training or resources.	3.68	Strongly Agree
I had access to online platforms or digital resources for review and self-assessment.	3.68	Strongly Agree
The exam content was aligned with real-world school leadership challenges.	3.67	Strongly Agree
I was familiar with the exam's structure and format beforehand.	3.67	Strongly Agree
I received feedback and guidance after taking the exam that helped me grow professionally.	3.66	Strongly Agree

I had sufficient time to prepare thoroughly for the exam.	3.64	Strongly Agree
The review programs I attended were relevant and up to date.	3.63	Strongly Agree
I received adequate mentoring or coaching during my exam preparation.	3.55	Strongly Agree
Average Mean	3.67	Strongly Agree

Legend: 3.26 – 4.00 Strongly Agree, 2.51 – 3.25 Moderately Agree, 1.76 – 2.50 Disagree, 1.00 – 1.75 Strongly Disagree

Table 14 presents the factors related to the NQESH in preparing school heads for leadership and responding to emerging demands in education, all of which the respondents rated as “Strongly Agree.” That is, in general, this means that the respondents see the NQESH as a well-structured examination whose content is appropriate, and which represents both theoretical and practical dimensions of school leadership. The most important information obtained concerns the indicator that states, “The competencies assessed were clearly connected to the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH),” with the highest mean score ($M = 3.74$). From this, it ensures that the NQESH is highly correlated with the set leadership standards that guide the conduct of education administration in the Philippines. By implication, it validates the said examination as a valid framework for assessing leadership preparedness.

On the other hand, the lowest-rated indicator was “I received adequate mentoring or coaching during my preparation for the exam,” with a mean of $M = 3.55$, revealing a gap in supportive mechanisms for would-be school heads. At the same time, NQESH’s content and structure are appropriate, but pre-examination professional support remains limited. This would imply that the NQESH enhances the leadership pipeline by assessing appropriate, standards-based competencies; however, its overall effectiveness can be further enhanced through expanded mentoring, structured review programs, and sustained post-examination professional development, which would ensure continuous growth and application of leadership competencies in real school contexts.

The role of individual agency, manifested in motivation, prior experience, and disciplined study habits, and systemic factors such as availability of quality review resources and institutional scaffolding, aligns with Self-Determination Theory and Social Capital Theory, which emphasize intrinsic motivation and social support as critical to successful leadership development (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Putnam, 2000). Transformational Leadership Theory also underscores the need for leadership readiness grounded in relevant, context-sensitive competencies aligned with national standards (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The literature further highlights that mentorship, practical exposure, and alignment with real-world challenges enhance readiness and the application of leadership skills in schools (Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024; Duma, 2022). Therefore, NQESH’s effectiveness depends not only on the exam content but also on enriched preparation experiences, continuous mentorship, and systemic support to cultivate confident, competent school leaders capable of meeting evolving educational demands.

Part V. Significant Difference in the Perceived Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles and the Extent of How NQESH Prepares School Heads to Address Emerging Educational Demands when Grouped According to Profile

Table 15. Significant Difference in Perceived Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles when Grouped according to Location

Effectiveness	Profile (Location)	Mean	Test Statistic (H)	p-value	Decision	Conclusion
Instructional Leadership	Along the Población Area	3.33	11.083	0.004	Reject H_0	Significant difference exists
	Barrio School	3.69				
	Central School	3.49				
	Along the Población Area	3.47	6.742	0.034	Reject H_0	Significant difference exists
	Barrio School	3.73				

School Performance Metrics	Central School	3.52				
Effectiveness Focusing on Teaching and Learning	Along the Población Area	3.56	4.996	0.082	Fail to Reject H_0	No Significant difference exists
	Barrio School	3.76				
	Central School	3.59				
Crisis and Change Management	Along the Población Area	3.40	8.383	0.015	Reject H_0	Significant difference exists
	Barrio School	3.73				
	Central School	3.46				
Teacher Development	Along the Población Area	3.40	5.916	0.052	Fail to Reject H_0	No Significant difference exists
	Barrio School	3.72				
	Central School	3.64				

A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in the perceived effectiveness of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) in preparing school heads for leadership roles across school locations. Results revealed a statistically significant difference in instructional leadership across locations, $H(2) = 11.083$, $p = .004$, indicating that respondents from Barrio Schools ($M = 3.69$) rated the effectiveness higher than those from Central Schools ($M = 3.49$) and schools along the Población Area ($M = 3.33$). Similarly, a significant difference was found in school performance metrics, $H(2) = 6.742$, $p = .034$, with Barrio Schools ($M = 3.73$) reporting higher perceived effectiveness than Central Schools ($M = 3.52$) and Población Area schools ($M = 3.47$).

For effectiveness focusing on teaching and learning, no significant difference was observed among the groups, $H(2) = 4.996$, $p = .082$, suggesting that perceived effectiveness was relatively similar across locations (Barrio School, $M = 3.76$; Central School, $M = 3.59$; Población Area, $M = 3.56$). However, a significant difference was found in crisis and change management, $H(2) = 8.383$, $p = .015$, indicating that Barrio School respondents ($M = 3.73$) perceived higher effectiveness than those in Central ($M = 3.46$) and Población Area schools ($M = 3.40$). Lastly, for teacher development, the difference among groups was not statistically significant ($H(2) = 5.916$, $p = .052$), suggesting comparable levels of perceived effectiveness across the three locations.

Overall, the findings suggest that school location influences perceptions of NQESH effectiveness, particularly in instructional leadership, school performance metrics, and crisis and change management, with Barrio Schools consistently reporting higher mean ratings than their Central and Población counterparts.

The findings imply that school location affects the NQESHs' perceived effectiveness in preparing school heads for leadership, especially in instructional leadership, school performance indicators, and crisis and change management. In particular, school administrators from Barrio Schools give NQESH higher effectiveness ratings than Central School administrators and schools in the Población Area in these locations, indicating that the test is seen as more pertinent or better administered in more rural or less urbanized environments. But for teacher development and teaching and learning, no remarkable differences were found across places, suggesting a relatively uniform perception of effectiveness in these areas, irrespective of the geographical context. These results highlight the impact of contextual factors, including resource availability, community support, and school climate, on how preparation under NQESH manifests as leadership effectiveness across different categories of schools.

Research shows that rural and urban schools in the Philippines face different challenges and resource limitations that affect leadership practices and outcomes (DepEd, 2022; Yamauchi, 2025). Transformational Leadership Theory highlights leaders' ability to adapt and innovate in context, which can account for differences in perceived preparedness and effectiveness (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Research on school-based management also indicates that decentralization initiatives are mixed depending on local capacity, quality of leadership, and community participation, which vary by region (World Bank, 2005; Yamauchi, 2025). Barrio Schools' higher ratings could be due to stronger community cohesion or more focused assistance, which would maximize NQESH's impact there. Overall, addressing location-specific needs through differentiated support and resource allocation could further enhance the NQESH's effectiveness across diverse educational settings.

Table 16. Significant Difference in the Extent of NQESH to Prepare School Heads to Address Emerging Educational Demands when Grouped according to Location

Preparedness	Profile (Location)	Mean	Test Statistic (H)	p-value	Decision	Conclusion
Digital Leadership Preparedness	Along the Población Area	3.31	16.556	<0.001	Reject H_0	Significant difference exists
	Barrio School	3.72				
	Central School	3.58				
Mental Health and Well-being Preparedness	Along the Población Area	3.30	13.426	0.001	Reject H_0	Significant difference exists
	Barrio School	3.71				
	Central School	3.61				
Inclusive Education Preparedness	Along the Población Area	3.25	11.538	0.003	Reject H_0	Significant difference exists
	Barrio School	3.73				
	Central School	3.45				

A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in the extent of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) in preparing school heads to address emerging educational demands across school locations. Results revealed a statistically significant difference in digital leadership preparedness across locations, $H(2) = 16.556$, $p < .001$, indicating that respondents from Barrio Schools ($M = 3.72$) rated the preparedness higher than those from Central Schools ($M = 3.58$) and schools along the Población Area ($M = 3.31$).

Similarly, a significant difference was found in preparedness for mental health and well-being, $H(2) = 13.426$, $p = .001$, with Barrio Schools ($M = 3.71$) reporting higher preparedness than Central Schools ($M = 3.61$) and Población Area schools ($M = 3.30$). In the same manner, inclusive education preparedness showed a significant difference among locations, $H(2) = 11.538$, $p = .003$, with Barrio Schools ($M = 3.73$) demonstrating higher preparedness than Central Schools ($M = 3.45$) and schools along the Población Area ($M = 3.25$).

Overall, the findings suggest that school location plays an essential role in the extent to which NQESH prepares school heads for emerging educational demands. In particular, school heads from Barrio Schools consistently reported higher levels of preparedness in digital leadership, mental health and well-being, and inclusive education compared to their counterparts from Central and Población Area schools.

The findings imply that school location significantly influences the extent to which NQESH prepares school heads to address emerging educational demands in digital leadership, mental health and well-being, and inclusive education. School heads in Barrio Schools consistently report higher levels of preparedness in these areas than those in Central Schools and schools along the Población Area. This suggests that the NQESH may be particularly effective or better implemented in more rural or less urbanized settings, potentially due to differences in local support, resource allocation, or community engagement. Conversely, the lower reported preparedness in more urban areas indicates a need for targeted interventions or support mechanisms tailored to the unique challenges faced in these locations to ensure equitable leadership development across all regions.

Research shows that rural schools in the Philippines often face distinctive challenges, such as limited infrastructure and resources, but may benefit from strong community ties and targeted support programs that enhance leadership effectiveness (Critical Links, 2025; DepEd, 2022). Transformational and Adaptive Leadership theories underscore the importance of contextual leadership that is responsive to local needs and challenges, which aligns with the higher preparedness perceived in Barrio Schools (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). The literature on educational equity emphasizes that differentiated support and capacity-building are essential to bridge gaps in leadership readiness between rural and urban schools (World Bank, 2016).

This corroborates the notion that the NQESH's impact varies by location and underscores the need for location-specific strategies to optimize school heads' preparation for emerging educational demands.

Table 17. Significant Difference in Perceived Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles when Grouped according to Years in Service

Effectiveness	Profile (Years in Service)	Mean	Test Statistic (H)	p-value	Decision	Conclusion
Instructional Leadership	0 to 3 years	3.47	17.693	0.003	Reject H_0	Significant difference exists
	4 to 7 years	3.71				
	8 to 11 years	3.69				
	12 to 15 years	3.74				
	16 to 19 years	3.58				
	20 years and above	2.93				
School Performance Metrics	0 to 3 years	3.43	16.902	0.005	Reject H_0	Significant difference exists
	4 to 7 years	3.72				
	8 to 11 years	3.80				
	12 to 15 years	3.78				
	16 to 19 years	3.64				
	20 years and above	3.36				
Effectiveness Focusing on Teaching and Learning	0 to 3 years	3.51	13.209	0.021	Reject H_0	Significant difference exists
	4 to 7 years	3.78				
	8 to 11 years	3.82				
	12 to 15 years	3.81				
	16 to 19 years	3.66				
	20 years and above	3.44				
Crisis and Change Management	0 to 3 years	3.36	23.501	<0.001	Reject H_0	Significant difference exists
	4 to 7 years	3.78				
	8 to 11 years	3.79				
	12 to 15 years	3.79				
	16 to 19 years	3.54				
	20 years and above	3.31				
Teacher Development	0 to 3 years	3.44	15.392	0.009	Reject H_0	Significant difference exists
	4 to 7 years	3.75				
	8 to 11 years	3.79				
	12 to 15 years	3.74				
	16 to 19 years	3.63				
	20 years and above	3.39				

A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in the perceived effectiveness of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) in preparing school heads for leadership roles across years of service. Results revealed a statistically significant difference in instructional leadership, $H(5) = 17.693$, $p = .003$, indicating that respondents with 12 to 15 years of service ($M = 3.74$) rated effectiveness higher than those with 20 years and above ($M = 2.93$) and those with fewer years of service.

A significant difference was also observed in school performance metrics, $H(5) = 16.902$, $p = .005$, where school heads with 8 to 11 years of service ($M = 3.80$) and 12 to 15 years of service ($M = 3.78$) reported higher perceived effectiveness compared to those with 20 years and above ($M = 3.36$). Likewise, effectiveness focusing on teaching and learning showed a significant difference across groups, $H(5) = 13.209$, $p = .021$, with respondents having 8 to 11 years ($M = 3.82$) and 12 to 15 years ($M = 3.81$) of service reporting higher effectiveness ratings than those with shorter or longer tenures.

For crisis and change management, the difference among service groups was highly significant, $H(5) = 23.501$, $p < .001$. Respondents with 8 to 15 years of service ($M = 3.79$) perceived the NQESH as more effective compared

to those with 20 years and above ($M = 3.31$) and those with 0 to 3 years of service ($M = 3.36$). Similarly, teacher development showed a significant difference, $H(5) = 15.392$, $p = .009$, with the highest mean ratings coming from school heads with 8 to 11 years ($M = 3.79$) and 4 to 7 years ($M = 3.75$) of service, while those with 20 years and above rated it the lowest ($M = 3.39$).

Overall, the findings suggest that years in service influence the perceived effectiveness of NQESH in preparing school heads for leadership roles. Those with mid-range experience, particularly those with 8 to 15 years of service, consistently reported higher effectiveness ratings than novice and long-serving school heads.

The findings suggest that the perceived effectiveness of NQESH in equipping school heads with leadership skills varies substantially by years of service. Mid-experience school heads, especially those with 8 to 15 years of service, consistently rate NQESH's effectiveness higher across all central leadership areas, including instructional leadership, school performance indicators, teaching and learning, crisis management, and teacher growth. Conversely, the newly appointed (0 to 3 years) and the most experienced (20 years and more) have a lower perception of the effectiveness. This would indicate that NQESH preparation would be more appealing to leaders in their mid-career years, when readiness and experience align with the exam competencies, whereas less experienced or older school heads would not find the exam as directly relevant or aligned with their leadership issues.

This trend may be explained by career development and adult learning theories, which posit that mid-career workers are in the active application stage of their knowledge and are ready to develop professionally (Super, 1990; Kolb, 2018). Transformational Leadership Theory stresses that leadership ability develops over time, and linking NQESH with professional standards (PPSSH) assists those in active leadership stages who are ready to apply sophisticated skills (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The educational leadership development literature further notes that novice leaders may need more foundational support, while long-serving leaders may face a discrepancy between changing standards and their established ways of doing things (Duma, 2022; Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). Hence, the effectiveness of NQESH is mediated by service experience, underscoring the need for differentiated developmental routes and support tailored to leadership career phases to optimize the exam's relevance and impact.

Table 18. Significant Difference in the Extent of NQESH to Prepare School Heads to Address Emerging Educational Demands when Grouped according to Years in Service

Preparedness	Profile (Years in Service)	Mean	Test Statistic (H)	p-value	Decision	Conclusion
Digital Leadership Preparedness Mental Health and Well-being Preparedness	0 to 3 years	3.50	11.816	0.037	Reject H_0	Significant difference exists
	4 to 7 years	3.74				
	8 to 11 years	3.78				
	12 to 15 years	3.71				
	16 to 19 years	3.54				
	20 years and above	3.36				
Inclusive Education Preparedness Digital Leadership Preparedness	0 to 3 years	3.44	16.947	0.005	Reject H_0	Significant difference exists
	4 to 7 years	3.73				
	8 to 11 years	3.80				
	12 to 15 years	3.72				
	16 to 19 years	3.50				
	20 years and above	3.42				
Mental Health and Well-being Preparedness Inclusive Education Preparedness	0 to 3 years	3.53	12.337	0.030	Reject H_0	Significant difference exists
	4 to 7 years	3.74				
	8 to 11 years	3.78				
	12 to 15 years	3.74				
	16 to 19 years	3.32				
	20 years and above	3.40				

A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in the extent of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) in preparing school heads to address emerging educational demands across years of service. Results revealed a statistically significant difference in mental health and well-being preparedness, $H(5) = 11.816$, $p = .037$, indicating that respondents with 8 to 11 years of service ($M = 3.78$) and 4 to 7 years of service ($M = 3.74$) reported higher levels of preparedness compared to those with 20 years and above ($M = 3.36$).

Similarly, digital leadership preparedness showed a significant difference across groups, $H(5) = 16.947$, $p = .005$. Respondents with 8 to 11 years of service ($M = 3.80$) and 4 to 7 years ($M = 3.73$) perceived themselves as better prepared than those with 20 years and above ($M = 3.42$) and those with 16 to 19 years ($M = 3.50$) of service. A significant difference was also found in inclusive education preparedness, $H(5) = 12.337$, $p = .030$, where school heads with 8 to 11 years ($M = 3.78$) and 12 to 15 years ($M = 3.74$) of service had higher preparedness ratings than those with 16 to 19 years ($M = 3.32$) and 20 years and above ($M = 3.40$).

Overall, the findings suggest that years in service significantly influence the extent to which NQESH prepares school heads for emerging educational demands. School heads with moderate experience, particularly those with 8 to 15 years of service, consistently reported higher preparedness levels in digital leadership, mental health and well-being, and inclusive education compared to both early-career and long-serving school heads.

The findings suggest that the extent to which NQESH prepares school heads to address new educational needs in digital leadership, mental well-being and health, and inclusive education varies remarkably by years of service. More specifically, school heads with moderate years of service, especially those with 8-15 years, report higher preparedness than those with fewer than 3 years or more than 16 years of service. This implies that mid-career leaders will be better positioned to implement competencies acquired under NQESH and shift towards emerging needs. In contrast, new and experienced leaders will require further specific support to realize the full potential of the preparation. This trend indicates the need for differentiated capacity development programs that account for levels of leadership experience to maximize NQESH's potential to enhance school leadership competence.

Both adult learning and career development theories assert that mid-career professionals are in their most open and optimal phase of learning, connecting new knowledge with applied experience (Kolb, 2018; Super, 1990). Transformational and Adaptive Leadership theories also underscore that leadership development and adaptation occur incrementally with experience, and that NQESH's design meshes well with the developmental requirements of mid-career leaders (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). The literature continues to show that new leaders need to be grounded in mentoring and supported learning, and that veteran leaders can be served with refreshers and higher-order challenges to keep pace with changing educational requirements (Duma, 2022; Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). Overall, the findings support differentiated NQESH training and post-training professional development tailored to leaders' career stages to optimize preparedness for new educational challenges.

Table 19. Significant Difference in Perceived Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles when Grouped According to Year of Passing the Exam

Effectiveness	Profile (Year of Passing the Exam)	Mean	Test Statistic (z)	p-value	Decision	Conclusion
Instructional Leadership	Pre-Pandemic	3.49	-1.497	0.134	Fail to Reject H_0	No Significant difference exists.
	Pandemic and Post-Pandemic	3.67				
School Performance Metrics	Pre-Pandemic	3.55	-1.283	0.200	Fail to Reject H_0	No Significant difference exists.
	Pandemic and Post-Pandemic	3.71				
Effectiveness Focusing on Teaching and Learning	Pre-Pandemic	3.59	-1.428	0.153	Fail to Reject H_0	No Significant difference exists.
	Pandemic and Post-Pandemic	3.75				

Crisis and Change Management	Pre-Pandemic	3.50	-1.104	0.270	Fail to Reject H_0	No Significant difference exists.
	Pandemic and Post-Pandemic	3.71				
Teacher Development	Pre-Pandemic	3.53	-0.925	0.355	Fail to Reject H_0	No Significant difference exists.
	Pandemic and Post-Pandemic	3.71				

A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in the perceived effectiveness of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) in preparing school heads for leadership roles across years of exam passing. Results showed no significant difference in instructional leadership, $z = -1.497$, $p = .134$, indicating that the perceived effectiveness did not differ between those who passed pre-pandemic ($M = 3.49$) and those who passed during or after the pandemic ($M = 3.67$).

Similarly, there were no significant differences found in school performance metrics, $z = -1.283$, $p = .200$; effectiveness focusing on teaching and learning, $z = -1.428$, $p = .153$; crisis and change management, $z = -1.104$, $p = .270$; and teacher development, $z = -0.925$, $p = .355$. In each case, respondents who passed the NQESH during or after the pandemic (Means ranging from 3.67 to 3.75) reported slightly higher mean scores compared to those who passed before the pandemic (Means ranging from 3.49 to 3.59), but these differences were not statistically significant.

Overall, the findings suggest that the year of passing the NQESH, whether before, during, or after the pandemic, did not significantly affect school heads' perceptions of the examination's effectiveness in preparing them for leadership roles.

The findings imply that the year that school heads sat for and passed the NQESH, before, during, or after the pandemic, has little bearing on their perceptions of the effectiveness of the test in preparing them for leadership. While those who passed during or after the pandemic show slightly higher mean scores across all leadership areas, these differences are statistically insignificant. This indicates that, amid pandemic challenges such as changes in test format and content delivery, the NQESH has maintained a consistent level of effectiveness in leadership preparation. The stability in perceived effectiveness demonstrates the exam's resilience and ongoing applicability in preparing school heads to develop competencies in instructional leadership, school performance management, crisis and change management, and teacher development, even amid external disruptions.

Research highlights the flexibility and coping capacity of educational assessment systems, such as NQESH, to respond to pandemic-related changes, for instance, shifting to online exams and revised content that align with evolving educational demands (DepEd, 2023; Buban & Digo, 2021). Transformational Leadership Theory substantiates the ongoing development of leadership traits regardless of external pressures, whereas Adaptive Leadership Theory emphasizes adapting to changing situations (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). The COVID-19 education literature also reinforces that successful leader preparation relies less on timing and more on alignment with national standards and continuous professional learning opportunities (Lacanaria, 2024; Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). Generally, the findings indicate that NQESH's design and implementation have successfully maintained leadership competence-building across various periods, solidifying its position as a valid and appropriate tool for school head preparation.

Table 20. Significant difference in the extent of NQESH to Prepare School Heads to Address Emerging Educational Demands when grouped according to Year of Passing the Exam

Preparedness	Profile (Year of Passing the Exam)	Mean	Test Statistic (z)	p-value	Decision	Conclusion
Digital Leadership Preparedness	Pre-Pandemic	3.40	-3.209	0.001	Reject H_0	Significant difference exists
	Pandemic and Post-Pandemic	3.73				
Mental Health and Well-being Preparedness	Pandemic					

Inclusive Education Preparedness Digital Leadership Preparedness	Pre-Pandemic	3.41	-2.814	0.005	Reject H_0	Significant difference exists
	Pandemic and Post-Pandemic	3.72				
Mental Health and Well-being Preparedness Inclusive Education Preparedness	Pre-Pandemic	3.36	-2.407	0.016	Reject H_0	Significant difference exists
	Pandemic and Post-Pandemic	3.72				

A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in the extent of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) in preparing school heads to address emerging educational demands across years of passing the exam. Results revealed a statistically significant difference in preparedness for mental health and well-being, $z = -3.209$, $p = .001$, indicating that respondents who passed the NQESH during or after the pandemic ($M = 3.73$) reported higher preparedness than those who passed before the pandemic ($M = 3.40$). A significant difference was also found in digital leadership preparedness, $z = -2.814$, $p = .005$, with those who passed during or after the pandemic ($M = 3.72$) reporting greater preparedness than pre-pandemic passers ($M = 3.41$). Likewise, inclusive education preparedness showed a significant difference, $z = -2.407$, $p = .016$, suggesting that pandemic and post-pandemic passers ($M = 3.72$) rated their preparedness higher than those who passed before the pandemic ($M = 3.36$).

Overall, the findings indicate that the year of passing the NQESH significantly influenced school heads' perceived preparedness to address emerging educational demands. Those who passed during or after the pandemic consistently reported higher levels of readiness in digital leadership, mental health and well-being, and inclusive education than those who passed before the pandemic.

The findings suggest that the year passed NQESH significantly impacts school heads' self-evaluation of their readiness to meet emerging educational needs, with those passing during or after the pandemic scoring higher in digital leadership, mental health and well-being, and inclusive education than those passing before the pandemic. This implies that changes in the NQESH made during and after the pandemic, including revised test content and delivery methods that take into account prevailing educational issues, have made the examination more relevant and valuable in preparing school heads to meet the demands of modern leadership. The improved preparedness reported here among recent passers suggests constructive progress towards aligning leadership training with evolving needs in a rapidly changing education landscape.

This concurs with studies on how the COVID-19 pandemic propelled the integration of digital skills, mental health literacy, and inclusive approaches into education leadership standards (DepEd, 2023; Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). Adaptive Leadership Theory underscores the need to develop new leadership capabilities to address emergent issues, with a focus on continuous learning and adaptability (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Transformational Leadership Theory highlights visionary and responsive leadership that can lead schools in periods of uncertainty and innovation (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The literature also notes that education systems worldwide have modified assessments to be more relevant in times of crisis, supporting the argument that NQESH adaptations positively influenced perceived preparedness (Buban & Digo, 2021). Overall, the results confirm that recent versions of NQESH have effectively addressed modern educational needs, better preparing school leaders for the future through the exam's enhanced role.

Part VI. Significant Relationship Between the Perceived Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles and the Extent to Which NQESH Prepares School Heads to Address Emerging Educational Demands.

Table 21. Relationship between Perceived Instructional Leadership Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles and the Extent of NQESH to Prepare School Heads to Address Emerging Educational Demands

Effectiveness	Preparedness	Spearman rho	p-value	Decision	Conclusion
Instructional Leadership	Digital Leadership	0.638	<0.001	Reject Ho	Significant Relationship Exists
	Mental Health and Well-being	0.678	<0.001	Reject Ho	Significant Relationship Exists
	Inclusive Education	0.681	<0.001	Reject Ho	Significant Relationship Exists

A Spearman rank-order correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between the perceived instructional leadership effectiveness of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) in preparing school heads for leadership roles and the extent to which they are prepared to address emerging educational demands. Results revealed a positive and significant relationship between instructional leadership effectiveness and digital leadership preparedness ($\rho = 0.638$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher perceived effectiveness in instructional leadership is associated with greater preparedness in digital leadership.

Similarly, there were significant positive relationships between instructional leadership effectiveness and mental health and well-being preparedness ($\rho = 0.678$, $p < .001$) and between instructional leadership effectiveness and inclusive education preparedness ($\rho = 0.681$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that as school heads perceive NQESH as more effective in developing their instructional leadership, they also tend to feel better prepared to meet the demands of digital leadership, mental health and well-being, and inclusive education.

Overall, the results indicate that NQESH's perceived instructional leadership effectiveness is strongly and positively correlated with school heads' preparedness to address emerging educational demands, suggesting that improvements in leadership training under NQESH are likely to enhance readiness in these key areas.

The findings suggest a strong, significant positive correlation between NQESH's instructional leadership in preparing school heads and self-reported preparedness to meet emerging educational needs in digital leadership, mental well-being, and inclusive education. This indicates that the more effective school heads believe the NQESH is in sharpening their instructional leadership skills, the more competent they also feel in addressing the challenges posed by these key issues in education today. The implication here is that increasing leadership development within NQESH is most likely to improve school heads' readiness across a range of areas critical to the changing face of education.

Transformational Leadership Theory reinforces the finding by highlighting that robust instructional leadership abilities form the basis for visionary and adaptive leadership required for effective management of digital transformation, enhancing mental health awareness, and enhancing inclusive practice within schools (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Adaptive Leadership Theory further resonates with such understandings by emphasizing the contribution of adaptive, context-sensitive leadership behaviors to addressing intricate and dynamic educational issues (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Further evidence indicates that successful instructional leadership is federally associated with school reform and teacher inspiration, thereby enabling holistic strategies for digital integration, mental health interventions, and inclusivity measures (Leithwood et al., 2019; Darling-Hammond et al., 2025). Collectively, this evidence supports the core role of instructional leadership as a bedrock for school heads' readiness to drive transformative schooling agendas supported by the NQESH.

Table 22. Relationship between Perceived School Performance Metrics, Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles, and Extent of NQESH to Prepare School Heads to Address Emerging Educational Demands

Effectiveness	Preparedness	Spearman rho	p-value	Decision	Conclusion
School Performance Metrics	Digital Leadership	0.658	<0.001	Reject Ho	Significant Relationship Exists
	Mental Health and Well-being	0.643	<0.001	Reject Ho	Significant Relationship Exists
	Inclusive Education	0.661	<0.001	Reject Ho	Significant Relationship Exists

A Spearman rank-order correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between the perceived effectiveness of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) in preparing school heads for leadership roles and the extent to which NQESH prepares them to address emerging educational demands. Results revealed a positive and significant relationship between school performance metrics effectiveness and digital leadership preparedness, $\rho = 0.658$, $p < .001$, indicating that higher perceived effectiveness in school performance metrics is associated with greater preparedness in digital leadership.

Likewise, significant positive relationships were found between school performance metrics effectiveness and mental health and well-being preparedness ($\rho = 0.643$, $p < .001$) and between school performance metrics effectiveness and inclusive education preparedness ($\rho = 0.661$, $p < .001$). These results suggest that school heads who perceive NQESH as more effective at improving school performance metrics also tend to feel better prepared to address emerging educational demands in digital leadership, mental health and well-being, and inclusive education.

Overall, the findings indicate that the perceived effectiveness of NQESH in school performance metrics is strongly and positively correlated with preparedness to address new educational challenges, suggesting that enhancing school performance-related competencies through NQESH increases school heads' readiness in these critical areas.

The findings demonstrate that school leaders who view the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) as an effective tool for improving school performance are more ready to meet new educational requirements. The research shows that people who believe NQESH works better are better prepared for digital leadership, mental health support, and inclusive education. The study indicates that improving NQESH quality for performance measurement and development will help school leaders manage current challenges. This leads to stronger school leadership.

The results presented in Table 22 closely align with research highlighting NQESH's significant role in developing key leadership skills. Transformational Leadership Theory, as depicted in the literature, supports the idea that effective leadership development, such as that fostered by NQESH, enhances the visionary and adaptive capabilities required to meet emerging educational needs, including digital leadership and inclusivity (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Leithwood et al., 2019). Besides, the study also points out issues that NQESH passers may struggle with in transferring theoretical knowledge to practical leadership dimensions, especially in emerging fields such as mental health and digitalization, highlighting the appropriateness of these correlations to leadership readiness (Lacanaria, 2024; Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). The high correlations, therefore, affirm calls in the literature for ongoing updating and support of NQESH content, to the point that the exam not only qualifies for basic competence but also prepares school heads with the adaptive and situational competencies necessary to succeed in the modern-day challenges facing education. This cross-referencing supports the perceived effectiveness of NQESH as a key driver of actual readiness in priority areas of emerging leadership, underscoring the significance of synthesizing applicable leadership theories and empirical findings to investigate and enhance NQESH's impact on the development of school leadership.

Table 23. Relationship between Perceived Focusing Teaching and Learning Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles and the Extent of NQESH to Prepare School Heads to Address Emerging Educational Demands

Effectiveness	Preparedness	Spearman rho	p-value	Decision	Conclusion
Focusing on Teaching and Learning	Digital Leadership	0.687	<0.001	Reject Ho	Significant Relationship Exists
	Mental Health and Well-being	0.700	<0.001	Reject Ho	Significant Relationship Exists
	Inclusive Education	0.713	<0.001	Reject Ho	Significant Relationship Exists

A Spearman rank-order correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between the perceived effectiveness of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) in focusing on teaching and learning and the extent to which it prepares school heads to address emerging educational demands. Results revealed a positive and significant relationship between focusing teaching and learning effectiveness and digital leadership preparedness, $\rho = 0.687$, $p < .001$, indicating that higher perceived effectiveness in focusing on teaching and learning is associated with greater preparedness in digital leadership.

Similarly, significant positive relationships were found between focusing teaching and learning effectiveness and mental health and well-being preparedness ($\rho = 0.700$, $p < .001$) and between focusing teaching and learning effectiveness and inclusive education preparedness ($\rho = 0.713$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that school heads who perceive NQESH as more effective in enhancing teaching and learning competencies also tend to feel better prepared to meet emerging demands in digital leadership, mental health and well-being, and inclusive education.

Overall, the results indicate that the perceived effectiveness of NQESH in focusing on teaching and learning is strongly and positively correlated with preparedness to address emerging educational demands, suggesting that strengthening NQESH's teaching-and-learning-focused components improves school heads' readiness to address evolving educational challenges.

The findings suggest that the perceived effectiveness of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) in prioritizing teaching and learning directly affects school heads' readiness to respond to emerging education needs. In particular, perceived effectiveness in this context is associated with increased readiness in digital leadership, mental health and well-being, and inclusive education. This implies that focusing on teaching and learning competencies in NQESH is significant in preparing school heads with the knowledge and skills needed to address the changing nature of educational challenges. These results reaffirm NQESH's salient role in developing the necessary leadership traits in tune with the needs of the times, underscoring the need to regularly improve the test's teaching and learning aspects to enhance school leaders' aggregate capacity and competency in responding to significant educational challenges.

The findings are well supported and well contextualized within the literature review. The literature highlights that the NQESH is designed to certify essential leadership competencies aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), including instructional leadership and curriculum implementation—key elements of focusing on teaching and learning. However, multiple studies highlight a persistent gap between theoretical knowledge assessed by NQESH and practical leadership abilities, particularly in instructional supervision, coaching, and the use of assessment data to improve teaching quality (Pana, 2024; Lacanaria, 2024). Transformational Leadership Theory underscores the importance of NQESH in fostering visionary, adaptive leadership that inspires teacher growth and improves student outcomes, yet empirical evidence indicates that some NQESH-certified heads are inadequately prepared to apply these competencies effectively in practice (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Leithwood et al., 2019). This gap underscores the necessity for the NQESH to not only evaluate knowledge but also support ongoing professional development and experiential learning, ensuring

school heads can translate certification into concrete leadership practice that addresses emerging educational demands. Therefore, the correlations in Table 23 validate concerns in the literature about enhancing the teaching-and-learning focus of NQESH to better prepare school heads for the multifaceted challenges of contemporary education, and they advocate reforms that bridge the divide between certification and real-world instructional leadership effectiveness.

Table 24. Relationship between Perceived Crisis and Change Management Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles and the Extent to Which NQESH Prepares School Heads to Address Emerging Educational Demands

Effectiveness	Preparedness	Spearman rho	p-value	Decision	Conclusion
Crisis and Change Management	Digital Leadership	0.690	<0.001	Reject Ho	Significant Relationship Exists
	Mental Health and Well-being	0.743	<0.001	Reject Ho	Significant Relationship Exists
	Inclusive Education	0.698	<0.001	Reject Ho	Significant Relationship Exists

A Spearman rank-order correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between the perceived crisis and the change management effectiveness of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) in preparing school heads for leadership roles and the extent to which NQESH prepares them to address emerging educational demands. Results revealed a positive and significant relationship between crisis and change management effectiveness and digital leadership preparedness ($\rho = 0.690$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher perceived effectiveness in crisis and change management is associated with greater preparedness in digital leadership.

Likewise, significant positive relationships were found between crisis and change management effectiveness and mental health and well-being preparedness ($\rho = 0.743$, $p < .001$), as well as between crisis and change management effectiveness and inclusive education preparedness ($\rho = 0.698$, $p < .001$). These results suggest that school heads who view NQESH as effective in developing crisis and change management skills also feel more prepared to handle emerging educational challenges related to digital transformation, mental health promotion, and inclusive practices.

Overall, the findings indicate that the perceived effectiveness of NQESH in crisis and change management is strongly and positively correlated with preparedness to address emerging educational demands, suggesting that enhancing school heads' competencies in crisis and change management contributes to their overall readiness to address modern educational challenges.

The results imply that, to a large extent, the effectiveness of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) in preparing school heads depends on how its stakeholders perceive it. More particularly, the high correlations between perceived effectiveness in some of the most critical leadership competencies—school performance measures, teaching and learning, and crisis and change management—and readiness for new challenges like digital leadership, mental health and well-being, and inclusive education indicate that NQESH has a significant influence in preparing leaders to acquire the skills necessary to lead in dynamic and complex school contexts. This highlights the need to continually refine the exam to better align with actual school leadership needs, ensuring that certified school administrators are not only informed but also adaptive and transformational leaders who can produce desirable school outcomes. In addition, this illustrates the need to incorporate holistic professional development and support systems after certification to close theory-practice gaps and enhance sustainable leadership effectiveness for teachers, students, and communities.

The evidence in Table 24, showing a positive correlation between the perceived effectiveness of NQESH in crisis and change management and school leaders' preparedness to confront modern educational challenges, is strongly corroborated by previous literature. The literature highlights that timely crisis and change management are

essential skills for school leaders managing increasingly unstable conditions such as digital transformation, mental health emergencies, and inclusive education calls (Giglio & de Almeida, 2024; Wallace Foundation, 2023). Nonetheless, research repeatedly shows that existing evaluation frameworks, including NQESH, fail to place sufficient priority on experiential, contextually driven crisis management competencies essential for real-world application (Velasco et al., 2024; Rizada, 2024). The identified gap underscores the need for the NQESH to incorporate more realistic simulations, scenario-based training, and regular professional development activities that immediately build leaders' ability to manage crises effectively. This congruence is significant in ensuring school heads not only see themselves as ready but are indeed able to handle the intricacies of modern education environments, as emphasized in the literature and buttressed by the observed correlations in this study.

Table 25. Relationship between Perceived Teacher Development Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles and the Extent of NQESH to Prepare School Heads to Address Emerging Educational Demands

Effectiveness	Preparedness	Spearman rho	p-value	Decision	Conclusion
Teacher Development	Digital Leadership	0.704	<0.001	Reject Ho	Significant Relationship Exists
	Mental Health and Well-being	0.752	<0.001	Reject Ho	Significant Relationship Exists
	Inclusive Education	0.720	<0.001	Reject Ho	Significant Relationship Exists

A Spearman rank-order correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between the perceived teacher development effectiveness of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) in preparing school heads for leadership roles and the extent to which they are prepared to address emerging educational demands. Results revealed a positive and significant relationship between teacher development effectiveness and digital leadership preparedness ($\rho = 0.704$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher perceived effectiveness in teacher development is associated with greater preparedness in digital leadership.

Similarly, significant positive relationships were found between teacher development effectiveness and mental health and well-being preparedness ($\rho = 0.752$, $p < .001$) and between teacher development effectiveness and inclusive education preparedness ($\rho = 0.720$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that school heads who perceive NQESH as more effective in enhancing teacher development also feel better prepared to meet emerging educational challenges related to digital innovation, mental health promotion, and inclusive practices.

Overall, the results indicate that the perceived effectiveness of NQESH in teacher development is strongly and positively correlated with preparedness to address emerging educational demands, suggesting that strengthening NQESH's teacher development components improves school heads' readiness to respond to evolving educational needs.

This means that improving the teacher development elements in NQESH not only helps school heads build stronger teacher capacities but also equips them with leadership competencies to drive innovation, advance mental well-being, and apply inclusive practices in schools.

The literature highlights the critical role of school principals in fostering continuous professional development among teachers, which directly affects educational quality and learner performance (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Galleposo, 2021). That said, research also points to challenges in linking teacher development programs to real-world leadership needs, suggesting the need for additional, more focused, context-dependent training and assessment systems that ensure school heads are well-equipped to lead teacher development and navigate emerging education challenges (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Overall, the high correlations affirm the importance of NQESH in reinforcing teacher development-oriented competencies to better prepare school heads for emerging leadership positions better.

Part VII. Long – term Effectiveness of Passing the NQESH in Curriculum Implementation and Instructional Supervision

Table 26. Coded Responses on Participants' Journey to Becoming School Head

Core Theme	Description	No. of References (NVivo Count)	Representative Quotes
Theme 1. NQESH as a Source of Professional Validation and Motivation	Principals viewed passing the exam as an achievement that boosted confidence and credibility.	12	"Passing the NQESH gave me a sense of validation..." (P1)
Theme 2. Theoretical Knowledge vs. Practical Readiness Gap	Most principals felt the NQESH emphasized theoretical understanding but fell short in preparing them for the realities of hands-on leadership.	15	"The exam covered policies and theories but not the realities of leading a team." (P1)
Theme 3. Transition Challenges and Learning Through Experience	The transition to principalship required adaptive learning, self-reflection, and reliance on peer networks.	13	"The learning curve remained steep... on-the-job learning was essential." (P5)
Theme 4. Importance of Mentorship and Continuous Professional Development	Mentorship from senior principals and engagement in ongoing professional learning helped bridge the readiness gap.	10	"I relied on mentorship from veteran principals..." (P9)
Theme 5. Need for Broader Skill Preparation Beyond Policy Compliance	Participants highlighted missing competencies in interpersonal communication, innovation, and change management.	11	"The exam barely touched on conflict resolution skills I relied on daily." (P3)

The responses of 15 school heads reveal that while the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) serves as an important milestone that validates professional competence and boosts confidence, it only partially prepares them for the complex realities of instructional leadership. Some principals acknowledged a significant gap between the exam's theoretical orientation and the practical demands of school management, particularly in curriculum implementation, supervision, and interpersonal relations. To bridge this gap, they emphasized the value of mentorship, peer collaboration, and experiential learning as essential components of leadership readiness. The findings also underscore the importance of lifelong professional development, with principals recognizing that effective leadership extends far beyond exam performance and requires continual learning and adaptation to local contexts. Furthermore, respondents noted that NQESH's focus is limited to interpersonal and transformative leadership skills, highlighting a need for more holistic assessment frameworks. Finally, seasoned principals observed that while the NQESH has evolved, it still lags behind the growing demands of modern education, which now prioritizes innovation, adaptability, and context-driven leadership.

The data suggest that while passing the NQESH is associated with increased professional confidence and foundational knowledge, it remains insufficient in equipping new school heads with the practical, interpersonal, and transformative leadership skills necessary for effective curriculum implementation and instructional supervision. The importance of mentorship, continuous professional learning, and adaptive capacity is repeatedly highlighted by principals across all service years, reinforcing the need for ongoing, context-sensitive leadership development that goes beyond the scope of certification exams.

The findings corroborate the literature questioning the balance between theory and practice in the examination. The literature recognizes NQESH as a pivotal achievement that recognizes competence and increases confidence, but notes its shortcomings in equipping school heads to navigate real challenges such as mentorship, hands-on supervision, and responding to the changing needs of curriculum leadership (Galleposo, 2021; Lacanaria, 2024). Principals who were surveyed corroborated these concerns, citing a disconnect between theoretical test material and real-world leadership experience, and highlighting the importance of mentorship, peer support, and ongoing professional development—precepts underpinned by Transformational and Adaptive Leadership Theories—as essential for successful leadership after certification. Secondly, the further enhancement of NQESH through more applied, context-specific, and social leadership measurements is supported by scholarly literature on ongoing experiential learning and adaptive leadership competencies in fluid school environments. This cross-reference shows that although NQESH is a foundational certification, long-term leadership effectiveness hinges significantly on post-certification support and continued capacity development, as supported by the initial data and broader literature.

Table 27. Coded Responses on the Participants' Knowledge or Competence Acquired During NQESH Preparation

Core Theme	Description	No. of References (NVivo Count)	Representative Quotes
Theme 1. Application of Theoretical Knowledge	1. NQESH preparation provided principals with a strong foundation in school governance, curriculum alignment, policy interpretation, and leadership theories, which are applied in curriculum planning and compliance.	15	"During my NQESH preparation, I gained solid foundational knowledge in school governance and policy frameworks..." (Principal 1)
Theme 2. Instructional Supervision Competencies	2. Competencies in classroom observation, supervisory tools, performance evaluation, and curriculum monitoring are directly applied in daily instructional supervision.	12	"I developed a comprehensive understanding of instructional supervision models during my pre-exam training, which I apply daily through classroom observations." (Principal 3)
Theme 3. Strategic and Data-Driven Leadership	3. Strategic planning, action planning, and data-driven decision-making help principals set instructional goals, evaluate curriculum initiatives, and implement new programs effectively.	10	"Being introduced to data-driven decision making during NQESH review was very helpful. I now use achievement data to evaluate curriculum initiatives." (Principal 4)

Theme 4. Gaps in Practical Skills	NQESH focused heavily on theory, leaving gaps in conflict management, informal coaching, communication, technology integration, inclusive education, staff development, and adaptive leadership.	14	“The exam barely touched on dealing with teacher resistance to change, which I have encountered frequently since taking up my role.” (Principal 2)
Theme 5. Need for Contextualized and Adaptive Competencies	Principals highlighted the need for personalized strategies, innovation, and adaptive skills to address real-world challenges in curriculum implementation and instructional supervision.	9	“Competencies around staff development and nurturing teacher leaders were not prioritized during my exam days.” (Principal 12)

Table 27 analysis shows that school heads' responses indicate that NQESH preparation provided a strong theoretical framework for school governance, curriculum alignment, policy interpretation, and leadership, which they applied in practice through curriculum planning, instructional supervision, and data-driven decision-making. Skills in classroom observation, performance evaluation, and strategic planning were more helpful in managing instructional goals and assessing curriculum initiatives. Nonetheless, the examination lacked preparation for actual challenges, including conflict management, on-the-job mentoring, communication with stakeholders, technology integration, inclusive education, and staff development. Principals called for adaptive, context-specific strategies and creative solutions to address real-world complexities in curriculum deployment. Overall, NQESH strengthened theoretical and strategic leadership capacities while addressing the theory-practice gap; sustained professional development, mentorship, and adaptive leadership interventions are required.

The findings indicate that NQESH preparation effectively develops strategic and administrative competencies necessary for school leadership, particularly in policy interpretation, planning, and supervision. However, the data also reveal a need for stronger integration of contextual, interpersonal, and adaptive leadership skills—areas crucial for translating theoretical knowledge into meaningful, practice-based instructional leadership.

The findings are consistent with the literature, which highlights NQESH's role in developing core strategic and administrative competencies. The literature acknowledges NQESH preparation as significant to comprehend DepEd policies, curriculum alignment, and data-driven decision-making, which are imperative to effective school leadership (Malipot, 2021; Galleposo, 2021). Nonetheless, as participants in the study noted, existing research further suggests that, while these strengths exist, there is a gap in the interpersonal, adaptive, and context-dependent leadership skills required to navigate complex instructional settings (Lacanaria, 2024; Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). The literature underscores the importance of consistent mentorship, experiential learning, and attention to transformational leadership competencies, rather than theoretical knowledge, as evaluated in NQESH. Combined, these findings indicate that although preparation in NQESH lays an essential foundation of knowledge for curriculum leadership, a more holistic training is required to adequately prepare school heads for the complex realities of teaching supervision and ongoing school improvement.

Table 28. Coded Responses on Participants' Overcoming Challenges in Curriculum Implementation or Instructional Leadership through NQESH Acquired Skills

Core Theme	Description	No. of References (NVivo Count)	Representative Quotes
Theme 1. Strategic Application of NQESH Competencies in Curriculum Implementation	Principals effectively applied NQESH-acquired skills, including strategic planning, data analysis, and policy interpretation, to address specific curriculum challenges.	15	"I applied my NQESH skills in strategic planning to lead the rollout of a revised curriculum." (P1)
Theme 2. Leadership Adaptability and Situational Problem Solving	Participants demonstrated flexibility and context-based decision-making to address issues unaddressed by the exam framework.	12	"The success relied heavily on adaptability—something the NQESH only touched upon." (P1)
Theme 3. Strengthened Instructional Supervision and Accountability	Principals employed monitoring, evaluation, and supervision tools to improve curriculum delivery and teaching performance.	10	"I created checklists and observation tools for remote teaching." (P4)
Theme 4. Effective Stakeholder and Teacher Engagement	Collaboration and communication strategies helped resolve conflicts and foster ownership of reforms.	11	"I coordinated open forums to explain reforms and rebuild trust." (P13)
Theme 5. Beyond Certification: Growth through Experience and Mentorship	Participants acknowledged that long-term leadership effectiveness came from ongoing learning and adaptation beyond NQESH training.	14	"Maintaining the momentum requires skills and resilience developed over years, not just from certification." (P12)

Table 28 captures principals' experiences using learning from the NQESH program to overcome challenges in instructional leadership and curriculum implementation, organized into five thematic areas: stakeholder engagement, adaptability, instructional supervision, strategic planning, and continuous growth post-certification. The results indicate that although NQESH skills provided the necessary tools for successful curriculum management and leadership, principals were also highly dependent on adaptability and ongoing professional development to address complex and changing problems. These findings suggest that leadership training programs, such as NQESH, are necessary but should be supplemented with practical experience and adaptive abilities to support and equip successful curriculum and instructional leadership.

The findings are well supported by relevant literature, which emphasizes the critical role of strategic planning, policy interpretation, data-driven decision-making, instructional supervision, and stakeholder engagement as foundational competencies for school leadership (Galleposo, 2021; DepEd Order 24, s. 2020). These skills, as reported by principals, facilitated the management of reforms, resource allocation, and conflict resolution, aligning with educational leadership theories that stress the importance of transformational and collaborative leadership for effective school operations (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Leithwood et al., 2019). However, both primary data and studies point to a need for continued development of adaptive, interpersonal, and transformative leadership skills that extend beyond the technical competencies emphasized in the exam to address the dynamic, context-specific realities of schools (Lacanaria, 2024; Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). This cross-reference confirms that while NQESH provides essential grounding for instructional and curriculum leadership, sustained effectiveness relies on ongoing professional learning, experiential practice, and collaborative stakeholder engagement.

Part VIII. NQESH-Certified School Heads' Perception of the Examination's Role in Shaping Their Professional Growth and Career Progression.

Table 29. Coded Participants' Responses on Contribution of Passing the NQESH in the Professional Growth and Career Progression of School Heads

Core Theme	Description	No. of References (NVivo Count)	Representative Quotes
Theme 1. NQESH as a Catalyst for Career Progression and Recognition	The NQESH qualification provided eligibility for promotion, enhanced professional status, and increased leadership credibility.	15	"Passing the NQESH was essential in my promotion as a school head." (P2)
Theme 2. Enhanced Leadership Confidence and Professional Identity	Certification boosted self-efficacy and reaffirmed participants' capacity to lead and manage schools effectively.	12	"Obtaining the NQESH gave me added confidence and credibility." (P1)
Theme 3. Expansion of Roles and Leadership Responsibilities	Many principals assumed greater responsibilities, including supervising staff, leading improvement projects, and mentoring peers.	11	"It opened up opportunities for me to lead school improvement initiatives." (P5)
Theme 4. Gaps in Practical Application and Contextual Relevance	Participants observed that some exam content lacked real-world applicability, especially in resource-limited and rural contexts.	13	"The assessment system didn't fully consider the diversity of school environments." (P4)
Theme 5. Sustainability Challenges and Limited Ongoing Support	Despite certification, principals cited time constraints, lack of mentoring, and insufficient post-exam capacity-building as barriers to growth.	9	"I noticed limited ongoing support after certification." (P5)

Table 29 presents selective coded responses from school heads on how becoming an NQESH-certified school head has assisted them in their professional development and career advancement, grouped into five overarching themes: career growth and institutional recognition, increased leadership confidence, increased responsibilities, practical relevance gaps, and sustainability issues. The results show that NQESH certification is an essential determinant of promotion and of professional identity enhancement, and will allow principals to undertake more sophisticated leadership roles. The participants also pointed out limitations in the exam's non-contextual application and the lack of adequate support post-certification. These findings suggest that although NQESH is crucial for promoting careers, enhancing post-certification mentoring, and tailoring content to varied school contexts are essential to optimizing its impact on long-term professional development.

The findings show that principals frequently reported that passing the NQESH was indispensable for promotion, leadership expansion, and gaining validity in managing schools. This self-assurance and official endorsement of their expertise enabled them to assume greater responsibilities and engage in mentoring and systemic leadership. Some respondents, however, mentioned issues with the exam's theoretical nature, the lengthy process, and the lack of adequate post-certification support, which they identified as areas for improvement within the system. Comparing this to literature, research underscores that although NQESH is a bridge to leadership roles and verifies candidates' initial knowledge and skills, actual leadership effectiveness demands continuous development, field application, and contextualized guidance (Galleposo, 2021; Lacanaria, 2024; Ibanez & Salmon, 2020). This convergence reflects the need for the examination framework to transform, incorporating

capacity-building processes that encourage continuous learning and on-the-job leadership adaptation to enable long-term success in educational leadership.

Table 30. Coded Participants' Responses on Other Factors Supported the Leadership Effectiveness

Core Theme	Description	No. of References (NVivo Count)	Representative Quotes
Theme 1. Mentorship and Peer Support as Catalysts for Leadership Growth	Mentorship from experienced principals and peer collaboration played a crucial role in building leadership confidence and problem-solving capacity.	13	"Mentorship from experienced school heads was invaluable in helping me navigate challenges." (P1)
Theme 2. Continuous Professional Development as a Sustained Learning Mechanism	Regular training programs, seminars, and online courses provided essential platforms for skill enhancement beyond NQESH certification.	15	"Professional development seminars helped me build practical skills beyond the NQESH." (P2)
Theme 3. Strengthening Leadership through Emotional Intelligence and Communication Skills	Soft skills training on communication, empathy, and conflict resolution enhanced leaders' ability to manage staff and foster a positive school culture.	9	"Training on emotional intelligence and conflict resolution significantly supported my growth." (P4)
Theme 4. Community Engagement and Partnership Building	Immersion and collaboration with stakeholders deepened contextual understanding and strengthened school improvement efforts.	11	"Community immersion programs gave me insights into our unique local needs." (P3)
Theme 5. Exposure to Innovation and Global Leadership Practices	Participation in forums and conferences expanded leaders' perspectives and introduced innovative educational models.	8	"Participating in national and international forums exposed me to evolving trends and leadership models." (P13)

Table 30 illustrates selective coding of participants' answers regarding factors beyond passing the NQESH that made them effective leaders, grouped into five themes: mentorship and peer support, ongoing professional development, emotional intelligence and communication skills, community engagement, and exposure to innovation and best international practices. The results highlight that mentorship and continuous training were essential for advancing leadership confidence and experiential skills, with improvements in soft skills and community engagement further consolidating leadership capacity. Moreover, engaging with broader education trends through forums widened leaders' horizons.

The findings suggest that although obtaining the NQESH is an essential qualification, leadership effectiveness in schools is complex and highly influenced by supporting factors like mentorship, ongoing professional development, community involvement, continuous learning, and individual reflective practices. These factors, when combined, increase a leader's ability to address complex, context-specific challenges in schools, build collaborative cultures, and respond to changing educational needs. This means that leadership competence goes beyond certification, heavily depending on prolonged, experience-driven learning and strong support systems.

The value of mentorship, professional development, and community engagement aligns with transformational leadership theories that highlight relational, adaptive, and inclusive leadership attributes as the chief drivers of school success (Sarong, 2023; Uy et al., 2024). Research in the Philippine context also notes that successful school leadership involves emotional intelligence, collaboration with stakeholders, and ongoing improvement

activities complemented by systemic and localized professional development initiatives (Galleposo, 2021; Malipot, 2019). Furthermore, frequent exposure to changing educational trends and reflective practice is considered essential for school heads to remain relevant and responsive in their roles (Pedroso et al., 2021; Ibanez & Salmon, 2020). In this way, the empirical evidence and scholarly reflections cumulatively highlight the imperative of supplementing NQESH certification with widespread, context-specific assistance to develop adaptive, effective, and enduring school leadership practice.

Table 31. Coded Participants' Responses on Suggested Improvements for the NQESH to Make it a More Effective Tool for Selection and Developing Future School Heads

Core Theme	Description	No. of References (NVivo Count)	Representative Quotes
Theme 1. Enhancement of Practical and Contextual Learning Approaches	Principals emphasized the need for experiential, school-based simulations and modules tailored to varied contexts such as barrio schools.	14	"Make the training more practical and hands-on, with real case studies and simulations." (P1)
Theme 2. Integration of Mentorship and Sustained Professional Support	Participants recommended embedding mentorship and post-certification coaching to sustain leadership growth.	12	"Greater mentorship opportunities linked with the NQESH would help candidates apply their learning." (P4)
Theme 3. Flexibility and Accessibility in Program Delivery	Suggestions included modular courses, flexible assessments, and pathways suitable for working educators.	11	"Shorter, modular courses would make it easier for working educators to participate." (P9)
Theme 4. Strengthening Technology and Innovation Competencies	Participants recognized the need to add digital literacy and technology management to leadership preparation.	8	"Adding technology training to manage digital tools and remote learning would be beneficial." (P5)
Theme 5. Recognition of Experience and Contextual Diversity	Principals called for recognition of veteran educators' experience and local school challenges within the NQESH structure.	9	"Recognize prior experience more explicitly and allow flexible pathways." (P11)
Theme 6. Balanced and Authentic Assessment Methods	Calls were made for improvements to assessments that integrate theory with real-world leadership applications.	7	"Improving assessment methods to balance theory with practical scenarios." (P14)

Table 31 summarizes the selective coding of participants' recommendations for enhancing the NQESH to select better and develop future school heads, categorized into six overall themes: practical and contextual learning, mentorship and continuous support, flexible delivery of programs, technology proficiency, experience and diversity recognition, and authentic evaluations. There is an apparent demand for increased contextual, hands-on training and integrating mentorship to facilitate sustained development, as indicated by the findings. The participants also underscored the importance of accommodative, flexible courses, improved digital competencies, and assessment approaches aligned with current leadership issues. Moreover, considering the experience of veteran educators and accommodating a variety of school environments were seen as critical enhancements. These findings suggest that making NQESH more practical, supportive, and responsive will better equip school leaders for heterogeneous and dynamic educational settings.

The findings imply that, to increase the impact of the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) as an instrument for selecting and developing the next generation of educational leaders, the

examination should be enhanced with more practical, context-specific training. The participants stressed the value of school-based simulations, mentorship, continuous assistance, responsive learning modalities, contemporary leadership skills such as digital literacy, and a greater focus on community involvement. They also emphasized the importance of balancing theoretical knowledge and practical appraisals. This indicates that the NQESH not only needs to examine core knowledge but also promote adaptive, experiential, and collaborative leadership skills appropriate to various school contexts.

Cross-referencing with literature, the same suggestions have been made for integrating context-led leadership development, mentorship schemes, and ongoing professional learning into school leader education in the Philippines (Malipot, 2021; Galleposo, 2021). Leadership effectiveness research focuses on integrating digital skills, evidence-based decision-making, and stakeholder collaboration as essential to educational leadership in the modern era (DepEd Order 24, s. 2020; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). The emphasis on flexibility and modular training aligns with studies promoting accessible, continuous capacity-building processes that work within educators' schedules and diverse local school contexts (Uy et al., 2024; Ibanez & Salmon, 2020). Cumulatively, these research findings and scholarly contributions overwhelmingly suggest that remaking the NQESH into an innovative, workable, and helpful system of development will better prepare school heads to face changing educational challenges successfully.

Part IX. Key Challenges Faced by NQESH Passers in Applying the Competencies Assessed in the Examination to Real-World Educational Leadership in Alignment with the Domains of Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH).

Table 32. Coded Participants' Responses on NQESH Preparation in Setting a Clear Vision and Direction for School in Alignment with PPSSH Domain – Leading Strategically

Core Theme	Description	No. of References (NVivo Count)	Representative Quotes
Theme 1. Strategic and Data-Informed Vision Development	Principals credited NQESH preparation for providing tools and frameworks for strategic planning, data analysis, and goal alignment in crafting their school vision.	14	"NQESH training strengthened my skills in analyzing school data to inform vision development." (P6)
Theme 2. Inclusive and Collaborative Vision Setting	The NQESH fostered participatory approaches involving teachers, parents, and communities in the formulation and implementation of the vision.	12	"It introduced me to vision-setting tools that encouraged inclusive participation from teachers and parents." (P3)
Theme 3. Vision as a Dynamic and Contextual Process	Participants viewed vision not as static but as evolving—continuously reviewed and adapted to community realities and school goals.	10	"My preparation helped me understand vision as a living document that requires continuous review." (P4)
Theme 4. Alignment with National Priorities and Local Realities	The program guided principals in aligning school directions with DepEd's goals while contextualizing them to local needs.	11	"I learned how to align our school's vision with national education goals." (P5)
Theme 5. Visionary and Transformational Leadership Practice	NQESH emphasized the importance of shared leadership and communication in fostering a unified, forward-looking school culture.	9	"The preparation emphasized leadership styles that promote shared vision." (P7)

Table 32 presents selective coding of participants' responses on how NQESH preparation helped them establish a clear vision and direction for schools, corresponding to the PPSSH domain of strategic leadership. The results indicate that principals attributed NQESH to helping them improve strategic planning and data analysis, thereby forming well-informed, adaptive, and inclusive visions for their schools. The program also underscored cooperation with teachers, parents, and local communities in a manner that assures vision-setting is both informed by national priorities and localized. Furthermore, participants acknowledged the significance of visionary leadership behaviors that foster collaborative ownership and a transformative school-improvement process. These findings suggest that NQESH is effective in facilitating principals to develop strategic, context-sensitive, and transformational leadership that can drive schools toward continuous development and alignment with educational objectives.

The findings highlight that NQESH preparation significantly equips school heads to establish a clear, strategic, and adaptable vision aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH). Participants reported enhanced competencies in strategic planning, inclusive vision-building, data-informed decision-making, and stakeholder communication. These skills enable school heads to craft visions that are both contextually relevant and aligned with national education goals, fostering collective ownership and transformational leadership within their schools. This underscores the efficacy of NQESH in fostering visionary leadership, which is essential to dynamic, responsive school management in the Philippines.

The integration of PPSSH-based strategic leadership in NQESH preparation aligns with national educational policies and frameworks that emphasize the importance of visionary and adaptive leadership for school heads (DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2020; Malipot, 2021). Scholarly works on educational leadership in the Philippines highlight the crucial role of inclusive vision-setting, stakeholder collaboration, and continuous adaptation to local contexts as key attributes of effective school leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Leithwood et al., 2019). The literature supports that developing these competencies through structured training and assessment contributes to improved school governance and instructional outcomes. Hence, the findings confirm that NQESH effectively prepares school heads to lead strategically by instilling critical skills for vision development and execution aligned with PPSSH domains.

Table 33. Coded Participants' Responses on Limitations Experienced in Using Strategic Planning Tools and Leadership Frameworks in the School Heads' Daily Responsibilities in Alignment with PPSSH Domain – Leading Strategically

Core Theme	Description	No. of References (NVivo Count)	Representative Quotes
Theme 1. Practical and Contextual Barriers to Framework Application	Principals find strategic tools too complex, rigid, or disconnected from the unique realities of barrio and resource-limited schools.	14	"Some frameworks are too generic and not tailored enough to our school's unique needs." (P4)
Theme 2. Time, Workload, and Administrative Burdens	Daily operational demands leave little time for reflective or strategic work, limiting the effective use of leadership frameworks.	13	"Balancing framework implementation with daily emergencies leaves little time to utilize these tools." (P2)
Theme 3. Resource and Technological Constraints	The lack of sufficient funding, manpower, and access to technology hinders proper planning and data-based decision-making.	11	"Lack of resources and limited staff capacity restrict how extensively we can apply frameworks." (P3)
Theme 4. Insufficient Training and Continuous Support	Principals expressed a need for regular, practical training and post-certification guidance to apply planning tools fully.	9	"The biggest limitation is the lack of continuous training and follow-up support." (P12)

Theme 5. Structural and Policy-Related Challenges	Rapid policy changes, bureaucratic delays, and overlapping frameworks undermine consistency and innovation.	10	“Frequent changes in policies make it hard to maintain consistent strategic plans.” (P5)
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The results show that although principals appreciate the utility of strategic planning tools and leadership frameworks, some practical and systemic impediments hinder their complete utilization in everyday practice. The greatest obstacle is the complexity and generic nature of frameworks that do not suit the realities of small or limited-resource schools. Principals complained that time pressures, administrative load, and constant policy changes interfere with long-term planning and reflection. Furthermore, resource scarcity—limited human capacity, antiquated information systems, and a lack of appropriate technology—was cited as one of the most significant barriers to data-driven leadership. A lack of ongoing professional development and post-certification mentoring also exacerbates these issues, leaving principals to lean heavily on experience rather than established guidelines. Additionally, motivational and cultural barriers among staff, as well as inflexible bureaucratic procedures, limit the practice of cooperative and adaptive leadership. In all, the analysis points out that leadership frameworks and tools need to be streamlined, contextualized, and underpinned by ongoing capacity-building to work effectively in day-to-day school management.

The findings highlight essential practical constraints that school heads face when applying strategic planning instruments and leadership models necessary for managing daily school activities, as mapped against the PPSSH competency area on Leading Strategically. Respondents indicated that complexity, time constraints, resource constraints, policy obstacles, lack of training, and contextual incompatibility hinder the effective use of the said frameworks across their different school settings. This indicates that although strategic planning is accepted as critical, existing tools and methodologies may be too generic or resource-intensive, limiting their adaptability and usability in real-world environments.

The same challenges have been extensively reported in the Philippine education system, where school administrators wrestle with overly complex planning demands, inadequate support, and misplaced frameworks that neglect local realities (DepEd Order No. 7, s. 2024; San Miguel, 2019). Studies indicate the need for simplified, locally relevant tools and a continuum of capacity-building interventions that include practical training, long-term professional development, and responsive models sensitive to urban-rural and resource variations (Malipot, 2021; Uy et al., 2024). In addition, effective strategic leadership in schools is supported through minimizing bureaucratic bottlenecks and encouraging collaborative staff participation, according to governance evaluations and research on educational leadership (Leithwood et al., 2019; Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). The combined findings emphasize an imperative to transform strategic leadership instruments to be more accessible, pertinent, and responsive to school heads' changing daily leadership tasks.

Table 34. Coded Participants’ Responses on the Operational Management Challenges Faced Even After NQESH Certification in Alignment with PPSSH Domain – Managing Resources and School Operations

Core Theme	Description	No. of References (NVivo Count)	Representative Quotes
Theme 1. Persistent Resource Limitations and Infrastructure Gaps	Principals continue to face resource scarcity and a lack of facilities, hindering operational efficiency.	14	“Dealing with budget limitations despite having skills to manage funds efficiently is a recurring problem.” (P6)
Theme 2. Overlapping Roles and Time Management Struggles	The dual demand of instructional and administrative duties remains overwhelming, requiring prioritization and delegation skills.	13	“Balancing administrative duties with instructional leadership responsibilities remains difficult.” (P7)

Theme 3. Bureaucratic and Policy-Driven Constraints	Changing policies and procedural requirements often slow decision-making and implementation of operational plans.	10	“Navigating bureaucratic processes and paperwork slows down operational efficiency.” (P11)
Theme 4. Human Resource Limitations and Motivation Concerns	Staff shortages, absenteeism, and low morale continue to affect workflow and leadership effectiveness.	11	“Lack of sufficient personnel affects our ability to implement operational plans fully.” (P12)
Theme 5. External and Environmental Challenges	Factors beyond the principal’s control, such as community issues or natural disruptions, introduce unpredictability into school management.	9	“Frequent external disruptions, such as community issues or weather events, complicate school operations.” (P15)

Table 34 displays coded participants' answers naming operational management problems encountered by school principals despite achieving NQESH certification, categorized under the PPSSH area of managing resources and school operations. The results indicate the following long-standing problems: resource shortages and infrastructure deficits; challenges in maintaining instructional and administrative balances; bureaucratic challenges; human resource deficiencies; and external interference that hamper sound school administration. Despite greater proficiency from NQESH, the problems reflect systemic and contextual constraints that limit their operational effectiveness. The implications are that even certification of superior managerial proficiency is needed, but that intervening to relax broader structural constraints and installing additional support mechanisms are also required to allow principals to manage resources and operations in their schools effectively.

The findings indicate that, despite NQESH certification, school heads in the Philippines still face significant operational management challenges that hinder practical resource and school operations management. Such challenges are bound by financial constraints and human resources, excessive workload, infrastructure and technological shortages, bureaucratic red tape, communication failures, and resistance to changes in management practices. This implies that although the NQESH prepares school heads with theoretical and strategic management learning competencies corresponding to the PPSSH competency domain on Managing School Operations and Resources, practical complexities and contextual constraints continue to hinder their ability to fully utilize these competencies substantially.

These findings align with studies pointing to systemic issues in Philippine public schools, such as limited budgetary releases, human resource inadequacies, and constant policy adjustments that negatively impact the efficiency of school administration (DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2020; Galleposo, 2021). Research highlights the need for continued professional training tailored to pragmatic leadership requirements and for revising bureaucratic procedures to minimize operational bottlenecks (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Ibañez & Salmon, 2024). The literature further notes that effective operational management depends on context-specific support, practical training in resource management, and interventions to improve stakeholder communication and participation (Malipot, 2021). Therefore, integrating theoretical preparation through the NQESH with these adaptive and contextual facilitations is essential to further the operational effectiveness of school heads across various Philippine educational contexts.

Table 35. Coded Participants’ Responses on Addressing the Complexity of Balancing Administrative Tasks with Instructional Leadership in Alignment with PPSSH Domain – Managing Resources and School Operations

Core Theme	Description	No. of References (NVivo Count)	Representative Quotes
Theme 1. Strategic Prioritization and Structured Scheduling	Principals employ deliberate time management, setting clear priorities to manage administrative and instructional duties efficiently.	13	“Setting clear goals for myself and the team helps maintain focus despite juggling multiple responsibilities.” (P4)

Theme 2. Delegation and Empowerment through Shared Leadership	Effective delegation to staff and leadership teams allows principals to balance duties without compromising instructional quality.	14	“Building a strong leadership team allows me to share administrative load and concentrate on curriculum improvement.” (P6)
Theme 3. Integration of Administrative and Instructional Leadership	Principals merge administrative tasks with instructional goals, ensuring coherence and alignment toward student achievement.	12	“I integrate instructional goals into administrative plans so the two work hand-in-hand.” (P7)
Theme 4. Technology-Driven and Systematic Management	The use of digital tools, organizational systems, and structured routines enhances efficiency and reduces overload.	9	“I use digital tools and scheduling apps to organize my time efficiently.” (P2)
Theme 5. Collaborative and Adaptive Leadership Approaches	School heads balance both leadership aspects through teamwork, flexibility, and adaptive decision-making.	11	“I maintain a flexible schedule and practice situational leadership to address emerging priorities.” (P12)

Table 35 reveals that school heads reconcile administrative and instructional leadership by planning, distributing leadership, and goal integration. Strategic scheduling and prioritization proved vital for juggling competing demands. Assigning administrative tasks to capable personnel and leadership groups enables the principal to spend more time on instructional quality. Furthermore, weaving administrative planning into instructional goals produces coherence between operational and pedagogical purposes. The exploitation of digital tools and procedure-based routines enhances efficiency, while adaptive and collaborative leadership styles help principals respond effectively to changing school conditions. These results emphasize that successful balance derives not from removing tasks, but from organizing them around common goals and shared responsibility.

The findings highlight the various approaches taken by NQESH-certified school administrators to successfully balance administrative work and instructional leadership within the PPSSH category of Managing Resources and School Operations. Principals indicated using task prioritization, time management practices involving computer applications and calendars, and sharply dividing days between administrative and instructional tasks to stay focused and on track. Delegation and shared leadership were the major themes that emerged, with the empowerment of effective staff and shared team leadership helping distribute duties and allowing leaders to focus on instructional improvement. In addition, linking goal-setting and planning ensures consistency between administrative choices and instructional goals through open communication and shared practices. Finally, adaptive and systematic measures, such as flexible scheduling and situational leadership, enable responsive management of emergent priorities.

These results concur with global and Philippine studies on effective school leadership, which also emphasize the importance of distributed leadership, organized time management, and collective decision-making in maintaining balanced leadership positions (Leithwood et al., 2019; Grissom et al., 2021). The literature supports leadership frameworks that balance administrative effectiveness with instructional emphasis, emphasizing the empowerment of teacher leaders and the use of technology to manage organizations (OECD, 2024; Hallinger, 2022). The combined wisdom confirms effective instructional leadership is contingent on conscious planning, realistic delegation, and responsive leadership practices—exactly the skills called out by principals in their balancing act. This affirms the need to further these skills in leadership development programs such as NQESH to ensure school heads can succeed in their dual roles and meet school improvement objectives.

Table 36. Coded Participants' Responses on Ways They Find Difficult to Supervise Instruction Effectively Despite NQESH Certification in Alignment with PPSSH Domain – Focusing on Teaching and Learning

Core Theme	Description	No. of References (NVivo Count)	Representative Quotes
Theme 1. Time and Administrative Burden Limit Instructional Focus	Principals face significant time constraints due to administrative responsibilities, reducing opportunities for active supervision.	13	"Balancing administrative duties with instructional supervision is tough." (P4)
Theme 2. Teacher Resistance and Motivation Gaps	Resistance from experienced or unmotivated teachers makes supervision and instructional improvement difficult.	11	"I struggle with gaining full cooperation from experienced teachers." (P1)
Theme 3. Inadequate Resources and Contextual Challenges	Resource shortages, socio-economic factors, and a lack of technology hinder the effective implementation of supervisory strategies.	12	"Limited instructional materials and technology make supervision challenging." (P3)
Theme 4. Theory–Practice Divide in NQESH Preparation	Theoretical training provided by NQESH does not always align with the complexities of classroom realities and teacher dynamics.	10	"I find it difficult to translate theory from NQESH into practice." (P5)
Theme 5. Evolving Educational Demands Require Continuous Adaptation	Principals must constantly update their supervisory skills due to ongoing curriculum and pedagogical reforms.	9	"Frequent curriculum changes require constant adjustment in supervision strategies." (P7)

Table 36 presents selective coding of participants' responses to the challenges they face in practicing adequate supervision of instruction despite NQESH certification, as per the PPSSH category of concentrating on teaching and learning. Principals cite time constraints due to administrative loads, the unwillingness and low motivation of some teachers, and a lack of adequate resources that constrain supervision practices. Moreover, the discrepancy between theoretical NQESH preparation and actual classroom realities makes practical application difficult, as do ongoing educational reforms that require constant updates to supervisory practices. These findings suggest that, despite NQESH imparting basic knowledge, rectifying contextual realities, improving resource levels, and assisting principals in role-balancing are key to enhancing the effectiveness of instructional supervision.

The findings indicate that, even with NQESH certification, principals continue to face challenges in supervising instruction aligned with the PPSSH area of Focusing Teaching and Learning. Primary concerns include teacher resistance and motivational issues; lack of time due to excessive workload; unavailable resources and environmental constraints, particularly in rural areas; recurrent curriculum and pedagogy modifications; disconnection between theoretical supervisory models and classroom practice; varying teacher and learner requirements; and restrictions imposed by high class numbers. These issues show that although NQESH enhances supervisory competencies and capabilities, practical constraints within the school setting prevent their uniform use.

Comparable themes are underscored in Philippine studies on education, which point out the intricacies of school heads' instructional supervision due to excessive bureaucratic responsibilities, insufficient resources, and socio-economic influences on learners (Sumapal & Haramain, 2023; Andal, 2024). Research emphasizes the necessity for ongoing professional development that spans theory to practice, enhances teacher involvement, and empowers leaders with responsive supervisory approaches responsive to varying classroom contexts (Mangadlao, 2025; Ceralde, 2014). The results also indicate the importance of systemic support in lessening administrative loads and promoting instructional leadership. Therefore, empirical evidence and the literature support stronger support systems, in addition to the NQESH certification, to empower school heads in managing instructional quality across diverse educational settings.

Table 37. Coded Participants' Responses on Gaps Between What Was Learned from NQESH and the Realities of Quality Teaching in School in Alignment with PPSSH Domain – Focusing Teaching and Learning

Core Theme	Description	No. of References (NVivo Count)	Representative Quotes
Theme 1. Resource and Infrastructure Constraints	Principals reported that limited teaching materials, large class sizes, and inadequate school infrastructure hinder the implementation of ideal instructional strategies learned from NQESH.	6	"The NQESH emphasized ideal instructional practices, but in reality, large class sizes and limited resources make it difficult to implement these strategies fully." – Principal 1. "There's a gap between the ideal leadership models taught and the realities of working with limited infrastructure and socio-economic factors affecting students." – Principal 6
Theme 2. Contextual Adaptation Challenges	Theoretical frameworks and leadership models from NQESH often do not fully align with local socio-cultural and multi-grade classroom contexts, requiring flexible, context-specific adaptation.	5	"Theoretical frameworks from NQESH don't always fit our barrio conditions, especially when it comes to dealing with insufficient teaching materials and community challenges." – Principal 3. "The program is comprehensive, but it lacks specific guidance for managing instructional quality in multi-grade or multi-level classrooms typical in many schools." – Principal 8
Theme 3. Teacher Development and Motivation	Limited professional development support and teacher workload make sustaining instructional quality challenging despite principals' leadership efforts.	4	"NQESH prepared me well on paper, but the challenge lies in motivating teachers who have little professional development support outside school." – Principal 5. "Although NQESH addressed supervision techniques, it underestimated the challenges of frequent curriculum changes and teacher workload." – Principal 7
Theme 4. Operational and Bureaucratic Constraints	Daily operational demands, bureaucratic processes, irregular student attendance, and parental involvement issues often divert attention	5	"While strategic leadership is key, the bureaucratic processes and paperwork workload often hinder maintaining instructional excellence." – Principal 13. "There is a gap between ideal leadership

	from instructional leadership priorities.		roles described in NQESH and the multitasking demands that pull focus from instructional priorities." – Principal 14
Theme 5. Need for Flexible Leadership Approaches	Principals highlighted the need for leadership and supervision approaches that are adaptable to students' diverse needs, including behavioral and socio-economic factors.	3	"I learned a lot about leadership and supervision, but the diversity of student needs in our school requires more flexible, context-specific approaches than those covered." – Principal 2. "I found some leadership frameworks less applicable because they don't fully consider the complexity of student behavioral issues in our school setting." – Principal 10

Table 37 illustrates selective coding of participants' responses to the gaps between NQESH training and the actualities of quality teaching, in relation to the PPSSH area of concentrating teaching and learning. The results identify several challenges: resource and infrastructure constraints inhibit the application of optimum teaching strategies; conceptual frameworks need situational adjustment for local, socio-cultural, and multi-grade settings; teachers' motivation is limited by inadequate professional growth and excessive workload; operational and bureaucratic pressures detract from teaching leadership; and principals demand more flexible leadership styles specific to different student needs. These findings suggest that although NQESH offers sound leadership foundations, program content improvements to address the complexities of the context, resource limitations, and teacher guidance are required to address the theory-practice gap and enhance the quality of instruction in diverse school environments.

In sum, the results show that while NQESH offers critical theoretical and leadership models, its actual application in real school contexts remains limited by contextual factors. Principals highlighted challenges in implementing idealized approaches in resource-constrained, socio-economically disadvantaged contexts. They also mentioned the challenge of translating theoretical models into heterogeneous teacher and learner demands, tolerating burdensome administrative tasks, and dealing with constant curriculum reforms. The lack of clear policy directions for working in multi-grade classes and the limited opportunities for continuous teacher training further widen the gap between the competencies acquired and the actual supervisory circumstances.

The implications of these findings suggest that NQESH is a sound basis for leadership development; there is an urgent need to contextualize it. Ongoing post-certification assistance, in the form of localized professional development, mentoring schemes, and practice modules responsive to varied school settings, has the potential to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Moreover, policies that reduce administrative burdens and enhance teacher capacity development will enable school heads to lead instruction more effectively and improve the quality of teaching outcomes.

The gaps identified in Table 36 between what school heads learn from the NQESH and the realities of implementing quality teaching in Philippine schools are well supported by the existing literature on educational leadership challenges in resource-constrained, complex school contexts. Studies on the Philippine education system highlight chronic issues such as inadequate instructional materials, limited infrastructure, teacher shortages, and socio-economic barriers that significantly hinder effective leadership and teaching practices (DepEd, 2025; Apillanes, 2025). The literature also discusses the persistent disconnect between theory and practice in leadership programs, noting that standardized frameworks often lack the flexibility to fully address local contextual demands, especially in diverse rural and multi-grade classroom settings (Lynch & Lodge, 2023; Sharma et al., 2022). Moreover, the frequent curriculum changes and the administrative burdens that principals face are recognized as factors that reduce their capacity to focus on instructional leadership, as noted in various qualitative studies on school leadership in the Philippines (Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). Research also emphasizes the critical role of continuous, context-sensitive professional development and mentoring to bridge these gaps by equipping school leaders with adaptive strategies tailored to their unique environments (Bass &

Avolio, 1994; Duma, 2022). These insights affirm the urgent need for NQESH to be supplemented by ongoing localized support, mentorship, and policy reforms that reduce administrative load and strengthen teacher professional development, thereby enhancing the practical impact of leadership training on instructional quality.

Table 38. Coded Participants' Responses on Challenges School Heads Faced in Mentoring Teachers and Cultivating Leadership Potential among Staff in Alignment with PPSSH Domain – Developing Self and Others

Core Theme	Description	No. of References (NVivo Count)	Representative Quotes
Theme 1. Teacher Readiness and Motivation	Principals observed that some teachers lack confidence, fear additional responsibilities, or show inconsistent commitment, making it challenging to identify and mentor potential leaders.	6	"I find that some teachers are hesitant to take on leadership roles because they lack confidence or fear additional responsibilities." – Principal 1. "Identifying potential leaders is sometimes difficult because teachers may not openly express interest or confidence." – Principal 7
Theme 2. Time and Administrative Constraints	Administrative duties, bureaucratic tasks, and competing responsibilities limit the time available for mentoring and focused leadership development.	5	"Mentoring is rewarding, but time constraints and administrative duties limit how often I can provide focused support." – Principal 2 "I find it rewarding to mentor emerging leaders, yet bureaucratic tasks reduce the time I can dedicate to this." – Principal 13
Theme 3. Professional Development and Resource Limitations	Limited access to training, professional development opportunities, and community or school resources restricts teachers' growth potential.	4	"In our barrio setting, limited access to professional development restricts the growth opportunities for teachers." – Principal 3. "Resource limitations and challenging community contexts affect teachers' motivation to pursue leadership." – Principal 9
Theme 4. Resistance to Change and Organizational Culture	Some teachers are resistant to change, accustomed to top-down management, or hesitant to adopt new leadership practices, which hinders the effectiveness of mentorship.	4	"Some teachers resist change or new ideas, making it challenging to cultivate a leadership mindset." – Principal 4. "Encouraging staff to take initiative is challenging when they're accustomed to top-down management styles." – Principal 14

Theme 5. Positive Outcomes and Growth Opportunities	Despite challenges, principals observed that targeted mentoring and ongoing support led to promising leadership development among receptive teachers.	3	"I've seen progress when mentoring is aligned with specific goals, but a lack of formal structures sometimes slows development." – Principal 8. "Despite challenges, I've seen promising growth in some teachers, but it requires continual encouragement in our environment." – Principal 15
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Table 38 presents selective coding of participants' responses to challenges school heads encounter in mentoring teachers and developing leadership potential, as related to the PPSSH domain of self-and-other development. The results indicate that principals grapple with teacher preparedness and motivation, limited time due to administrative tasks, inadequate professional development resources, and an entrenched organizational culture resistant to change. Despite these impediments, focused mentoring showed encouraging signs of leadership development among willing teachers. These findings suggest that effective leadership development depends on addressing motivational and cultural challenges, improving access to professional learning, and dedicating time to mentorship to foster sustainable growth among aspiring school leaders.

The data reveal that teacher reluctance to take on leadership positions and opposition to change are the most prevalent problems, often stemming from fear of increased responsibility or a lack of self-assurance. School heads further indicated that time constraints and administrative workloads hamper their capacity to offer consistent and effective mentoring. Contextual hindrances, such as limited professional development opportunities, limited resources, and socio-economic constraints—especially in rural or underprivileged regions—also limit the development of leadership. Principals also highlighted challenges in identifying future leaders, the lack of formal mentoring programs, and differences in teacher motivation.

The findings indicate that although school heads appreciate the significance of leadership development and mentoring, systemic and contextual factors usually hinder forward progress. Overcoming these challenges requires institutional support for formalized mentoring programs, reduced administrative burden, and focused professional development opportunities. Facilitating a supportive and collaborative school culture, rewarding leadership contributions, and bridging mentoring activities with school improvement priorities can reinforce teacher participation and leadership capacity at all levels.

Challenges faced by school heads in developing teachers and identifying leadership potential are similar to those reported in Philippine studies on educational leadership (Alegado, 2018). Teacher resistance and unwillingness to take on leadership tasks owing to fear of increased workload or resistance to change are common themes highlighted by research on teacher motivation and leadership in the Philippines. Time and administrative limitations that prevent regular mentoring, as emphasized by principals, reflect evidence that heavy workload and bureaucratic pressures curb school heads' ability to engage in practical leadership development activities (DepEd, 2025; Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). Contextual resource constraints, such as limited professional growth opportunities, particularly in rural areas, are well recognized as key deterrents to teacher development and long-term leadership development. Challenges in recognizing and engaging future leaders align with the necessity for formalized mentoring systems and culturally sensitive practices, identified as critical for successful teacher leadership development (Schwan et al., 2020; Kilag et al., 2022). Additionally, the differential levels of preparedness and motivation among teachers highlight demands in the literature for contextually responsive, differentiated mentoring approaches to create leadership pathways. Generally, the literature supports the need for systemic support areas, such as reduced administrative workload, official mentoring programs, ongoing professional development, and positive school cultures, to address these challenges and effectively build teacher leadership capacity, as found in the NQESH setting.

Table 39. Coded Participants' Responses on Ways School Heads Find it Difficult to Promote a Culture of Continuous Improvement within School in Alignment with PPSSH Domain – Developing Self and Others.

Core Theme	Description	No. of References (NVivo Count)	Representative Quotes
Theme 1. Resistance to Change	Some teachers prefer familiar routines or are hesitant to adopt new practices, which slows the establishment of a continuous improvement culture.	5	"Encouraging teachers to embrace continuous improvement is challenging because some prefer sticking to familiar routines." – Principal 1. "Resistance to change among some veteran teachers slows the pace of improvement." – Principal 7
Theme 2. Time and Competing Priorities	Principals face difficulty sustaining initiatives due to limited time, administrative duties, and competing responsibilities.	4	"I try to introduce new initiatives, but limited time and competing priorities make it hard to sustain momentum." – Principal 2. "Teachers often juggle many roles, leaving limited energy for professional growth activities." – Principal 9
Theme 3. Resource and Professional Development Constraints	Limited school resources and insufficient professional development opportunities hinder ongoing improvement efforts.	3	"Resource constraints and lack of access to regular professional development slow down efforts to promote ongoing improvement." – Principal 3. "In our barrio context, poverty and community issues can detract focus from school improvement efforts." – Principal 6
Theme 4. Staff Engagement and Motivation	Inconsistent teacher engagement, lack of recognition, and staff cynicism pose challenges in fostering a sustained culture of growth.	4	"I'm positive about the future, but inconsistent engagement from teachers creates barriers to establishing a continuous improvement culture." – Principal 5. "Lack of incentives or recognition for growth sometimes reduces motivation to improve continuously." – Principal 10
Theme 5. External and Bureaucratic Challenges	Socio-economic factors, community dynamics, and bureaucratic hurdles affect principals' ability to lead improvement initiatives.	3	"External factors like socio-economic hardships in the community sometimes overshadow school development goals." – Principal 12. "I find it critical to lead by example, though bureaucratic hurdles often slow down improvement initiatives." – Principal 13
Theme 6. Positive Outcomes through Strategic Leadership	Principals highlighted those small wins, celebration of achievements, and leading	2	"Despite difficulties, I've seen real progress when we build small wins and celebrate efforts regularly." – Principal 15.

	by example can gradually promote continuous improvement despite challenges.		"While some staff are engaged and proactive, others resist new approaches, creating an uneven culture." – Principal 14
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Table 39 presents selective coding of participants' responses on the challenges in school heads' facilitation of a continuous improvement culture, as related to the PPSSH category of developing oneself and others. Results indicate resistance to change, insufficient time due to administrative needs, resource and professional development constraints, inconsistent staff engagement, and socio-economic and bureaucratic external challenges as major obstacles. Despite these barriers, principals identified that strategic leadership, such as celebrating small wins and demonstrating best practices, can facilitate incremental development towards a culture of continuous improvement. Such findings suggest that developing such a culture entails overcoming motivational, resource, and contextual issues while using positive leadership practices to maintain momentum in school development.

Teacher resistance to change and willingness to stick with the status quo are consistent with evidence of struggles to change deeply ingrained mindsets and traditional practices in schools (Alegado, 2018; Villar & Cavanagh, 2013). The endemic problem of time and workload constraints is reflected in studies that indicate excessive administrative burdens that handicap leaders' ability to prioritize long-term improvement efforts (DepEd, 2025; Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). Limited resources and poor access to professional development, particularly in rural or disadvantaged regions, are commonly referenced as reasons that invalidate continuous improvement efforts (Edwards, 2016; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Low teacher motivation and unreliable teacher participation further complicate the development of a culture of shared growth, as research indicates that increased incentives and reward systems can help maintain teacher involvement (Kiragu et al., 2013; Schlegel, 2017). External socio-economic problems, such as poverty, further complicate school development, as noted in DepEd reports (DepEd, 2025). Lastly, bureaucratic and system impediments to decision-making and initiative execution are supported by literature on school governance challenges (Ayeni & Ibukun, 2013). In sum, these findings from the literature highlight that, to foster effective continuous improvement cultures, Philippine schools need systemic reforms that alleviate administrative hassles, enhance access to resources, and build motivational and facilitative environments sensitive to local contexts.

Table 40. Coded Participants' Responses on Challenges School Heads Encounter in Sustaining Collaboration with Parents, Stakeholders, and the Community in Alignment with PPSSH Domain – Building Connections

Core Theme	Description	No. of References (NVivo Count)	Representative Quotes
Theme 1. Parental Engagement Challenges	Busy schedules, limited formal education, and low awareness hinder consistent parental participation and engagement in school programs.	5	"Engaging busy parents consistently is difficult, as many have demanding work schedules." – Principal 1. "Some parents have limited formal education, which can hinder engagement in school programs." – Principal 9
Theme 2. Stakeholder Priority Conflicts	Differing priorities and expectations among stakeholders make sustaining collaboration difficult and require ongoing negotiation.	4	"Sometimes stakeholders have differing priorities, which makes sustaining collaboration challenging." – Principal 2 "Managing differing expectations among stakeholders requires constant negotiation and patience." – Principal 10
Theme 3. Socio-Economic and	Poverty, local economic hardships, and community skepticism reduce active	4	"Sustaining collaboration is hard when local economic hardships prevent active involvement." –

Community Constraints	involvement and affect long-term partnership sustainability.		Principal 6 "Socio-economic challenges and occasional skepticism from community members slow down partnership-building." – Principal 12
Theme 4. Trust, Continuity, and Leadership Factors	High turnover among community leaders, relationship-building challenges, and new leadership roles affect the continuity of collaboration and the development of trust.	3	"High turnover of community leaders and parents causes disruptions in long-term partnerships." – Principal 7 "Building trust takes time, and as a new principal, I'm still working on strengthening relationships." – Principal 4
Theme 5. Communication and Bureaucratic Challenges	Communication gaps and bureaucratic procedures sometimes delay initiatives and coordination with stakeholders.	2	"Communication gaps sometimes arise, limiting effective coordination with stakeholders." – Principal 8 "Formalizing partnerships helps, but bureaucratic procedures sometimes delay initiatives." – Principal 13
Theme 6. Positive Practices and Outcomes	Demonstrating the benefits of collaboration and maintaining consistent efforts leads to improved community engagement over time.	2	"Despite obstacles, community collaboration improves when we consistently demonstrate the benefits for students." – Principal 15. "Over time, I've learned that community collaboration ebbs and flows, and sustaining it requires ongoing effort." – Principal 11

Table 40 presents selective coding of participants' responses on the challenges school heads face in maintaining collaboration with parents, stakeholders, and the community, in line with the PPSSH domain of establishing connections. The results indicate significant challenges, including parental involvement challenges due to hectic schedules and low educational levels, prioritization conflicts among stakeholders, socio-economic adversities impacting participation, and trust-building challenges amid leadership changes. Communication gaps and bureaucratic impediments also inhibit coordination efforts. However, principals explained that continued demonstration of collaboration gains and continued efforts can enhance community participation in the long run. These results suggest that developing durable partnerships involves overcoming socio-economic and relational barriers, maintaining transparent communication, and patiently building trust and shared commitment.

Table findings are echoed in the rich literature, which cites typical obstacles in the Philippine education setting. Inadequate parental participation because of hectic schedules and other priorities is reinforced by the commonly reported challenge of recruiting parents to participate regularly, particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged or rural settings (Aguilar, 2022; Ramos, 2023). Varying expectations and priorities among stakeholders align with difficulties in goal coherence and pressure management for prompt results, in line with partnership studies (Ramos, 2023; Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). Socio-economic and environmental obstacles, such as poverty and low levels of education, impede active engagement and trust development; likewise, studies highlight the role of external community forces in school collaboration (De Vera, 2021; Dela Cruz, 2022). Gaps in communication and coordination, trust problems, and instability related to leadership change are widely documented hindrances in ensuring a strong school-community relationship (Dusi, 2012; Hartley, 2010). Procedural delays and bureaucratic barriers exacerbate sustainability issues in partnerships, as noted in governance research (Ayeni & Ibukun, 2013). Lastly, the boom-and-bust of community participation and employee cynicism attest to the necessity of sustained effort and culturally relevant strategies to foster enduring

cooperation (Kiragu et al., 2013). Taken together, these findings necessitate open communication strategies, faith-building activities, organizational support, and socio-economic participation to strengthen enduring partnerships in schools in the Philippines.

Table 41. Coded Participants' Responses on Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads in Building Partnerships and External Linkages in Alignment with PPSSH Domain – Building Connections

Core Theme	Description	No. of References (NVivo Count)	Representative Quotes
Theme 1. Theoretical Foundation and Awareness	Principals acknowledged that NQESH provided a solid understanding of the importance of partnerships and external linkages.	6	"NQESH gave me a good foundation for understanding the importance of partnerships, but I still find real-world application challenging." – Principal 1 "NQESH refreshed my understanding of partnerships and introduced new frameworks, which enhanced my existing practices." – Principal 11
Theme 2. Gaps in Practical Application	While the program emphasized principles, practical strategies, role-playing, and context-specific exercises, these components reduced its applicability in real school settings.	6	"The program highlighted key principles, but it lacked practical strategies specific to engaging diverse community groups." – Principal 2. "I found the theoretical aspects solid but would have appreciated more practical exercises and role-playing during training." – Principal 14
Theme 3. Contextual Challenges	Principals noted that NQESH did not fully address challenges in rural or barrio contexts, socio-economic barriers, and limitations in local infrastructure.	5	"It helped me appreciate collaboration, yet the limited focus on barrio context made it harder to build local linkages." – Principal 3 "NQESH helped reaffirm the role of external linkages but didn't fully equip me to overcome barriers like limited local infrastructure." – Principal 15
Theme 4. Skill Enhancement and Confidence	Training expanded principals' skills in stakeholder engagement, formalizing partnerships, and advocating for resources, which supported their practical work.	4	"It expanded my skills in stakeholder engagement, which translated well to my work in town and central schools." – Principal 7 "It strengthened my capacity to formalize partnerships and advocate for resources effectively." – Principal 13
Theme 5. Need for Ongoing Support and Follow-Up	Sustaining partnerships and fully implementing training require mentoring, follow-up sessions, and guidance on navigating local socio-economic realities.	4	"Overall, it laid a good groundwork for external collaboration, but follow-up sessions or mentoring on partnership-building would be beneficial." – Principal 10 "I feel better equipped to initiate partnerships, though sustaining long-term relationships requires more support." – Principal 4

Table 41 presents selective coding of participants' responses on the effectiveness of NQESH in preparing school heads to establish partnerships and external linkages, aligning with the PPSSH domain of developing connections. The results reveal that although NQESH offers a solid theoretical basis and strengthens stakeholder engagement and resource advocacy skills, it falls short in pragmatic strategies, particularly for varied and rural settings. Principals also underscored the need for regular follow-up mentoring support to maintain partnerships effectively despite local socio-economic constraints. These findings suggest that enhancing NQESH with additional context-based, practical training and sustained support would more effectively empower school leaders to foster and develop appropriate external relationships, which are critical to school growth.

Educational leadership literature in the Philippines emphasizes the importance of root-level knowledge and sensitivity to collaboration among school leaders, in line with principals' acceptance of NQESH's theoretical basis in partnership principles (DepEd, 2025; Tubungan, 2023). Yet, the common criticism of being overly theoretical and lacking practical utility in a theory-practice divide resonates with research showing that standardized leadership programs tend not to fully meet the particular needs of community contexts, particularly in rural or lower-socioeconomic-status communities (Lynch & Lodge, 2023; Reyes, 2024). Economic and infrastructural contextual barriers minimize the practicability of generic approaches, making place-based, specialized approaches necessary to build effective partnerships (Gonzales et al., 2022). Principals' valuation of skill-building and stakeholder engagement capabilities aligns with research linking leadership training to enhanced formalized partnerships and capacity mobilization (Buban & Digo, 2021). The need articulated for continuous mentoring and follow-up capacity development represents widespread demands across the literature for prolonged professional growth and support systems to ensure resilient school-community connections (Paglinawan & Bauyot, 2024). Combined, these findings indicate that although NQESH lays essential groundwork for partnership development, subsequent versions should be built on experiential learning, localized case studies, and systematic follow-up support to enhance their actual impact across a variety of community settings.

Part X. Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Findings: Understanding How NQESH Prepares School Heads for Leadership Roles and Emerging Educational Challenges

Table 42. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings on the Effectiveness of NQESH in Preparing School Heads for Leadership Roles

Key Competency Area	Quantitative Results (Mean / Description)	Qualitative Insights (Emerging Themes)	Integrated Interpretation
Instructional Leadership	Mean = 3.85 (Effective)	Limited application due to entrenched teacher practices and workload constraints (Table 34)	While the NQESH effectively strengthened instructional leadership theory, real-world supervision remains constrained by contextual barriers.
Teacher Development and Mentoring	Mean = 3.78 (Effective)	Need for stronger post-certification mentoring programs (Table 36)	Quantitative strength in teacher development reflects confidence in foundational knowledge, but a lack of continuous mentoring challenges sustainability.
Stakeholder Engagement	Mean = 3.46 (Somewhat Effective)	Difficulty in engaging parents with limited availability and resources (Table 38)	Qualitative data clarify that low parental participation and community diversity limit the practical application of stakeholder engagement skills.
Crisis Management	Mean = 3.82 (Effective)	Leaders displayed preparedness, but mental health issues remain under-addressed (Table 37)	Quantitative results indicate confidence in crisis management, yet qualitative narratives reveal gaps in psychological first aid and emotional resilience training.

Digital Leadership	Mean = 3.21 (Moderately Effective)	Challenges in adapting to digital platforms and limited ICT support (Table 39)	The lower quantitative mean is supported by school heads' narratives highlighting insufficient digital competencies and resource inequities.
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To address the integration questions, a comprehensive examination of how qualitative insights from school heads' perspectives deepened and clarified the quantitative results on the perceived effectiveness of the NQESH program and its long-term impact on leadership performance in educational settings. The quantitative findings indicated that participants generally perceived the NQESH initiative as effective in cultivating essential competencies in key areas, including instructional leadership, teacher development, and crisis management. However, it was also noted that the program fell short in equipping leaders with the necessary skills to confront emerging challenges, particularly in digital leadership and mental health promotion.

The qualitative data collected provided a rich layer of explanatory depth, illuminating the patterns observed in the quantitative results. As detailed in Tables 24 through 39, school heads articulated a consensus that, while the NQESH program did enhance their theoretical grounding and bolster their confidence in their leadership roles, its somewhat limited emphasis on practical contextual realities—such as the prevalent issues of resource scarcity, the diversity of stakeholders, and the lack of strong post-certification mentoring programs—significantly hindered their ability to leverage these competencies in real entirely - world school settings.

For example, participants in Table 34 elaborated on the specific challenges they encountered in supervising instructional practices effectively. They expressed that entrenched teacher practices and substantial administrative workloads contributed to their difficulties, which resonated with the moderate quantitative ratings observed regarding their effectiveness in instructional leadership. Similarly, challenges in establishing and nurturing connections with parents and other stakeholders were described in Table 38, which helped clarify the rationale for the quantitative scores, indicating that stakeholder engagement was perceived as only “somewhat effective.” This juxtaposition of qualitative insights with quantitative data provided a more nuanced understanding of the complexities school leaders face in implementing the competencies promoted by the NQESH program.

XI. Triangulating Data through Lived Experiences: Exploring How School Heads' Reflections Support or Challenge Quantitative Results on NQESH Effectiveness

Table 43. Triangulation of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings on NQESH Effectiveness Across Demographic Profiles

Quantitative Findings	Qualitative Insights (Lived Experiences & Reflections)	Nature of Relationship (Convergence / Divergence / Clarification)	Integrated Interpretation
Rural school heads reported lower effectiveness scores in implementing NQESH competencies.	Rural heads cited limited digital infrastructure, scarce professional development, and contextual challenges hindering leadership effectiveness.	Convergence	Quantitative disparities are supported by qualitative accounts showing structural inequities affecting rural leadership success.
Urban school heads scored higher in leadership effectiveness ratings.	Urban heads described better access to institutional resources, training, and support networks.	Convergence	The quantitative advantage of urban leaders is explained by qualitative data that emphasize strong systemic and contextual support.

Years of service showed a significant positive correlation with perceived effectiveness.	Experienced heads stated that practical exposure and mentorship enhanced their leadership more than formal certification.	Clarification / Partial Divergence	While quantitative data linked experience with higher effectiveness, qualitative data revealed that real-world mentorship, not just tenure, drives leadership growth.
No significant difference in NQESH effectiveness by formal qualification level.	Some heads argued that practical experience outweighed formal training in sustaining leadership performance.	Divergence	Contradiction highlights that certification alone may not fully account for effective school leadership without ongoing experiential learning.
Overall, the NQESH program is perceived as effective but context-sensitive.	Participants emphasized the need for continuous, context-based support to sustain impact.	Convergence and Clarification	The integration reveals that while NQESH provides a strong theoretical foundation, contextual and experiential factors critically shape long-term leadership outcomes.

Table 43 presents the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings on NQESH effectiveness across demographic profiles. The responses on lived experiences and reflections of school heads support, clarify, or contradict the quantitative findings on the relationship between NQESH effectiveness and long-term leadership performance across different demographic profiles, highlighting both convergence and divergence between the two data strands and illustrating a complex landscape of leadership effectiveness in schools. Quantitatively, significant differences in the efficacy of the NQESH program were observed when analyzed alongside various factors, including geographic location (rural vs. urban schools) and years of service of the school heads involved. The respondents' qualitative narratives substantiated these disparities, offering more profound insights into the unique challenges and advantages of different school leadership scenarios.

Rural school heads expressed concerns about contextual constraints that hindered their effectiveness, particularly inadequate digital infrastructure, which made it challenging to implement modern educational practices. Additionally, they noted limited access to professional development opportunities, which are critical for ongoing leadership growth and renewal. In contrast, urban school heads reported greater institutional support, including access to resources, training, and networking opportunities, which facilitated more effective implementation of leadership practices. This alignment with higher perceived effectiveness scores in the quantitative data underscores the importance of context in educational leadership.

However, divergence was also evident within these discussions among school heads regarding the impact of experience versus formal qualifications. Some seasoned school heads stated that their accumulated knowledge and mentorship throughout their careers outweighed the formal NQESH certification in fostering their leadership development. This suggests a nuanced perspective in which practical exposure and continuous learning in real-

world settings may play a more significant role in achieving sustained leadership effectiveness than formal credentials alone. Such insights highlight the need for a multifaceted approach to leadership development in education, one that values both structured programs and experiential learning. This duality encourages a broader conversation about how best to support school leaders in evolving educational landscapes.

Overall, the integrated analysis revealed that quantitative data identified measurable patterns in NQESH effectiveness, while qualitative findings illuminated the reasons behind these trends. This complementary relationship underscores that NQESH serves as a strong foundational tool for leadership preparation but requires further development through contextualized, experiential, and ongoing support to sustain its impact across diverse school settings.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn. The majority of respondents are school heads from rural or barrio schools, with moderate years of service (8 to 15 years), and most have recently passed the NQESH (2021 or 2023), indicating a newer generation of school leaders working predominantly in resource-constrained environments.

NQESH is generally perceived as effective in equipping school heads across key leadership domains. However, practical challenges remain in translating competencies into real-world contexts, especially in instructional supervision and stakeholder engagement.

NQESH prepares school heads effectively for emerging educational demands, particularly in digital leadership, mental health, and inclusive education. Yet, ongoing capacity-building and localized support are crucial to sustain and expand these competencies.

NQESH's effectiveness is influenced by access to quality preparation resources, mentoring, leadership experience, the contextual relevance of exam content, and institutional supports, with gaps noted in post-certification assistance and tailored training.

Perceptions of effectiveness differ significantly by school location and years in service, with rural school heads and mid-career leaders generally rating NQESH effectiveness higher than their urban counterparts or those with fewer or more years of service.

A strong positive correlation exists between perceived leadership effectiveness and preparedness, indicating that stronger NQESH-based leadership training is associated with greater readiness to meet contemporary education challenges.

Passing NQESH provides foundational leadership capabilities but falls short in fully equipping school heads for the dynamic, interpersonal, and adaptive aspects of curriculum delivery and instructional supervision in actual school settings.

NQESH certification is valued as a milestone facilitating career advancement and professional credibility, though leaders emphasize the need for continued mentorship and professional development to translate knowledge into effective leadership.

NQESH passers encounter significant challenges in applying competencies due to resource constraints, teacher resistance, workload, limited development opportunities, and complex socio-economic school contexts, creating a gap between certification and practice.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings revealed that the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) was generally effective in developing core leadership competencies, including instructional leadership, teacher development, and crisis management. However, the synthesis of data also indicated that translating these competencies into practical leadership performance was hindered by contextual realities, including entrenched teacher practices, limited mentoring support, and resource constraints. The qualitative insights deepened the understanding of the numerical results by highlighting how school heads,

though theoretically equipped, struggled to implement their knowledge effectively in areas such as stakeholder engagement, digital leadership, and mental health promotion. Overall, the integrated analysis demonstrated that while NQESH established a strong theoretical foundation for leadership readiness, its limited focus on contextual adaptability and continuous professional support limited its sustained impact on real-world school leadership.

The triangulation of quantitative findings and lived experiences yielded a nuanced understanding of how demographic and contextual factors influenced perceptions of the NQESH program's effectiveness. Convergence across data strands revealed that rural school heads consistently faced barriers—such as inadequate digital infrastructure and limited access to professional development—that constrained their leadership effectiveness. In contrast, their urban counterparts benefited from greater institutional support. Divergences emerged when seasoned leaders emphasized that hands-on experience and mentorship played a more critical role in enhancing leadership competence than formal certification alone. These insights clarified that although NQESH served as a valuable foundational tool for leadership preparation, its long-term effectiveness depended on the inclusion of context-responsive, experiential, and ongoing developmental programs to bridge the gap between certification and authentic school leadership practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions, the following are recommended. Since the majority of respondents were new school heads from rural schools with limited resources, the Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) may provide additional logistical and financial support to strengthen leadership implementation in resource-constrained environments.

Although NQESH is effective in equipping leaders, translating the skills into practice remains challenging; therefore, the Bureau of Human Resource and Organizational Development (BHROD) may review and enhance the NQESH framework by including contextualized, performance-based assessment tasks that reflect real leadership situations.

While NQESH prepares school heads for emerging educational demands, ongoing support is necessary; thus, Education Program Supervisors (EPS) may conduct continuous, localized capacity-building programs focusing on digital leadership, inclusive education, and mental health responsiveness.

As the effectiveness of NQESH depends on mentoring, experience, and contextual relevance, BHROD may institutionalize a structured national mentoring and coaching program for newly appointed NQESH passers to ensure continuous professional growth.

Because NQESH's effectiveness varies by location and years of service, the Schools Division Office Human Resource Development Section may design and implement differentiated professional development programs tailored to the specific needs of rural and urban school heads.

Given the strong link between principal preparedness and leadership effectiveness, Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) should enhance their leadership preparation programs by integrating targeted supervision, coaching, and feedback mechanisms that specifically address the documented competency gaps of aspiring and newly certified school heads. This includes embedding practice-based simulations, contextualized mentoring, and performance feedback systems to ensure that future principals are better equipped for the complex demands of school leadership.

Since NQESH builds foundational skills but lacks focus on adaptive and interpersonal competencies, BHROD may integrate simulation-based and scenario-driven modules in NQESH preparation programs to enhance these areas.

As NQESH certification enhances credibility but requires post-certification development, school heads may actively engage in mentorship, peer collaboration, and self-directed professional learning to sustain and deepen the leadership competencies gained through NQESH.

Because school heads face heavy workloads, limited resources, and teacher resistance, DepEd may streamline administrative tasks and improve resource allocation to allow school heads to focus more on instructional supervision and leadership.

While NQESH builds theoretical strength, it lacks contextual adaptability; therefore, BHROD may revisit the NQESH competency framework to include context-based performance indicators that assess the practical application of leadership knowledge.

Recognizing that leadership effectiveness is context-dependent and experiential learning is vital, future researchers may conduct longitudinal and comparative studies to examine how experiential and contextual factors influence the long-term efficacy of NQESH-certified school heads.

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