Navigating the Final Stretch: A Phenomenological Study of Retirable Principals as Curriculum Leaders

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of retirable school heads in the Schools Division of Laoag City as they manage curriculum implementation in the final years of their professional service as basis for the development of a conceptual framework. Utilizing a basic phenomenological research design, the study aimed to understand how these veteran leaders navigate the complexities of institutional compliance, global educational standards, and the emotional transition toward retirement. The participants included five (5) purposively selected school heads, aged 55 to 60, predominantly holding the rank of Principal IV in various junior high schools. Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured face-to-face interviews using an aid-memoire to capture perceptual, factual, procedural, and experiential aspects of their leadership. The qualitative data were analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological method to extract significant statements, formulate meanings, and identify emergent themes. Findings reveal that retirable school heads perceive their roles as a delicate balancing act between meeting rigorous Department of Education (DepEd) mandates and establishing a professional legacy. Key themes centered on the importance of instructional supervision, the challenge of navigating external policy shifts, and the critical role of mentorship in ensuring curriculum continuity. The study concludes that the "experiential knowledge" of retiring leaders is a vital asset for institutional resilience. Based on the findings, it is suggested that the conceptual framework be adopted to guide young and incoming principals in sustaining curriculum excellence during leadership transitions.

Keywords: Curriculum Continuity, Legacy-Driven Leadership, Instructional Supervision, Phenomenological Essence, Succession Planning

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Navigating the complexities of curriculum implementation is no small feat, especially for school heads who are nearing the end of their careers. For these leaders, the task is a mix of challenge and opportunity—a delicate balancing act of meeting institutional demands while leaving a meaningful legacy. This study delves into their journeys, shedding light on the intricate roles they play in their schools. Their experiences offer invaluable lessons on curriculum leadership and its potential to elevate educational standards (OECD, 2020; Awan et al., 2023).

The world of education isn't what it used to be. Rising societal expectations, ever-tightening accountability measures, and the rapid pace of technological advancements are reshaping how schools operate. For school leaders, it's no longer just about ensuring their curricula tick the boxes of national requirements; it's about aligning them with global standards while addressing the unique needs of diverse learners (Thessin, 2019). This is no easy task. Imagine juggling the expectations of a globalized world while staying deeply attuned to the needs of your local community. Yet, strong curriculum leadership bridges this gap. It empowers students to thrive academically and socially while keeping them prepared for the demands of an interconnected world (Senate of the Philippines, 2019).

Take, for instance, how global education systems have embraced equity and quality as priorities (OECD, 2020). Leaders are at the forefront of these shifts, acting as catalysts for change. They integrate cutting-edge teaching methods, foster collaborative learning environments, and ensure that their schools remain inclusive. But it's

not just about staying ahead of trends—it's about persistence, strategic vision, and a commitment to lifelong learning (Awan et al., 2023). These qualities turn school heads into architects of innovation and stability.

Consider the impact of initiatives like Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). While they aim to elevate educational outcomes, they also increase the pressure on school leaders. Administrators must meet rigorous accountability standards while simultaneously fostering creativity in classrooms. This is a tall order, especially for those nearing retirement. These leaders carry the weight of years of experience, yet they also face the strain of keeping up with an ever-evolving educational landscape. As they prepare to pass the baton, they must balance administrative tasks and compliance with the desire to nurture innovative ideas within their schools. Their wisdom becomes a beacon, guiding others while shaping the future of education (Awan et al., 2023).

Mentorship plays a vital, though frequently informal, role as a "thread" in the story of school leadership succession. For leaders who are retiring, this transition requires the conversion of years of refined strategies and principles into a legacy through the mentorship of younger faculty. Nevertheless, to progress beyond mere anecdotal narratives and to foster a "ripple effect" of resilience, this research proposes that mentorship should be formalized. To tackle the absence of structure observed in existing practices, Schools Division Offices might consider implementing a Knowledge Transfer Protocol (KTP). This formalized approach shifts the relationship from basic guidance to a systematic transfer of "institutional intelligence," ensuring that the framework for curriculum execution remains preserved and that schools continue to be flexible long after the departure of the experienced leader (Thessin, 2019).

On a local level, the story becomes even more complex. The surrounding community, available resources, and cultural nuances shape how curriculum leadership unfolds. School leaders often find themselves in the middle of these dynamics, bridging the local with the global. For instance, in the Philippines, the K-12 initiative brought significant challenges for leaders tasked with implementing curriculum reforms. Leaders had to navigate teacher readiness, resource constraints, and a diverse array of student needs. Research underscores that success in such efforts hinges on effective leadership, resource management, and transparent communication (Palestina et al., 2020). These aren't just abstract ideas—they're daily realities for those in the trenches.

Interestingly, legislative changes, such as proposals to lower the voluntary retirement age for public school teachers, could shift the dynamics of curriculum management. On one hand, retaining experienced teachers offers continuity; on the other, it requires even greater support to ensure they remain effective amidst change (Senate of the Philippines, 2019). These layers of complexity illustrate the need for systematic professional development and robust support networks.

This study, led by a department head, seeks to uncover the personal and professional stories of retiring school heads in the Schools Division of Laoag City. This research investigates the relationship between legacy-building and mentorship, filling a gap in current literature regarding how retiring school leaders manage institutional compliance, align with both global and local educational standards, and transfer their experiential knowledge to maintain school adaptability. It specifically focuses on the unique challenges faced within the Schools Division of Laoag City, taking into account the effects of Philippine K-12 reforms, the preparedness of teachers, and potential alterations to the legislative retirement age on leadership transitions and the quality of the curriculum. Furthermore, the study examines the personal and professional dynamics of retiring leaders, revealing how their motivations, challenges with changing educational requirements, and personal stories influence their mentorship strategies, resource management, and the resilience of their institutions as they prepare to leave their positions.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of retirable school heads in managing curriculum implementation, with a focus on understanding the challenges they face, the strategies they employ, and the impact of their leadership on educational outcomes as basis for the development of a legacy-driven leadership model. Specifically, it sought to:

1. describe the personal and professional profiles of the participants to provide context for their experiences, particularly in terms of personal characteristics such as year of birth, sex, and civil status, and professional characteristics including rank or position, organizational assignment, highest educational attainment, tenure in the current position, formal training related to curriculum and supervision, years of service as a school head, previous administrative roles, and planned year of retirement.

2. explore the lived experiences of retirable school heads in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities in curriculum implementation during their final years of service, with particular focus on their experiences in instructional supervision, leadership and management, partnership, and decision-making.

3. examine how retirable school heads make sense of external influences, such as policy changes and community expectations, and how these factors shape their decision-making related to curriculum implementation.

4. identify the challenges experienced by retirable school heads in mentoring their successors and understand how these challenges influence the continuity and effectiveness of curriculum implementation within their schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of school heads in managing curriculum implementation is increasingly recognized as vital to achieving educational success. This literature review synthesizes insights from global and local contexts, highlighting the interconnectedness of educational leadership and curriculum reform across various settings. It draws on recent studies and reports to illustrate the challenges and opportunities faced by school heads, particularly those nearing retirement, in navigating curriculum implementation.

Leadership in Transition: Addressing Global Diversity and Curriculum Accountability

Rapid technological development, globalization, and shifting social needs are reshaping the education sector in profound ways (Zhang et al., 2017). Schools are no longer just places of rote learning; they've become laboratories of innovation, where the curriculum must evolve to meet the demands of a fast-changing world. These sweeping changes are driven by pressing global issues like climate change, economic uncertainty, and increasing social diversity. As the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2020) has pointed out, these challenges call for a critical reevaluation of educational goals and strategies.

The OECD's Education 2030 program exemplifies this shift, emphasizing the importance of preparing students for an unpredictable future. At its core, the program champions learner autonomy, critical thinking, and overall well-being (OECD, 2018). These principles align with a broader global movement toward curricular reforms aimed at creating not just academically proficient students but well-rounded individuals who can thrive in a complex, interconnected world. Within this evolving framework, school leaders play a pivotal role. They are tasked with translating these high-level goals into actionable strategies that suit the unique needs of their schools while staying aligned with global trends (Zhang et al., 2017).

But here's the rub: while school leaders are expected to drive these transformations, many lack adequate training to navigate the challenges posed by globalization, diversity, and interconnectivity. Critics have long argued that current leadership development programs fail to address these global literacy gaps effectively. Zhang et al. (2017) highlight how many training programs for school heads neglect to prepare them for the intricacies of leading in a globally diverse world. This gap underscores an urgent need for professional development opportunities that equip educational leaders with the tools to succeed in this new era.

Take the United States as an example. There's a growing demand among parents and communities for globally relevant education. Yet, according to a report from EdWeek (2016), many teacher-training programs fall short in preparing educators to tackle global issues and integrate diverse perspectives into their lessons. The result? Teachers—and by extension, their students—are left ill-equipped to engage with the complexities of an

interconnected world. This disconnect highlights the importance of not just equipping teachers but also empowering school leaders who can champion these initiatives within their institutions.

In the meantime, legislative frameworks like the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) have placed additional pressure on school heads. These leaders must ensure their schools meet state standards while also addressing the diverse needs of their student populations (Awan et al., 2023). The stakes are especially high for retiring school heads, who face the dual challenge of managing day-to-day responsibilities while preparing to hand over the reins. As Thessin (2019) notes, these leaders often find themselves caught between maintaining institutional stability and mentoring their successors. Despite their wealth of experience, which makes them invaluable during these transitions, their contributions are frequently underutilized.

Consider this, retiring leaders bring decades of wisdom and a deep understanding of how to balance tradition with innovation. Yet schools often fail to harness this potential, missing an opportunity to build a stronger foundation for the future. The rapid pace of change in education demands leaders who are not only strategic but also visionary—individuals who can navigate the intersection of local needs and global developments. This is especially critical in fostering creativity, equity, and adaptability in schools. One solution lies in addressing the deficiencies of leadership training programs. Educational leaders need robust preparation that equips them to tackle global challenges head-on. This isn't just about knowledge—it's about cultivating the skills and mindset necessary to inspire meaningful change across diverse educational contexts. With the right training and support, school heads can become the architects of a more inclusive and forward-thinking education system (Gamala & Marpa, 2022; Awan et al., 2023).

Educational Leadership in the Philippines: Challenges and Innovations in Curriculum Contextualization

In the Philippines, school heads are not just administrators; they're dynamic agents of change who ensure that educational programs align with national standards while addressing the unique needs of their communities. Their leadership is crucial in adapting the curriculum to reflect the diverse cultural, social, and economic realities of their regions, fostering both relevance and inclusivity. Over the years, these leaders have spearheaded training initiatives to hone their skills in curriculum development and management. As Cruz (2024) notes, these efforts are vital in equipping school heads to navigate the ever-shifting educational landscape effectively.

One cornerstone of these efforts is the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH)—a comprehensive framework for effective leadership. The PPSSH places a strong emphasis on instructional management, aiming to enhance teaching quality and tailor the curriculum to the needs of local populations. By bridging policy directions with practical applications, this model empowers school heads to enact meaningful changes within their schools, ensuring alignment with both regional contexts and broader national goals (Lopez, 2020).

However, even the most robust frameworks face limitations, particularly during times of crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, tested the resilience of school leaders in unprecedented ways. Under the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP), school heads were tasked with navigating disruptions that fundamentally altered the education system. Alonzo's (2023) qualitative research highlights several critical challenges faced by public school heads during this period, including insufficient resources, declining enrollment, and inadequate crisis-response training.

The sudden shift to alternative learning modalities disrupted traditional practices, leading to delays in curriculum delivery. A lack of access to digital tools, learning materials, and financial resources compounded these issues, particularly in under-resourced areas. Moreover, the absence of robust support systems left many school leaders to grapple with these challenges independently, underscoring the urgent need for enhanced crisis management training and logistical assistance (Alonzo, 2023).

As the education sector looks to the future, these challenges underscore the importance of addressing existing gaps to bolster the competencies of school managers. Customized professional development programs should

prioritize skills in adaptive leadership, digital transformation, and crisis management, equipping school heads to handle both routine challenges and extraordinary disruptions. For example, training modules on leveraging technology for remote learning could better prepare leaders for future scenarios where traditional classroom settings may be compromised (Gamala and Marpa, 2022).

Equally important is the fair distribution of resources. Schools in underdeveloped areas often struggle to secure the tools and materials necessary for effective curriculum delivery. Policymakers must ensure equitable allocation of these resources, bridging the gap between urban and rural schools. Additionally, creating clear, actionable guidelines can help school leaders navigate both day-to-day operations and unexpected crises more effectively (McNeil et al., 2016).

The role of school heads in the Philippines is uniquely complex. They operate at the intersection of local realities and national expectations, striving to balance the two while fostering meaningful educational outcomes. While frameworks like the PPSSH provide a solid foundation, the pandemic has brought to light critical areas that require urgent attention. Empowering school leaders calls for a multi-faceted approach—enhancing professional training, improving resource availability, and strengthening policy support. By addressing these priorities, the education system can ensure that school heads remain resilient and capable, driving quality education during crises and in normal times alike (Gamala & Marpa, 2022).

Exploring the Unique Challenges and Contributions of Retiring School Heads in Curriculum Implementation

While much progress has been made in understanding the role of school leaders in curriculum implementation, Awan et al. (2023) emphasize that critical gaps remain. One such area involves the experiences and insights of retiring school heads, whose unique perspectives are often overlooked. These leaders, with years of accumulated expertise, hold valuable knowledge that could significantly inform the transition to future leadership. Exploring their views is essential to developing strategies that ensure the seamless transfer of skills, knowledge, and leadership practices.

Another critical dimension needing further investigation is the influence of external factors on curriculum implementation. While some studies touch on the effects of global trends, policy shifts, and resource limitations, there's insufficient analysis of how these forces shape the decision-making processes of retiring school leaders. For instance, understanding how resource scarcity or evolving policy landscapes impact their choices could uncover ways to better support these leaders in navigating the complexities of the educational system (Thessin, 2019).

The dynamics of mentorship during leadership transitions also deserve closer scrutiny. Many retiring school heads take on informal mentorship roles, sharing their wisdom with successors and fostering collaborative environments. However, these efforts often lack structure or formal recognition. Exploring this area could shed light on effective mentorship practices, offering actionable insights into enhancing leadership development and promoting sustainable curriculum practices (Finkel, 2012).

Professional development programs for retiring school leaders are another area ripe for improvement. Current initiatives often fail to address their unique challenges, such as crisis management, mentoring, and adapting to evolving educational paradigms. Tailored programs could empower these leaders to leave a lasting impact on their institutions while continuing to grow their own skills. For example, workshops focused on transitioning from leadership roles to advisory or mentorship capacities might benefit both the retiring leaders and their schools (Boston et al., 2017).

Alonzo (2023) highlights a frequently underestimated aspect of curriculum implementation: community engagement. Retiring school leaders, with their years of experience, are uniquely positioned to build meaningful relationships with local stakeholders. Whether collaborating with parents, local governments, or other community members, these leaders can create more inclusive and context-sensitive educational programs. Future research could delve into the ways retiring leaders foster such connections, identifying strategies to enhance community involvement in curriculum development.

Navigating the intricacies of curriculum implementation demands a deep understanding of local conditions and global trends. Retiring school leaders, positioned at the intersection of these dynamics, provide a treasure trove of insights into effective leadership approaches. Addressing the gaps in research around their experiences, the influence of external factors, and mentorship dynamics is crucial—not only for advancing academic discourse but also for crafting practical strategies that strengthen educational leadership. By doing so, we can ensure sustainable and inclusive curriculum practices that meet the needs of a rapidly changing world (Retnawati et al., 2016; Al-Shabatat, 2016; Print, 2018).

Research Question

This study aimed to answers the following questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the participants in terms of:

A. Personal

1.a   year of birth;

2.a   sex;

3.a   civil status;

B. Professional

1.b   rank/position;

2.b   organizational assignment;

3.b   highest educational attainment;

4.b   tenure in current position

5.b   formal training on curriculum and supervision

6.b   number of years in service as a school head;

7.b   previous administrative roles; and

8.b   planned year of retirement?

2. What are the lived experiences of retirable school heads regarding their roles and responsibilities in curriculum implementation during their final years of service along with:

1.1. instructional supervision;

1.2. leadership and management;

1.3 partnership; and

1.4 decision-making?

3. How do retiring school heads perceive the impact of external factors, such as policy changes and community expectations, on their decision-making processes related to curriculum implementation?

4. What challenges do retiring school heads face in mentoring their successors that affect the continuity and effectiveness of curriculum implementation in their schools?

Scope and Limitations

This study employed a phenomenological approach to comprehensively capture the lived experiences of school heads nearing retirement, specifically those aged 55 to 60 years, who manage junior high schools within the Schools Division of Laoag City and Ilocos Norte. Since this is basic research, the study was conducted from December 2024 to December 2025.

Furthermore, despite the differences in gender, the selection of participants was exclusively based on their roles and experiences. A total of five participants were engaged in the study to share their insights regarding their responsibilities in curriculum implementation, the decision-making processes shaped by external influences such as policy changes and community expectations, as well as the challenges they face in mentoring their successors. The limited number of participants is attributed to the small pool of school heads eligible for retirement. Among them, two are currently working in a large urban school, while the other three are managing a rural school. Notably, three participants are female and two are male school heads. These factors significantly affect the continuity and effectiveness of curriculum implementation within their respective institutions.

Each participant underwent a face-to-face interview lasting 45 minutes. To guide the structured interviews, an *aid memoire* was developed. The questions encompassed factual, perceptual, procedural, and experiential aspects to ensure the collection of rich and thick narratives that effectively plot the experiences of the school heads in implementing and managing the curriculum.

The study's findings were based on the experiences of a limited number of participants, which may not be fully representative of all school heads operating in similar contexts. Consequently, the generalizability of the results was constrained by the focus on a specific age range (55 to 60 years) and geographical location. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data gathered through interviews may introduce biases stemming from participants' perceptions and recollections. Furthermore, the study's decision to exclude gender as a criterion may overlook differences in experiences and perspectives that could provide valuable insights.

The data analysis involved coding and theme generation, serving as the foundation for the development of a conceptual framework. By focusing on the significant themes generated, the study aimed to provide actionable insights and practical tools to support school heads in strengthening their leadership competencies and ensuring the continuity of curriculum excellence.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Since this study is qualitative, the Colaizzi method was employed, offering a structured approach to extract and analyze participants' lived experiences. Colaizzi's phenomenological method, developed in 1978, is particularly effective for uncovering the essence of participants' experiences by ensuring the findings remain closely aligned with the data and reflect participants' realities ((Abu Shosha, 2022; Morrow et al., 2015)

The seven steps of Colaizzi's method include the following:

1. Familiarization

The researcher thoroughly reads all participant accounts multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. This step ensures familiarity with the breadth and depth of the participants' experiences.

2. Identifying Significant Statements

Significant statements directly relevant to the phenomenon under investigation are extracted from the participants' accounts. These statements form the foundation for further analysis.

3. Formulating Meanings

The researcher interprets the significant statements to derive meanings related to the phenomenon. This step involves careful consideration to maintain alignment with participants' intended meanings.

4. Clustering Themes

The derived meanings are grouped into themes that represent common patterns and shared experiences among participants. These themes provide a structured understanding of the phenomenon.

5. Developing an Exhaustive Description

An inclusive and detailed description of the phenomenon is created, incorporating all identified themes. This description offers a comprehensive representation of participants' experiences.

6. Producing the Fundamental Structure

The exhaustive description is synthesized into a concise statement capturing the essence of the phenomenon, distilling the findings into their most critical aspects.

7. Seeking Verification

The researcher returns to the participants to verify whether the fundamental structure accurately reflects their experiences. Feedback from participants is incorporated to refine and validate the findings (Morrow et al., 2015; Abu Shosha, 2022).

This method is especially suitable for the study as it ensures that the analysis remains true to the lived experiences of the school heads, emphasizing their realities and insights. By following Colaizzi's structured approach, the study aimed to produce reliable and meaningful findings that contribute to a deeper understanding of curriculum management among school heads nearing retirement.

Sampling

This research, which examined the experiences of school heads approaching retirement in relation to curriculum implementation, employed a purposive sampling method, a technique particularly well-suited for qualitative research, especially in phenomenological studies. This approach enabled the researcher to identify and engage individuals who have specific, relevant experiences directly related to the phenomenon under investigation—in this case, school heads nearing retirement. By focusing on participants who are directly involved in curriculum management, purposive sampling ensures that the study draws from individuals capable of providing rich and detailed accounts of their lived experiences, including the challenges they face in implementing the curriculum (Salkind, 2010). The selected school heads are anticipated to offer valuable insights into their leadership practices, mentorship relationships, and the influence of external factors, such as policy changes and community expectations, on their roles. Selection criteria were focused on ensuring participants have substantial leadership experience and are nearing retirement, thereby aligning their backgrounds with the study's objectives. This method ensured the inclusion of participants whose experiences contributed to a nuanced understanding of how school heads nearing retirement navigate the complexities of curriculum implementation while fostering leadership continuity.

Data Collection

Before initiating data collection, the researcher first undertook the essential preparatory task of creating a *robot-foto,* which will encompass detailed personal and professional profiles of the participants. This document served as a concise yet informative overview, offering valuable insights into the participants' backgrounds, including their qualifications, roles, and pertinent experiences. Consequently, it facilitated the contextualization of the data and ensures that the study recognizes and honors the distinct perspectives of each participant. Following the creation of the *robot-foto,* the researcher developed an *aid-memoire*—a systematic

guide with open-ended questions aimed at eliciting comprehensive and significant responses. The questions were carefully aligned with the research objectives to encourage participants to share their insights, experiences, and reflections in depth. Open-ended questions, which are particularly advantageous in qualitative research, stimulate expansive and genuine responses, thereby enriching the dataset for analysis (O'Cathain & Thomas, 2004).

Moreover, the study involved five participants selected through purposive sampling, ensuring their profiles are directly relevant to the study's focus. Each interview was conducted in an environment conducive to comfort and openness, with an expected duration of approximately 45 minutes. However, the length of each session remained flexible to allow for data saturation—the stage at which no new themes or insights emerged—thereby ensuring the thoroughness and depth of the collected data. During the interviews, all participant responses were meticulously documented.

After the interviews, the researcher carefully transcribed all responses, ensuring that both verbal and nonverbal elements are comprehensively recorded. These transcriptions formed the foundation for coding and thematic analysis, a structured approach to identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns or themes within the data. The coding process segmented the data into meaningful categories, followed by thematic analysis to reveal overarching insights aligned with the research objectives. Ultimately, this meticulous methodology ensures that the findings are both comprehensive and reflective of the genuine viewpoints of the participants, thereby enhancing the study's validity and reliability.

Ethical Issues

Ethical practice in phenomenology fundamentally revolves around honoring the lived experiences of participants and protecting the integrity of their narratives. This obligation starts with informed consent, which should not be regarded merely as a bureaucratic formality, but rather as a continuous, dialogic engagement. It is crucial to ensure that participants have a comprehensive understanding of the research's aim: to explore and articulate the structure and essence of a particular lived phenomenon. Given that the method entails profound, reflective dialogue that taps into a person's immediate and often sensitive awareness, the researcher must underscore the participant's unequivocal right to withdraw their involvement or narrative at any time, acknowledging the emotional intensity that may arise from this self-exploration. This ongoing affirmation of the participant's choice is vital for respecting their autonomy.

The entire research relationship is governed by the absolute necessity of Respect for Participants. This respect transcends mere politeness, requiring the researcher to foster a secure, non-judgmental atmosphere that promotes the sharing of deep, subjective truths. The highest form of ethical respect within this methodology is the researcher's deliberate practice of the phenomenological epoché—the disciplined effort to suspend or bracket their own theories, biases, and preconceptions regarding the phenomenon being investigated. This intentional suspension guarantees that the researcher remains entirely open and receptive to the participant's distinct viewpoint, preventing any imposition of external interpretations. By regarding the participant as a co-investigator whose narrative serves as the primary source of the phenomenon's essence, researchers effectively address inherent power dynamics and avert any semblance of coercion or undue influence.

The phenomenological epoché acts as the methodological and ethical agreement between the researcher and the participant's narrative. As the analysis of data commences—transitioning from unrefined transcripts to pinpointing the fundamental structure of the experience—the researcher is required to actively participate in this suspension process, often referred to as "bracketing." This is not merely a casual act of forgetting; rather, it is a conscious and thorough effort to set aside all personal theories, assumptions, and life experiences that pertain to the phenomenon. From an ethical standpoint, this practice guarantees that the researcher's expertise or personal biases do not taint the participant's distinct story.

Plan for Data Analysis

This research utilized Colaizzi's phenomenological approach, which consists of a systematic seven-step procedure well-suited for examining the lived experiences of participants. This method prioritizes adherence to

the data, guaranteeing that the results authentically represent the realities of the participants. The steps involved are as follows: first, familiarization, where the researcher deeply engages with the data by carefully reviewing participant narratives; next, identifying key statements that pertain to the phenomenon; then, deriving meanings from these statements; followed by clustering themes to reveal shared elements; creating a comprehensive description that synthesizes all themes; condensing this into a core structure that encapsulates the essence of the phenomenon; and finally, seeking validation by revisiting participants to confirm and refine the findings. This meticulous process enhances the study's credibility and richness.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This part summarizes the findings of the study, presents the conclusions and recommendations.

Demographic Profile of the Participants

The demographic profile of the five participating school heads (Table 1) reveals a leadership group that is academically prepared, professionally seasoned, and positioned to play

Table 1. Demographic and Professional Profile of School Head Participants (n=5)

Category	Variable	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Professional Rank	Principal IV	4	80%
	Principal II	1	20%
School Assignment	Junior High School	4	80%
	Integrated School	1	20%
Gender	Female	3	60%
	Male	2	40%
Civil Status	Married	4	80%
	Single	1	20%
Highest Educational Attainment	Master's Degree	3	60%
	Doctorate Degree	2	40%
Specialized Training	Curriculum and Supervision	4	80%
	MATATAG Curriculum	1	20%
Years as School Head	25 years and above	3	60%
	11 – 24 years	2	40%
Previous Admin Designation	None	3	60%
	Head Teacher III	1	20%
	Division BAC Member	1	20%

Planned Retirement Year	2030	3	60%
	2035	2	40%
Total		**5**	**100%**

significant roles in curriculum implementation and school governance. In terms of rank, the respondents are composed of one Principal II (20%) and four Principal IV school heads (80%), suggesting that the majority occupy higher-level leadership positions. This distribution aligns with the typical organizational structure in secondary education where Principal IVs frequently supervise larger and more complex institutions. The organizational assignment supports this observation: four out of the five respondents (80%) serve in Junior High Schools, while only one (20%) is assigned to an Integrated School. According to DepEd leadership frameworks, principalship in secondary schools often requires more intensive curriculum supervision responsibilities, which may explain the predominance of Principal IV roles in this group.

The personal characteristics of the respondents further illustrate the composition of the leadership population. Three of the school heads are female (60%), and two are male (40%), reflecting the growing representation of women in educational leadership positions. This trend is consistent with studies emphasizing the feminization of teaching and the increasing visibility of women in administrative roles due to their strong instructional leadership competence (UNESCO, 2019). Research indicates that gender significantly influences how retirable school heads navigate curriculum transitions. Female leaders typically adopt relational and communal styles, viewing the "overwhelming" nature of reforms like the MATATAG curriculum as a collective emotional challenge. By applying an "Ethics of Care" (Noddings, 2013), they prioritize teacher well-being and utilize transformational behaviors—such as individualized consideration—to alleviate resistance and foster shared ownership (Eagly & Carli, 2023). In contrast, male leaders often emphasize operational pragmatism, focusing on the strategic reallocation of resources and facilities to meet policy mandates. While female leaders bridge "Insufficient Resources" through community networking and collaborative "co-educator" partnerships, male leaders frequently employ "negotiated advocacy," leveraging formal professional networks within district offices (Oplatka, 2022). For seasoned male leaders, the retirement phase often necessitates a shift from traditional agentic, top-down authority toward mentorship to preserve institutional memory (Fuller, 2021).

Civil status data reveal that four of the school heads (80%) are married, with only one (20%) being single. Such findings indicate a mature and settled workforce, which is consistent with the prolonged years of service recorded among the respondents.

The academic profile of the participants demonstrates strong educational qualifications. All respondents hold advanced degrees, with three possessing master's degrees (60%) and two holding doctorate degrees (40%). These findings resonate with research showing that higher educational attainment among school leaders is associated with better instructional supervision, stronger decision-making skills, and increased confidence in implementing curriculum reforms (Hallinger, 2018). Their preparedness is further supported by their training background. Four respondents (80%) reported having undergone formal training on curriculum and supervision, while the remaining principal indicated specialized training under the MATATAG Curriculum. Collectively, this suggests that the respondents possess the foundational competencies required for effective curriculum leadership, consistent with DepEd's National Competency-Based Standards for School Heads (NCBSSH).

In terms of professional experience, all respondents have served more than a decade as school heads, with years of service ranging from 11 to 33 years. Notably, three of them (60%) have at least 25 years of administrative experience, reflecting a long-standing commitment to school leadership. Literature consistently underscores that extended leadership tenure contributes to higher school stability, stronger stakeholder relationships, and deeper insight into organizational culture (Leithwood et al., 2020). The diversity in their administrative backgrounds further enriches their collective expertise. One respondent previously served as a Head Teacher III (20%), another as a Division BAC Member (20%), while the remaining three (60%) reported no prior administrative designation. This variety demonstrates that pathways to principalship differ widely—

some follow formal administrative ladders, while others transition directly into principalship based on performance, merit, or policy considerations.

The planned year of retirement shows that two principals (40%) are set to retire in 2035, and three (60%) in 2030. The concentration of retirements in 2030 highlights the potential for a significant leadership transition in the division within the next five to six years. Leadership transition literature emphasizes that such clustering of retirements requires deliberate succession planning to ensure continuity of school operations and to sustain the quality of instructional leadership (Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008).

Lived Experiences of Retirable School Heads Regarding their Roles and Responsibilities in Curriculum Implementation During their Final Years of Service

QUESTION 1. "Describe your lived experiences in curriculum implementation during your final years of service."

The question captured the school heads' essential interpretation of their professional identity in their final years. The themes and significant responses are shown in Table 2

Commitment to Sustaining Quality Education

In the earlier stages of a leadership career, school heads are often focused on "achievement"—meeting specific targets, climbing professional rungs, or establishing a personal reputation for excellence. However, as they approach retirement, the data shows a shift toward stewardship. Stewardship is the ethical behavior of a leader who views themselves as a temporary guardian of the school's mission rather than its owner (Bezzina, 2022). The significant response provided: *"I remain committed... despite the many changes,"* illustrates a leader who is more concerned with the institutional soul than with personal accolades.

Table 2. Lived Experiences of Retirable Principals in Curriculum Implementation.

Themes Emerged	Codes	Significant Responses
Commitment to Sustaining Quality Education	dedication to service; ensuring continuity; maintaining standards	"As a school head nearing the final years of service, I remain committed to ensuring that the school continues to provide quality education despite the many changes."
Navigating Curriculum Changes in the Final Years	adjusting to reforms; coping with evolving demands	"During my final years of service I do hope that curriculum planners consider the sentiments of teachers because changes are fast but provisions lack."
Strengthening Instructional Supervision	monitoring teaching; reinforcing teachers' roles; guiding implementation	"As a school head, I view my role as the driving force behind successful curriculum implementation, ensuring that teachers are guided and supported."
Balancing Administrative and Instructional Demands	workload management; role conflict; administrative pressures	"During my last years as a school head, I found myself constantly balancing administrative work with the demand to be visible in classrooms."
Deepening Purpose and Reflection on Leadership Legacy	legacy-building; leadership reflection; personal meaning	"My lived experiences are a reminder of how leadership shapes outcomes. I always think of how my decisions will be remembered once I retire."

The codes "dedication to service" and "maintaining standards" suggest that these leaders act as a stabilizing force. During "fast changes" and "evolving demands" (as noted in Table 1), the school head's commitment

ensures that the quality of education does not become a casualty of administrative transition. This is consistent with the concept of instructional resilience, where the leader protects the core teaching and learning processes from external policy fluctuations (Day et al., 2020).

The focus on "ensuring continuity" indicates that the school head is looking beyond their own tenure. They are preoccupied with the sustainability of quality. By reinforcing teachers' roles and strengthening instructional supervision now, they are effectively "future-proofing" the school. This reflects the generativity stage of professional life, where a leader's primary satisfaction comes from mentoring and preparing the next generation to succeed (Hallinger, 2022).

Navigating Curriculum Changes in the Final Years

The theme highlights the considerable cognitive and emotional strain of "sensemaking" in the face of swift educational reforms and systemic resource deficiencies. As one participant remarked, "*Changes are rapid, but resources are insufficient.*" This occurrence of "policy churn" places the school head in a pivotal role as a translator who must transform intricate mandates into a feasible daily reality (Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2021). In the context of the Philippines, this churn is illustrated by the quick succession of DepEd Order No. 002, s. 2024 (MATATAG Curriculum) alongside the changing performance standards under the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH). These legislative changes foster a high-stakes atmosphere where senior leaders feel a pressing professional obligation to stabilize new initiatives before their exit to avert organizational disintegration (Bubb & Jones, 2020).

Enhancing policy integration necessitates acknowledging that these transitions take place within a resource-limited environment that frequently does not meet the benchmarks established by the Republic Act No. 9155 (Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001). The results underscore a vital need for the Department of Education to alleviate administrative burdens—particularly by aligning reportorial requirements to diminish "compliance fatigue" during leadership transitions. Ultimately, the lived experience articulated here reflects a scenario of high-stakes adaptation, where the leader's accumulated knowledge is essential to bridge the divide between aspirational national policy mandates and the practical realities of local school operations (Netolicky, 2020). By correlating these thematic insights with legislative changes, this study promotes a more coordinated policy implementation that safeguards institutional stability during the "retirement horizon."

Strengthening Instructional Supervision

This characterizes the school head as the vital "driving force" that transforms static curriculum policies into dynamic classroom practices: *"I view my role as the driving force... ensuring that teachers are guided and supported".* This perspective moves beyond traditional, bureaucratic "monitoring" to a more profound pedagogical stewardship, where the leader's presence in the hallways and classrooms provides the necessary momentum for instructional excellence (Day et al., 2020). By positioning themselves as the engine of implementation, these retirable leaders demonstrate a deep-seated belief that high-quality teaching is not accidental but is the result of intentional oversight and the active removal of instructional barriers. This role is fundamental to the phenomenological essence of the "seasoned leader" who recognizes that their primary impact on student outcomes is mediated through the continuous, expert guidance they provide to their teaching staff.

Furthermore, this theme reflects a transition from evaluative supervision to a developmental partnership, emphasizing the "support" required to bridge teacher capacity gaps. In their final years, school heads perceive supervision not as a tool for compliance, but as a final opportunity to mentor and "shore up" the pedagogical skills of their staff to ensure long-term instructional stability (Supovitz et al., 2019). The deeper meaning of being a "driving force" involves cultivating a culture of collective efficacy where teachers feel safe to innovate because they are backed by the leader's accumulated instructional wisdom. Ultimately, strengthening supervision serves as a critical mechanism for "legacy-proofing" the curriculum, ensuring that the standards of teaching quality remain robust and resilient against the inevitable disruptions caused by leadership transition and policy shifts.

Balancing Administrative and Instructional Demands

The theme highlights a pervasive state of "role conflict" where the school head is perpetually torn between the bureaucratic requirements of the office and the pedagogical needs of the classroom: *"I found myself constantly balancing administrative work with the demand to be visible in classrooms."* This tension represents a structural fragmentation of the leader's time, where "managerial" duties—such as reports, logistics, and compliance—frequently overwhelm the "instructional" duties essential for school improvement (Netolicky, 2020). The deeper meaning of this struggle lies in the concept of "managerial capture," a phenomenon where the urgent nature of administrative tasks effectively crowds out the leader's capacity to serve as an instructional guide. When the school head is tied to a desk by administrative weight, their ability to influence teaching quality is diminished, creating a lived experience of professional frustration and a perceived loss of leadership agency (Supovitz et al., 2019).

For retirable school heads, this imbalance carries a unique emotional weight, as they view their final years as a critical window to cement their instructional legacy. The desire to be "visible in classrooms" is not merely about supervision; it is a symbolic act of presence that affirms the priority of learning over bureaucracy. The participants' struggle suggests that administrative overload serves as a significant barrier to the "generativity" phase of their career, preventing them from transferring their deep pedagogical wisdom to the next generation of teachers. This conflict reveals a poignant contradiction in late-career leadership: at the very moment when the school head possesses the greatest instructional insight, they are often most burdened by the administrative complexities of modern school governance. Ultimately, this theme underscores the need for distributed leadership models to offload managerial tasks, allowing senior leaders to reclaim their role as the primary architects of the school's instructional culture.

Deepening Purpose and Reflection on Leadership Legacy

The theme illustrates the profound psychological transition that occurs as school heads enter the "legacy phase" of their professional journey. Participants described a shift in focus from short-term administrative targets toward the enduring impact of their leadership: *"I always think of how my decisions will be remembered once I retire".* This focus on personal meaning-making suggests that in the twilight of their careers, leaders view curriculum implementation not as a series of tasks, but as a vehicle for establishing a lasting contribution to the school's history (Hallinger, 2022). This stage of leadership is characterized by a desire for generativity, where the leader's ultimate satisfaction is derived from ensuring that their values, vision, and instructional improvements are deeply embedded in the school culture to outlast their physical presence.

Moreover, it reveals that for retirable leaders, curriculum decisions become high-stakes moral acts linked to their professional identity and the "trace" they leave behind. The reflection on how decisions will be "remembered" indicates that these heads are actively managing their leadership transition by prioritizing succession planning and institutional stability over immediate bureaucratic praise. This deep sense of purpose acts as a motivational anchor, allowing them to remain engaged and resilient despite the exhaustion of "policy churn" or administrative overload. By focusing on legacy, school heads transform the standard curriculum into a "living legacy," viewing the success of their teachers and learners as the final, definitive evidence of a career spent in service to educational excellence.

Question 2. "Describe a recent experience where you felt particularly successful (or challenged) in supervising curriculum implementation."

The specific instances of success and difficulty encountered during instructional monitoring are reflected in the table (3) below.

Successful Collaboration with Teachers

This emerges as a hallmark of instructional efficacy, where the transition from top-down oversight to a culture of collective partnership defines leadership success. Participants characterized these breakthrough moments through the lens of teamwork and cooperative supervision, noting a significant shift when teachers moved

beyond mere compliance to proactive engagement: *"Teachers voluntarily coordinated their lesson plans for alignment."* This lived experience underscores the profound impact of distributed leadership, a model where the school head relinquishes absolute control in favor of shared accountability. When planning and supervision become collaborative rather than individualistic, the school achieves a higher degree of instructional coherence, ensuring that the curriculum is delivered with a unified purpose across all grade levels (Leithwood et al., 2020).

At its deeper phenomenological level, this collaboration represents the "relational triumph" of a retirable leader who has successfully cultivated trust over decades of service. The "voluntary" nature of the teachers' coordination suggests that the school head has moved past the need for formal authority, instead influencing the staff through a shared vision of student success. This synergy reduces the burden on the school head and creates a sustainable ecosystem of professional learning that is likely to endure after their retirement. By fostering this environment, the leader experiences a sense of "collective efficacy"—the belief that the staff as a whole possesses the power to overcome curriculum challenges—which serves as a major source of professional fulfillment and a testament to their leadership maturity.

Table 3. Experience in Supervising Curriculum Implementation whether Successfully or Challenged

Themes Emerged	Codes	Significant Responses
Successful Collaboration with Teachers	teamwork; cooperative supervision; shared planning	"Certainly, one recent experience where I felt successful was when teachers voluntarily coordinated their lesson plans for alignment."
Challenges in Managing Resistance to Change	teacher resistance; low acceptance; adjustment difficulties	"Some teachers find it difficult to adjust to the curriculum updates, which makes supervision challenging."
Ensuring Fidelity of Implementation	monitoring compliance; instructional oversight	"I always feel challenged when ensuring that all teachers follow the curriculum as intended because not all adhere consistently."
Addressing Teacher Performance Gaps	capacity-building; addressing weaknesses	"There were moments I felt challenged, especially when teachers lacked mastery of the new content."
Emotional Fulfillment from Improved Instructional Practices	satisfaction; improved teacher performance	"I felt successful when I saw teachers applying the strategies we agreed on during LAC sessions."

Challenges in Managing Resistance to Change

Within the lived experience of retirable school heads, the theme identifies a critical friction point where institutional inertia meets rapid educational reform. Participants highlighted a pervasive struggle with teacher pushback and a lack of psychological buy-in regarding new mandates: *"Some teachers find it difficult to adjust to the curriculum updates"*. This resistance is rarely a sign of professional defiance; rather, it often stems from "change fatigue" or a fundamental "capacity gap" where educators feel ill-equipped to meet the rigorous demands of updated standards (Bubb & Jones, 2020). When teachers do not feel a sense of ownership over the change process, the school head is forced into a reactive mode, spending more energy on conflict resolution and technical hand-holding than on strategic instructional improvement.

The deeper phenomenological meaning of this resistance lies in the "disruption of professional identity." For many teachers, a new curriculum invalidates years of established practice, leading to a defensive stance that school heads must navigate with high emotional intelligence. As retirable leaders, the participants feel this challenge acutely because they are attempting to cement a legacy of progress, yet they are hindered by a "low acceptance" that threatens to derail reforms after they depart. This underscores a significant failure in the

systemic change management process—specifically, the lack of a bridge between the top-down policy and the bottom-up reality of the classroom. To overcome this, the data suggests that school leaders must move beyond merely announcing changes to actively fostering a "culture of readiness," using their senior status to mentor resistant staff through the cognitive and emotional transitions required by the new curriculum.

Ensuring Fidelity of Implementation

Maintaining the "purity" of a curriculum as it moves from national policy to daily classroom practice serves as a persistent struggle for school heads in their final years of service. Participants consistently voiced the challenge of monitoring compliance, observing that the intended curriculum is often diluted or altered during classroom delivery due to varying teacher interpretations: *"not all adhere consistently."* This struggle represents the "implementation gap," where the school head must exert significant accountability pressure and conduct time-intensive supervision to ensure that teachers do not revert to outdated or comfortable methods that contradict new standards (OECD, 2021).

The deeper phenomenological meaning of this theme involves the leader's underlying anxiety over "curriculum drift"—a state where inconsistent adherence threatens the quality of student outcomes and undermines the integrity of the school's academic mission. For a retirable leader, ensuring fidelity is an act of institutional discipline; they recognize that if the foundational structure of a new curriculum like MATATAG is not strictly followed now, the reform will likely collapse after their departure. Consequently, they view their role as a "guardian of standards," using their remaining time to bake consistency into the school's DNA through rigorous monitoring and constant feedback loops.

Addressing Teacher Performance Gaps

The vital role of identifying and bridging professional deficiencies emerges as a core responsibility for leaders striving to ensure that no student is disadvantaged by a lack of teacher preparation. Leaders noted that a primary barrier to successful reform is the "lack of mastery" among some staff members regarding new content areas or pedagogical shifts, requiring the principal to pivot from administrative oversight to intensive capacity-building *"Teachers lacked mastery of the new content."* This highlights the school head's identity as a coach and mentor, necessitating the creation of ongoing support mechanisms such as specialized Learning Action Cells (LAC) to ensure all educators meet the required professional standards (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022).

From a deeper perspective, addressing these performance gaps is an act of "pedagogical rescue" and a key component of leadership legacy. Retirable heads perceive these gaps not as teacher failures, but as systemic hurdles that require a compassionate yet firm intervention. By focusing on "shore-up" strategies in their final years, they are ensuring the sustainability of the school's human capital. They understand that the success of any curriculum is entirely dependent on the competence of the person standing at the front of the classroom; thus, mentoring teachers to overcome their weaknesses becomes a final, definitive contribution to the school's future excellence.

Emotional Fulfillment from Improved Instructional Practices

Experiencing the tangible growth of teachers in the classroom serves as a profound emotional anchor for retirable school heads, validating decades of professional effort. These leaders find their most rewarding experiences when pedagogical strategies transition from theoretical discussions in Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions to active classroom application: "I felt successful when I saw teachers applying the strategies we agreed on during LAC sessions." This fulfillment is deeply rooted in the concept of eudaimonic well-being, where happiness is derived not from personal ease, but from the realization of purpose and the successful development of others (Cherkowski, 2020). For a leader nearing the end of their career, these "instructional wins" provide the moral nourishment necessary to remain engaged despite the exhaustion of final administrative demands.

On a deeper phenomenological level, this theme reveals a symbiotic connection between the leader's efficacy and the teacher's performance. The school head perceives the teacher's success as a direct reflection of their

own instructional mentorship, creating a shared sense of "collective triumph." As they prepare to exit the service, these moments of improved practice offer a reassuring "proof of legacy," suggesting that the instructional culture they have built is robust enough to produce results. This emotional reward acts as a final professional closure, allowing the leader to retire with the conviction that their leadership was not merely bureaucratic, but truly transformative for the individuals they led.

Retiring School Heads' Perceptions of the Impact of External Factors

Question 3. "What processes do you follow to engage stakeholders (teachers, parents, community) in curriculum-related decisions?"

This extensive question reveals a structured yet personal approach to governance, demonstrating commitment to co-ownership. Table 4 presents the different themes generated from the responses of the participants.

Systematic and Participatory Stakeholder Engagement

Implementing a curriculum through a structured, collaborative framework ensures that leadership decisions are grounded in the actual needs of the school community rather than administrative assumptions. Participants described a meticulous approach to engagement that begins with situational analysis and data-driven planning, moving away from unilateral decision-making toward a shared responsibility: *"Before making decisions, I begin by assessing the current learning context... gathering feedback... engaging officials."* This evidence-based strategy aligns with the principles of participatory governance, which posits that educational reforms are most successful when they are built upon the structured input of all stakeholders (Beauchamp et al., 2021). By establishing these formal steps, retirable heads create a rational and transparent environment where curriculum changes are viewed as a collective mission rather than a top-down mandate.

Table 4. Processes in Engaging Stakeholders in Curriculum-Related Decisions

Systematic and Participatory Stakeholder Engagement	situational analysis; needs assessment; data-driven planning	"Before making decisions, I begin by assessing the current learning context… reviewing learner performance data… gathering feedback from teachers… conducting parent or learner surveys… engaging barangay officials."
	structured consultation; organized dialogues	"I organize structured consultations such as LAC sessions, PTA meetings, and SGC forums… These platforms allow us to gather suggestions and collaboratively decide on strategies."
Collaborative Decision-Making Through Shared Vision	shared goals; consensus-building	"We request dialogues with the stakeholders… we share the vision/goal… we listen to their ideas… then together, come up with a decision."
	participatory planning workshops	"Teachers help design contextualized curriculum maps… parents and community partners co-create support programs… resources are pooled or localized using community knowledge."
Continuous Communication and Feedback Loops	open communication; transparency; regular updates	"I ensure regular communication updates through bulletins, parent group chats, and school assemblies… Feedback mechanisms are maintained through surveys and suggestion boxes."
	observation and involvement	"I schedule class observations and parent learning

	opportunities	visits to keep everyone involved."
Stakeholder Empowerment and Recognition	acknowledging contributions; strengthening ownership	"I make sure to recognize the efforts of teachers, parents, and community partners… When stakeholders feel valued, they become more committed."
Consultative and Data-Based Decision Processes	data presentation; evidence-based decisions	"Before making decisions, I present school data—achievement results, lab evaluations, observation reports—to parent leaders, GPTA, and community partners to justify proposed changes."
	joint implementation through community partnerships	"For programs like TLE and SPA, I work closely with community experts, local artisans, and industry partners to ensure relevance."
Relationship-Based and Informal Engagement	informal dialogue; personal rapport; empathy-driven engagement	"My approach to stakeholder engagement is informal and relationship-based… I talk to teachers personally in the faculty room… Parents are engaged through friendly conversations, not always through formal meetings."
	building comfort and trust	"My style is less systematic, but I make stakeholders feel comfortable, valued, and respected."
Commitment to Collaborative Leadership	co-ownership; shared accountability	"Engaging stakeholders means treating them as co-educators—not just supporters but partners who have a voice in shaping the future of our learners."

At a deeper level, this theme reflects the school head's role as a "community bridge-builder" who recognizes that sustainability depends on stakeholder buy-in. The shift toward systematic engagement indicates that these leaders are not just looking for immediate cooperation but are seeking to create "institutionalized collaboration" that survives their retirement. By conducting needs assessments and gathering diverse feedback, they validate the voices of teachers, parents, and local officials, thereby fostering a sense of psychological ownership over the curriculum. For the departing leader, this systematic approach provides a sense of security; they can retire knowing that the school's direction is guided by a robust, community-backed consensus rather than a fragile, individualistic vision.

Collaborative Decision-Making Through Shared Vision

Cultivating a "common purpose" through consensus-building serves as a primary strategy for retirable school heads to ensure that curriculum goals are not just understood, but deeply internalized by the staff. Participants emphasized a process of co-creation where final directions are reached through collective deliberation rather than executive decree: "*Then together, come up with a decision."* This approach underscores the principles of distributed leadership, where the leader acts as a facilitator of a shared vision, allowing diverse stakeholders to contribute their expertise to the decision-making process (Harris & Jones, 2020). By prioritizing "togetherness" in the face of complex mandates, these leaders reduce the psychological distance between administration and faculty, creating a unified front against the challenges of educational reform.

The deeper phenomenological significance of this theme lies in the transition from "compliance-based" leadership to "commitment-based" leadership. For a leader nearing retirement, engaging in collaborative decision-making is a strategic act of succession preparation; it empowers the remaining staff to exercise their own agency and judgment. When stakeholders are part of the "decision-making core," they develop a sense of collective accountability that ensures the curriculum's success is not dependent on the presence of a single individual. Ultimately, this shared vision acts as the "connective tissue" of the school, providing a stable and

enduring direction that can withstand the disruption of a leadership transition and the pressures of evolving national policies.

Continuous Communication and Feedback Loops

Maintaining an environment of transparency through constant information sharing allows retirable school heads to navigate the complexities of curriculum reform without losing the trust of their staff. Participants highlighted the use of diverse channels—such as bulletins and formal feedback mechanisms—to ensure that every stakeholder is informed and heard: *"I ensure regular communication updates through bulletins... Feedback mechanisms are maintained."*. This commitment to robust feedback loops is recognized in educational research as a cornerstone of organizational learning, providing the necessary "relational glue" to hold a school together during the implementation of controversial or difficult changes (Epstein & Sheldon, 2023). By keeping the lines of communication open, these leaders minimize the rumors and anxiety that often accompany new mandates, replacing uncertainty with a clear, documented path forward.

The theme exposes that continuous communication is a deliberate strategy for building "institutional trust" as a parting gift to the school. For the senior leader, transparency is not just about efficiency; it is an ethical stance that honors the professionalism of the teachers. By maintaining these feedback loops, the school head creates a safe space for "bottom-up" insights to reach the "top-down" administration, ensuring that curriculum adjustments are informed by the reality of the classroom. This culture of open dialogue serves as a critical stabilizing force, ensuring that the school remains a "learning organization" capable of self-correction long after the current leader has retired.

Stakeholder Empowerment and Recognition

Fostering a sense of worth and agency among community members acts as a powerful catalyst for institutional growth, transforming external partners into dedicated co-owners of the school's mission. Retirable school heads emphasized that the success of any curriculum or program is contingent upon how well stakeholders— parents, local officials, and community leaders—are recognized for their contributions: *"When stakeholders feel valued, they become more committed."* This strategic use of social capital and relational leadership shifts the dynamic from a transactional relationship to a transformational one, where the increased psychological ownership ensures that stakeholders are willing to invest their time and resources into school initiatives (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2020).

At a more profound level, this theme underscores the leader's role as a "cultural architect" who builds a legacy of mutual respect and appreciation. For a school head in their final years, empowering stakeholders is a deliberate act of sustainability; they understand that while a leader is temporary, the community is a permanent fixture of the school environment. By establishing systems of recognition and empowerment, the leader ensures that the support for school programs is rooted in the community's own values and pride rather than just a personal relationship with the principal. This approach secures a "community safety net" that will continue to advocate for and protect the school's curriculum standards long after the leader's tenure has concluded.

Consultative and Data-Based Decision Processes

Utilizing objective school data as the foundation for administrative choices allows retirable school heads to transcend personal biases and build a logical case for curriculum reform. Participants highlighted that presenting achievement results and school performance metrics is essential for justifying shifts in instructional strategy to both teachers and external partners: *"I present school data—achievement results to justify proposed changes."* This evidence-based approach enhances the legitimacy of the leader's decisions, transforming what might be perceived as a subjective mandate into a rational, necessary response to the school's actual learning needs. By rooting changes in transparent data, leaders minimize organizational friction and promote a culture of alignment where decisions are accepted as being in the best interest of the students (Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2021).

From a deeper phenomenological perspective, this theme reflects the school head's transition into a "rational facilitator" who uses facts to protect the school's instructional integrity. For a leader in their final years, data-based processes serve as a safeguard against the "personality-driven" leadership that can often destabilize schools during a transition. By embedding data-driven habits into the school's decision-making cycle, they are establishing a legacy of objective accountability. This ensures that even after they retire, the school will continue to prioritize professional logic and student outcomes over political or personal preferences, providing a stable, evidence-backed roadmap for the incoming leadership to follow.

Relationship-Based and Informal Engagement

Prioritizing personal connection over formal protocol allows retirable school heads to dissolve the traditional barriers between administration and staff, fostering a culture of mutual trust. Participants highlighted that while systems are necessary, it is often the one-on-one, "informal and relationship-based" dialogue that truly influences teacher behavior and commitment: "*My approach is informal and relationship-based. I talk to teachers personally."* This empathy-driven leadership style acknowledges the human emotionality inherent in school work, moving beyond the cold mechanics of bureaucracy to build a "relational bridge" that makes curriculum changes feel like a personal request rather than an institutional demand (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2020).

The deeper phenomenological meaning of this informal engagement lies in the creation of "psychological safety" within the school environment. For a leader in their final years, these personal rapports serve as a form of social capital that can overcome resistance more effectively than any written memo. By engaging in "corridor conversations" and personal check-ins, the school head validates the teacher's individual experience and struggle, making the daunting task of curriculum reform feel supported and shared. This approach represents a shift toward **humanistic leadership**, where the principal's legacy is defined not by the papers they signed, but by the strength of the professional relationships they leave behind, ensuring a supportive climate that facilitates a smoother transition for the next school head.

Commitment to Collaborative Leadership

Viewing stakeholders as essential "co-educators" marks a shift in the retirable leader's philosophy from seeing parents and community members as external supporters to recognizing them as active partners in the learning process. Participants emphasized that successful school governance is built on this foundation of parity, where stakeholders share the burden and the triumph of curriculum implementation: *"Engaging stakeholders means treating them as co-educators—not just supporters but partners."* This overarching belief aligns with the highest level of shared accountability in school leadership, suggesting that when the community is integrated into the educational mission, the school's capacity for instructional success is exponentially amplified (Leithwood et al., 2020).

A more profound structure of this theme reveals a "de-centering" of the school head's authority in favor of collective agency. For a leader nearing retirement, fostering this "co-educator" mindset is a strategic move to ensure the school's long-term resilience; they are essentially distributing the leadership load across a wider network of committed individuals. By honoring the expertise and role of every partner—from the local official to the classroom parent—the leader creates a sustainable ecosystem of support that is not dependent on a single personality. This philosophy of collaboration becomes the leader's final gift to the institution, leaving behind a school culture that is deeply rooted in the community and capable of navigating future educational reforms with a unified, collective voice.

Question 4. "What has been the most rewarding aspect of your leadership curriculum implementation as you near retirement?

This question described the professional fulfillment derived from a career in educational leadership. The summary of themes that emerged from the transcript is shown in Table 5.

Leadership Shaped by Past Struggles and Successes

Drawing from decades of professional experience, retirable school heads perceive their leadership style as an intricate tapestry woven from the threads of past hardships and triumphs. These leaders find that their long journey—from the trenches of the classroom to the complexities of the principal's office—has fostered a unique form of resilience and accumulated wisdom that allows them to navigate modern curriculum shifts with a historical perspective: *"I learned to be more understanding because I have gone through the same struggles as a teacher."* This finding aligns with the developmental trajectory of "seasoned leadership," where past struggles are transformed into "leadership capital," enabling the principal to respond to current crises with a calm, patient authority that younger leaders may still be developing (García-Garnica et al., 2021).

Table 5. Most Rewarding Aspect of Retirable Principals' Leadership Curriculum Implementation

Themes Emerged	Codes	Significant Responses
Leadership Shaped by Past Struggles and Successes	resilience; accumulated wisdom	"My personal experiences have deeply influenced my leadership. I learned to be more understanding because I have gone through the same struggles as a teacher."
Empathy and Compassion Toward Teachers	empathy in supervision; relational leadership	"I lead with empathy because I know how it feels to be overwhelmed by curriculum demands."
Adapting Strategies Based on Lived Realities	flexible leadership; contextual decision-making	"My experiences guide my decisions. I do not rely only on policy but also on what I see happening in classrooms."
Commitment to Mentoring Because of Prior Mentorship Received	mentoring; passing on guidance	"Because I was trained well by former supervisors, I also make it a point to mentor my teachers."

The deeper phenomenological meaning of this theme lies in the "narrative identity" of the late-career leader, where every policy decision is filtered through the lens of lived history. They do not view a new mandate as an isolated, threatening event but as part of a long continuum of educational change they have successfully managed before. This historical grounding provides them with **phronesis**, or practical wisdom—the ability to distinguish between fleeting educational fads and enduring instructional truths. By acknowledging how their past struggles have shaped their present empathy, these leaders demonstrate that effective curriculum implementation is not merely a technical skill, but a moral act informed by a lifetime of professional experience and human understanding.

Empathy and Compassion Toward Teachers

Adopting a "heart-centered" approach to supervision allows retirable school heads to transform the often-rigid process of classroom observation into a supportive dialogue that prioritizes the teacher's humanity. Participants described their leadership style as being governed by a deep-seated empathy, rooted in their own lived memories of being overwhelmed by the very same curriculum demands they now oversee: *"I lead with empathy because I know how it feels to be overwhelmed."* This orientation marks a clear alignment with servant leadership principles, where the principal's primary goal is to serve the needs of the staff, ensuring their emotional and professional well-being is secured before demanding technical compliance (Cherkowski, 2020).

The deeper phenomenological structure of this theme suggests that compassion acts as a strategic "shock absorber" during periods of intense educational reform. By leading with empathy, the school head creates a high-trust environment where teachers feel safe to admit their struggles with new mandates rather than hiding their difficulties for fear of administrative reprisal. For a leader in the final stage of their career, this empathetic

stance is a form of "legacy care"; they recognize that the most enduring impact they can leave behind is not a set of completed reports, but a faculty that feels valued, understood, and emotionally resilient. This approach ensures that the culture of the school remains supportive and teacher-focused, providing a stable foundation for the curriculum to flourish long after the leader has retired.

Adapting Strategies Based on Lived Realities

Prioritizing professional judgment over rigid policy adherence allows retirable school heads to cultivate a "contextualized" leadership style that is highly responsive to the immediate needs of their students and staff. These leaders find immense satisfaction in moving away from a "one-size-fits-all" administrative approach, instead using their classroom observations to refine and adapt curriculum implementation: *"I do not rely only on policy but also on what I see happening in classrooms."*

This practice reflects the transition toward **adaptive leadership**, where the principal integrates official mandates with "local practical knowledge" to ensure that school reforms are both feasible and relevant to the specific demographic they serve (Hallinger, 2022).

The theme lies in the school head's role as an "educational bridge" between high-level policy and grounded reality. For a leader in their final years, this adaptability is a source of pride; it demonstrates that their decades of experience have granted them the "eye" to see what works in practice versus what is merely written on paper. By modifying strategies based on lived realities, they prevent "reform fatigue" among their teachers and ensure that the curriculum remains a living, breathing tool for student growth. This nuanced decision-making process serves as a definitive hallmark of leadership maturity, leaving behind a school culture that values practical effectiveness and student-centered results over blind compliance.

Commitment to Mentoring Because of Prior Mentorship Received

The act of guiding the next generation of educators serves as a moral imperative for retirable school heads, driven by a deep sense of gratitude for the supervisors who once shaped their own professional paths. These leaders view the development of their teachers not as a mere administrative duty, but as a reciprocal act of professional stewardship: *"I also make it a point to mentor my teachers."* This practice is vital for leadership pipeline development, ensuring that the specialized skills and cultural wisdom acquired over decades are not lost upon the leader's departure, but are instead woven into the school's future leadership structure (Kelly, 2021).

At its deeper phenomenological level, this commitment represents a "legacy of influence" that extends far beyond the technical requirements of the curriculum. Mentoring becomes a vehicle for the senior leader to transfer institutional memory—the unwritten rules and historical context of the school—to younger staff members. By investing their final years in these developmental relationships, school heads ensure that the school remains a "learning organization" capable of sustaining high instructional standards. This cycle of mentorship provides the retiring leader with a sense of professional completion, knowing they have not just managed a school, but have actively built the human capacity that will carry the institution forward.

Question 5. "How have recent policy changes affected your decision-making in curriculum implementation?

This question focuses on the disruptive and defining influence of external mandates. Below are the elaborations of the themes from the responses of the participants (Table 6).

Adaptability to New Policy

Developing a heightened state of professional flexibility has become a survival and success mechanism for retirable school heads as they navigate the constant influx of educational mandates. Participants reported that the volatility of the current educational landscape, particularly with large-scale shifts like the MATATAG curriculum, has forced them to pivot their school's focus rapidly to meet new national standards: *"I have*

become more flexible and adaptive." This adaptive capacity is an absolute necessity in modern school governance, where the ability to manage "policy churn"—the rapid succession of reforms—determines whether a school thrives or remains stagnant under the weight of change (Bubb & Jones, 2020).

Table 6. Recent Policy Changes Affecting Principals' Decision-making in Curriculum Implementation

Themes Emerged	Code	Significant Response
Adaptability to New Policy	Increased Flexibility and Adaptiveness	"I have become more **flexible and adaptive**."
Curriculum-Specific Impact	Specific Impact of MATATAG Curriculum	"Recent policy changes especially under the **MATATAG curriculum** I have become more flexible and adaptive."
	Policy Impact on Curriculum View	"Recent policy changes, particularly those under the **MATATAG curriculum** a..."
Influence of Personal Experience	Lived Experience Shaping Perspective	"**My personal experiences have deeply influenced** how I view curriculum lead..."
	Role of Lived Experience	"**Lived experiences shaping understanding** of curriculum leadership"
Emotional/Cognitive Impact of Change	Overwhelming Nature of Changes	"Recent policy changes **have been quite overwhelming for me**."
Nature of Policy Changes	Adjustments under MATATAG	"Recent policy changes" particularly the **adjustments under the MATATAG**..."

The greater significance of this adaptability lies in the leader's role as a stabilizer during periods of institutional transition. Rather than resisting change, these seasoned leaders use their experience to "buffer" the staff from the shock of new policies, presenting updates in a way that feels manageable rather than threatening. This flexibility is not merely about compliance; it is about the cognitive and emotional work of re-aligning the school's vision with new realities without losing its core identity. For a leader near retirement, this theme proves they have remained professionally relevant and resilient, capable of leading through the "overwhelming" nature of modern reforms while maintaining institutional equilibrium.

Curriculum-Specific Impact (MATATAG Curriculum)

Navigating the specific requirements of the MATATAG Curriculum has acted as a significant catalyst for operational transformation, requiring school heads to re-evaluate their long-standing administrative habits. Participants noted that this particular reform, with its emphasis on foundational skills and decongested content, necessitated an immediate shift in how they manage teacher workloads and instructional schedules: *"Recent policy changes especially under the MATATAG curriculum I have become more flexible and adaptive."* This direct influence confirms that high-profile, systemic reforms do not merely exist as policy documents but serve as the primary drivers that dictate the daily operational and instructional priorities of school leadership (UNESCO, 2022).

The implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum represents a test of "institutional agility" for the retirable leader. Because this reform aims to simplify and focus the learning process, the school head must act as a filter, helping teachers let go of old pedagogical baggage to make room for new, streamlined standards. For a leader nearing the end of their tenure, successfully launching such a massive systemic change is a final act of modernization. It demonstrates their ability to stay at the forefront of educational innovation, ensuring that the

school is not left behind by national progress and that the students are receiving the most current and relevant instructional experience possible.

Influence of Personal Experience

Integrating decades of lived history into their daily decision-making allows retirable school heads to approach curriculum leadership with a level of nuance that transcends technical manuals. These leaders do not view new mandates as abstract concepts; rather, they filter every external demand through the lens of their own professional journey, from being a classroom teacher to navigating previous cycles of reform: *"My personal experiences have deeply influenced how I view curriculum lead..."* This reflects a high degree of reflective practice, where personal history serves as an essential cognitive filter that helps the leader interpret, contextualize, and implement national policies in a way that makes sense for their specific school environment (García-Garnica et al., 2021).

More profoundly, this theme suggests that for a senior leader, personal experience is a form of "professional intuition" that guides them through complex educational changes. Because they have survived the successes and failures of past initiatives, they possess a unique ability to anticipate potential pitfalls and identify the specific support systems their teachers will need. This "lived-experience leadership" provides a sense of authenticity and stability to the faculty; teachers are more likely to trust a leader who speaks from a place of shared struggle and practical wisdom. For the retirable head, this reliance on personal experience is the culmination of their career, representing the transformation of raw professional data into a refined, empathetic, and highly effective leadership philosophy.

Emotional/Cognitive Impact of Change

Acknowledging the psychological weight of modern educational reform reveals a significant vulnerability among senior school heads as they navigate the final chapter of their careers. Many participants expressed that the rapid pace and volume of current policy shifts have reached a saturation point, creating a sense of being professionally overextended: *"Recent policy changes have been quite overwhelming for me."* This emotional strain is a critical indicator of the high **cognitive load** placed on retirable leaders, who must not only master new content themselves but also manage the anxieties of their staff, often leading to deep-seated fatigue and the risk of professional burnout (Lahtero & Risku, 2022).

In essence, this "overwhelming" sensation represents a conflict between a lifetime of established expertise and the sudden imposition of unfamiliar frameworks. For a leader nearing retirement, the effort required to unlearn decades of practice while simultaneously championing a new system like the MATATAG curriculum can feel like an emotional tax. This finding suggests that without adequate psychological support and streamlined administrative demands, the final years of service can become a period of endurance rather than one of celebrated legacy. Recognizing this strain is essential for institutional health, as it highlights the need for resilience-building strategies that protect the well-being of senior administrators during periods of high-stakes systemic transition.

Nature of Policy Changes

The transition toward the MATATAG Curriculum represents a pivotal shift in the operational landscape for school leaders nearing retirement. Participants characterized this specific reform not merely as a change in content, but as a systemic overhaul that demanded immediate and radical flexibility: *"Recent policy changes, particularly the adjustments under the MATATAG..."* This suggests that for veteran leaders, the "Nature of Policy Changes" today is defined by high-stakes decongestion—the intentional narrowing of curriculum focus to foundational skills—which requires a complete recalibration of teacher assignments, instructional monitoring, and resource allocation (UNESCO, 2022).

On a deeper meaning, the "Adjustments under MATATAG" serve as a final test of a leader's adaptive capacity. For those who have spent decades under previous curricular models, the MATATAG framework requires a "unlearning" of old administrative habits in favor of a more streamlined, agile approach. This process is often a

source of both professional tension and personal growth; while the pace of the adjustment is described as "overwhelming," it also provides the leader with a sense of modern relevance. By successfully steering their school through this specific transition, the retiring leader ensures that their legacy is not anchored in the past, but is instead linked to the future-ready competencies and foundational literacy goals that the new policy aims to achieve.

Challenges do Retiring School Heads Face in Mentoring their Successors

Question 7. "What was your greatest challenge in the implementation of the curriculum?"

Table 8 shows the synthesis of the themes from the question focusing on the environmental barriers and the resulting transmission of wisdom to the next generation

Insufficient Resources and Support

Facing the persistent reality of material scarcity often forces retirable school heads to operate in a state of "crisis management" rather than strategic leadership. Participants identified the lack of textbooks, digital tools, and physical facilities as the most significant practical barrier to achieving curriculum goals: *"One of the greatest challenges I faced is the lack of resources."*

Table 8. Greatest Challenge of Retirable Principals in the Implementation of the Curriculum.

Themes Emerged	Codes	Significant Responses
Insufficient Resources and Support	lack of materials; limited provision	"One of the greatest challenges I faced is the lack of resources to support curriculum implementation."
Teachers' Resistance and Varying Levels of Competence	resistance to change; capacity gaps	"The greatest challenge I could consider is implementing changes when teachers are not ready or resistant."
Managing Curriculum Overload	content overload; impractical requirements	"The curriculum is too overloaded, making it difficult for teachers and learners to cope."
Ensuring Consistency Across Grade Levels	alignment issues; coherence	"Managing coherence among grade levels and ensuring uniform curriculum delivery was always challenging."
Balancing Administrative Duties While Ensuring Fidelity	workload challenges; limited time	"Collaboration has always been at the heart of my leadership, but administrative tasks make it difficult to focus on curriculum monitoring."

This finding confirms that even the most experienced and skilled leaders are frequently hamstrung by systemic underfunding, as **resource scarcity** remains a global primary obstacle that prevents educational reforms from moving beyond theoretical intent into classroom reality (Sun & Leithwood, 2020).

The theme implies the ingenuity and emotional resilience required of leaders who must "do more with less" as they approach the end of their careers. The lack of support from higher administrative levels creates a sense of professional isolation, where the school head must become a scavenger and a negotiator to secure the basic necessities for their teachers. For a leader nearing retirement, this struggle can be particularly disheartening; they wish to leave the school in a state of abundance, yet they find themselves battling the same infrastructure and material shortages that may have existed at the start of their tenure. Consequently, successful implementation in this context is redefined not by having the best resources, but by the leader's ability to maintain teacher morale and instructional quality despite these glaring physical limitations.

Teachers' Resistance and Varying Levels of Competence

Navigating the human element of curriculum reform requires retirable school heads to address both the emotional reluctance of staff and the technical gaps in their instructional skills. Participants identified a critical friction point where the speed of policy change outpaces the readiness of the faculty: *"Implementing changes when teachers are not ready or resistant."* This creates a dual burden for the leader: they must manage the behavioral issue of resistance to change while simultaneously bridging the functional issue of capacity gaps. Research suggests that overcoming this hurdle requires a sophisticated blend of targeted professional development and high-stakes motivational leadership to move teachers from skepticism to competence (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022).

The more significant meaning of the theme lies in the leader's role as a "psychological navigator." For a principal nearing retirement, teacher resistance is often seen not as defiance, but as a symptom of professional exhaustion or fear of inadequacy in the face of new technologies and methodologies. These leaders use their "accumulated wisdom" to differentiate between teachers who *won't* change and those who *can't* change yet, applying different coaching strategies for each. By fostering an environment where "not being ready" is met with support rather than sanction, the leader builds the collective efficacy necessary for the school to survive the transition. This legacy of "capacity building" ensures that the staff remains resilient and adaptable, even after the veteran leader's departure.

Managing Curriculum Overload

The struggle to reconcile an expansive list of learning competencies with the finite reality of classroom hours represents one of the most taxing challenges for school leaders. Participants consistently identified "content overload" as a systemic failure that compromises the quality of both teaching and learning: *"The curriculum is too overloaded, making it difficult for teachers and learners to cope."* This highlights a persistent global issue in **curriculum design**, where the accumulation of "nice-to-know" content creates unrealistic demands on teacher preparation and leaves students with a superficial understanding of core concepts rather than deep mastery (OECD, 2021).

From a phenomenological perspective, managing this overload requires the retirable school head to act as an "instructional gatekeeper." These leaders often find themselves in the difficult position of having to prioritize which aspects of the mandate are essential for student success and which are practically impossible to achieve given current constraints. For a leader in their final years, this is an exercise in **strategic pragmatism**; they use their decades of experience to help teachers "decompress" the curriculum, focusing on foundational literacy and numeracy over mere checklist compliance. By giving teachers the "permission" to focus on depth over breadth, the leader mitigates the risk of burnout and ensures that the school's legacy is defined by genuine student learning rather than the frantic completion of overloaded modules.

Question No. 7 "What advice would you give to incoming school heads to ensure effective curriculum continuity after your retirement?"

The preceding question led to the emergence of different themes derived from the participants' responses as shown in Table 9.

Be Open-Minded to Changes and Innovations

This theme highlights the importance of psychological and professional readiness in the face of educational evolution. Retirable school heads emphasize that for curriculum continuity to occur, successors must prioritize acceptance and adaptability: "It is necessary to be open-minded. Accept what is new." This suggests that a leader's ability to pivot and embrace innovation is a prerequisite for navigating the "fast" changes in curriculum provisions they experienced during their final years.

Table 9. Advice of Retirable Principals to Incoming School Head to Ensure Effective Curriculum Continuity

Themes Emerged	Codes	Significant Responses
Be Open-Minded to Changes and Innovations	acceptance; adaptability	"It is necessary to be open-minded. Accept what is new."
Strengthen Collaborative Culture	teamwork; collective leadership	"My advice is to lead with collaboration—work with teachers, not above them."
Prioritize Consistent Monitoring and Support	supervision; instructional leadership	"Ensure continuous monitoring of curriculum implementation so teachers feel supported."
Build on Existing Programs Instead of Starting Over	continuity; sustained momentum	"Do not overhaul everything. Continue the programs that work."
Lead with Purpose, Integrity, and Service	ethical leadership; servant leadership	"Be sincere and purposeful in your decisions because these will shape the future of the school even after you retire."

This finding aligns with the literature on "Adaptive Leadership," where leaders are encouraged to thrive in environments of uncertainty by viewing changes as opportunities for growth rather than disruptions (Bubb & Jones, 2020). Furthermore, the OECD (2021) emphasizes that "adaptive expertise"—the ability to apply knowledge flexibly to new and varying situations—is a core competency for school leaders who must implement complex reforms like the MATATAG curriculum. By advocating for open-mindedness, the participants are essentially calling for "sensemaking" capabilities, which allow leaders to interpret and implement ambiguous policies with a positive and proactive stance (Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2021).

Strengthen Collaborative Culture

Prioritizing a shift from hierarchical control to a community of shared practice represents the ultimate recommendation for ensuring long-term institutional health. Participants emphasized that the most effective way to navigate the complexities of curriculum reform is to "work with teachers, not above them," fundamentally rejecting the "lone hero" model of leadership: *"Lead with collaboration—work with teachers, not above them."* This advice is rooted in the principles of **distributed leadership**, a model where the responsibility for instructional quality is shared across the faculty. By flattening the power structure, school heads can tap into the collective intelligence of their staff, which is consistently linked to higher levels of school performance and the long-term sustainability of educational initiatives (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Significantly, this collaborative culture lies in the transition from "authority-based" to "influence-based" leadership. For a leader nearing retirement, fostering teamwork is a strategic act of succession planning; it ensures that the "leadership muscle" is developed within the teaching staff, making the school less dependent on any single individual's presence. When a collaborative culture is the norm, the school becomes a resilient ecosystem where knowledge and passion are distributed rather than hoarded. Ultimately, this approach transforms the school into a "we-centered" organization where curriculum success is a shared triumph, providing a stable and unified foundation for the incoming leader to build upon.

Prioritize Consistent Monitoring and Support

Maintaining a physical and professional presence within the classroom environment allows retirable school heads to transition from distant administrators to active partners in the instructional process. Participants underscored that "continuous monitoring" should not be perceived as a tool for policing, but as a vital mechanism for providing real-time support to teachers as they navigate new curriculum standards: *"Ensure continuous monitoring of curriculum implementation so teachers feel supported."* This proactive engagement

is the practical execution of the instructional leadership model, where the leader's primary focus is the improvement of teaching and learning through constant feedback and the removal of pedagogical barriers (Supovitz et al., 2019).

Consistent monitoring serves as a form of "administrative accompaniment." For a leader nearing the end of their career, being present in the hallways and classrooms reduces the isolation often felt by teachers during high-stakes reforms. It signals that the leader is "in the trenches" with their staff, fostering a sense of shared accountability. This "visibility-as-support" strategy ensures that instructional issues are identified and addressed early, preventing small frustrations from evolving into systemic failures. By prioritizing this hands-on approach, the leader leaves behind a legacy of high standards and a culture where supervision is welcomed as a collaborative opportunity for growth rather than a source of anxiety.

Build on Existing Programs Instead of Starting Over

Recognizing that institutional progress is a marathon rather than a series of sprints, retirable school heads advocate for a philosophy of continuity over radical disruption. These leaders caution against the "clean slate" approach often adopted by new administrators, advising instead that successful existing programs should be protected and refined: *"Do not overhaul everything. Continue the programs that work."* This perspective is essential for effective leadership succession, as it preserves the hard-won "institutional momentum" and prevents the exhaustion associated with "new leader, new initiative" syndrome, where valuable progress is abandoned simply to make room for a new leader's personal agenda (Kelly, 2021).

The theme lies in the transition from "ego-centric" leadership to "legacy-centric" leadership. For a leader in the final stage of their career, the value of a program is measured by its impact on students rather than who gets the credit for starting it. By encouraging their successors to build upon established foundations, they are promoting organizational stability and honoring the collective effort of the staff who implemented those programs. This approach ensures that the school remains a stable environment for learners, where curriculum changes are integrated into a proven framework rather than causing a systemic shock. Ultimately, this wisdom of continuity serves as a vital safeguard for the school's long-term success, ensuring that the "connective tissue" of the institution remains intact through leadership transitions.

Lead with Purpose, Integrity, and Service

Centering the final years of one's tenure on a foundation of moral clarity ensures that a leader's influence transcends their physical presence in the school. Participants emphasized that the most lasting impact is made when decisions are anchored in sincerity and a commitment to serving others: *"Be sincere and purposeful in your decisions because these will shape the future of the school even after you retire."* This philosophy exemplifies Servant Leadership and Ethical Leadership, where the school head views their power not as a tool for personal prestige, but as a vehicle for the long-term well-being of the students and staff. By prioritizing service over status, the retiring leader builds a culture of trust that serves as the moral compass for the next generation of administrators.

A more profound meaning of the theme lies in the transition from "transactional management" to "transcendental leadership." For a leader nearing retirement, "Lead with Purpose" means recognizing that every policy implementation and every teacher consultation is an opportunity to model integrity. This ethical consistency provides a sense of psychological safety for the entire school community, especially during the "overwhelming" shifts of new curriculum mandates. By acting with sincerity, the leader creates an "ethical legacy"—a set of unwritten standards for how people should be treated and how challenges should be faced. This commitment to service becomes the leader's ultimate contribution, ensuring that the school remains a values-driven institution long after the transition of leadership.

Formulated Conceptual Framework

The analysis of the data was the basis in the development of the conceptual framework that reflects school principals' strategies in implementing the curriculum effectively.
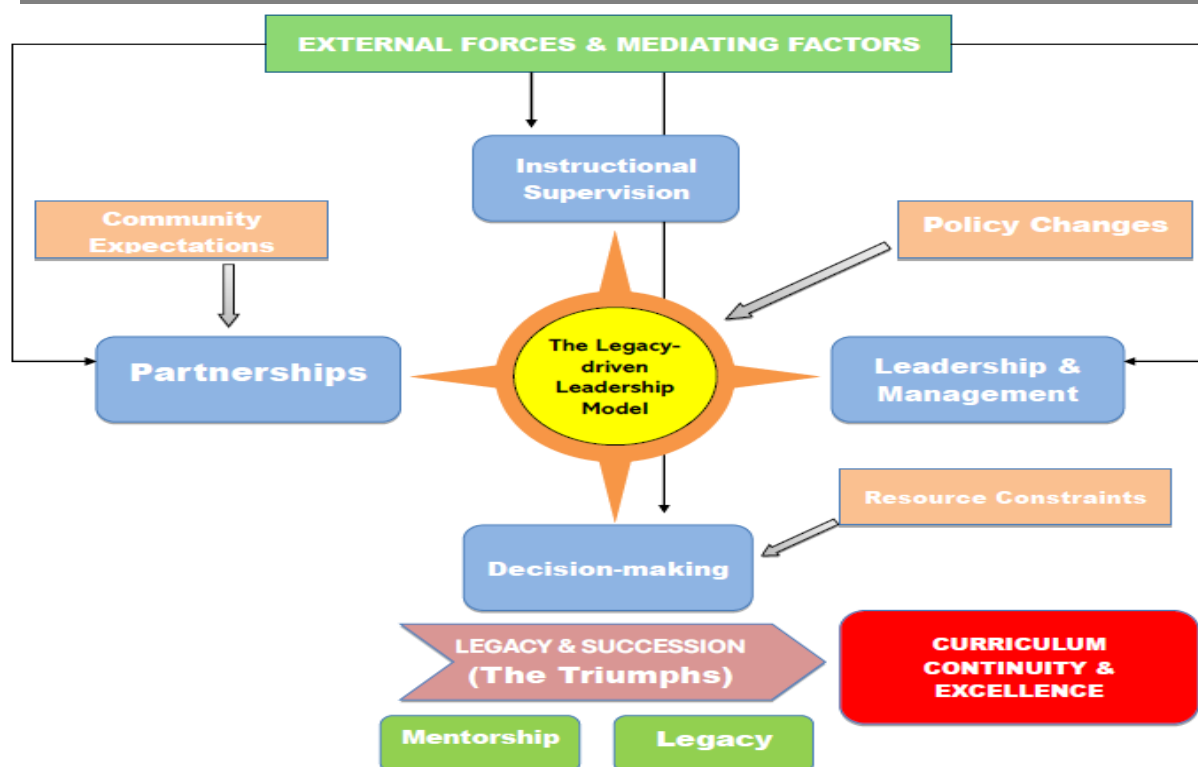
Figure 1. Legacy-driven Leadership Model

The study's conceptual framework, known as **The Legacy-Driven Leadership Model,** depicts the dynamic and interconnected dimensions that influence strategic leadership practices in the educational sphere. At the heart of this framework lies the Legacy-Driven Leadership Model, which serves as the fundamental orientation that directs school leaders' actions, decisions, and responses to institutional requirements. This central concept views leadership as a purpose-oriented and future-focused process, highlighting the importance of creating a lasting impact that extends beyond the immediate tenure of leadership.

Encircling this central concept are four interconnected leadership domains: instructional supervision, leadership and management, decision-making, and partnerships. These domains are organized in a compass-like formation to underscore balance, direction, and interdependence. Instructional supervision underscores the importance of teaching and learning as the cornerstone of effective leadership. Leadership and management encompass the organizational direction, coordination, and administrative efficiency essential for operational success. Decision-making embodies the strategic and evaluative processes through which leaders prioritize initiatives and allocate resources. Partnerships emphasize the significance of collaboration and stakeholder involvement in maintaining school programs and initiatives. Directional arrows from these domains toward the center signify that each domain contributes to and enhances legacy-driven leadership.

The framework also incorporates external influences and mediating elements, such as policy modifications, community expectations, and resource limitations. These elements are regarded as contextual factors that shape, rather than dictate, leadership practices. Policy modifications affect the direction of legacy-driven leadership by setting regulatory and strategic limits. Community expectations mainly influence partnerships, enhancing shared responsibility and stakeholder engagement. Resource limitations impact leadership and management, as well as decision-making, necessitating that leaders strategically prioritize actions within their available resources. The directional arrows linked to these external influences indicate their mediating function within the leadership process.

Beneath the core leadership construct, the framework shifts to legacy and succession, highlighting the long-term effects of leadership practices. This aspect emphasizes the significance of mentorship and legacy development as means to maintain leadership effectiveness over time. Through deliberate succession planning and capacity enhancement, leadership practices become institutionalized, ensuring continuity even amid leadership changes. A directional arrow links legacy and succession to the ultimate outcome of the framework.

The final outcome, curriculum continuity and excellence, signifies the lasting impact of legacy-driven leadership. It illustrates the alignment of leadership practices with curricular consistency, instructional quality, and long-term educational advancement. This outcome underscores that leadership effectiveness is assessed not just by immediate results but by lasting contributions to educational systems and learner outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

Retirable school heads demonstrate a strong sense of stewardship and legacy-building in curriculum implementation.

Their perceptions reflect accumulated professional wisdom and a desire to ensure stability and continuity, consistent with models of late-career or wisdom-based leadership.

Instructional leadership remains a core source of both effectiveness and strain.

Participants found fulfillment in teacher support and supervision yet experienced challenges due to administrative overload and shifting expectations.

Stakeholder engagement is both systematic and relational. Retirable leaders rely on formal structures (LAC sessions, PTA meetings, SGC consultations) as well as informal rapport-building to achieve shared curriculum decisions.

Emotional and relational rewards shape their final years of service. Witnessing improvement, mentoring teachers, and strengthening school–community partnerships were the most gratifying aspects of nearing retirement.

Policy changes significantly shape leadership decisions and intensify complexity. New directives require translation into workable school practices, heightening the cognitive and managerial load of senior leaders.

Curriculum implementation challenges persist and require adaptive leadership.

Resource scarcity, policy shifts, and teacher-related concerns remain central issues, emphasizing the need for strategic, collaborative, and evidence-based approaches.

Incoming school heads will need strong instructional competence, relational intelligence, and adaptive problem-solving. The advice given highlights the importance of continuity, communication, and sustained professional learning to maintain curriculum quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the experiences and insights of retirable school heads, as well as supporting literature, the following recommendations are proposed:

For School Administrators and Incoming School Heads. Strengthen instructional leadership competencies through ongoing training on coaching, supervision, and curriculum contextualization. Institutionalize structured stakeholder engagement systems such as regular SGC consultations, collaborative planning sessions, and community partnership mapping.

Establish mentorship programs wherein senior school heads can transfer institutional knowledge and leadership practices before retirement. Promote data-driven decision-making by enhancing school heads' skills in data interpretation for curriculum planning and evaluation. Adopt distributed leadership approaches to reduce administrative overload and empower teacher-leaders in curriculum implementation.

The following concrete steps are recommended for a formal mentorship pilot:

Phase	Activity	Objective
I. Archive Phase	Critical Incident Journaling	Retiring heads document the "triumphs and failures" of past policy implementations to build a localized "playbook."
II. Shadow Phase	Curriculum Walkthroughs	Successors accompany the leader during monitoring to learn the "soft skills" of empathy-based feedback.
III. Transfer Phase	Guided Decision-Making	The mentor delegates specific MATATAG implementation tasks, providing a "safety net" for the mentee to practice autonomy.

For Schools Division Offices (SDOs). Provide targeted support to late-career school heads, including reduced administrative tasks and specialized capacity-building addressing curriculum reforms. Ensure stability and clarity in policy dissemination to minimize confusion and provide sufficient time for implementation.

Allocate adequate resources and technical assistance to address recurring challenges in curriculum delivery, especially in resource-constrained schools.

For the Department of Education. Develop transition frameworks for leadership succession, ensuring continuity of programs when school heads retire. Review and streamline policy requirements to reduce redundancy and administrative burden on school heads.

For Future Researchers. Conduct similar studies involving mid-career and early-career school heads to compare leadership trajectories. Explore longitudinal designs to examine how curriculum leadership evolves before, during, and after retirement transitions. Investigate additional contexts such as large schools, specialized schools, or different regions to deepen transferability of findings.

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