School Heads' Engagement Strategies and Bottlenecks in Stakeholder Partnership: Basis for an Enhanced School Improvement Plan

Rodolfo A. Cebricus Jr.[1], Jerald P. Torillo[2]

[1]PhD Student, Graduate School, Eastern Samar State University Main Campus, Borongan City, Eastern Samar, Philippines, 6800,

[2]Faculty, Graduate School, Eastern Samar State University Campus, Borongan City, Eastern Samar, Philippines, 6800

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ABSTRACT

Stakeholder partnership is central to school-based management in Philippine public schools, yet school heads continue to face bottlenecks in sustaining meaningful participation from parents, communities, and external partners. This study determined the bottlenecks encountered by public elementary school heads in stakeholder partnership, the level of stakeholders' engagement, and the relationship between the two, as a basis for an enhanced School Improvement Plan (SIP). A descriptive-correlational design was employed. Data were gathered through a validated researcher-made questionnaire (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$) and triangulated through confirmatory interviews, and were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and Pearson product-moment correlation. Respondents were predominantly female, middle-aged, held graduate-level qualifications, and had long service records. Bottlenecks in communication ($M = 2.21$), stakeholder involvement ($M = 2.28$), resources ($M = 2.44$), and interest of support ($M = 2.42$) were all rarely encountered, with the most frequent concerns being motivating stakeholders to support curriculum-based innovations, securing financial and material support, and stakeholders' short-term orientation. Stakeholders' engagement was rated highly engaged ($M = 4.35$), strongest in transparent communication and community participation and weakest in partnerships with local businesses and local government units. All bottleneck dimensions were significantly related to engagement, with communication ($r = .712$) and stakeholder involvement ($r = .699$) showing the strongest relationships. An enhanced SIP aligned with the four pillars of access, equity, quality, and resilience and well-being was formulated to institutionalize communication systems, participatory governance, and sustainable partnerships.

Keywords: stakeholder partnership; stakeholder engagement; school heads; school-based management; School Improvement Plan; Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Schools are not only places where learners acquire academic knowledge but also platforms where communication, socialization, and critical thinking are developed through the collaboration of teachers, parents, and community stakeholders (De Torres, 2021). A school's success depends heavily on these stakeholders working together to create an environment where learners thrive academically and socially, and positive school–community relationships foster a sense of belonging that supports learner performance and personal growth (Lacanilao, 2020). Empowering local groups enables schools to address specific needs, make informed decisions, and implement School Improvement Plans (SIPs) aligned with shared goals (Onyango, 2020), while parental involvement and open communication enhance learner performance and school efficiency (Gichohi, 2015).

In the Philippines, stakeholder participation is institutionalized through school-based management under Republic Act No. 9155 and through the enhanced SIP process prescribed in DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2015. Nevertheless, public schools continue to experience difficulty in securing consistent stakeholder involvement.

Many parents and community members remain unaware of their roles in school activities, resulting in minimal participation and missed opportunities for school development (De Torres, 2021). Limited involvement is also associated with learners' feelings of disconnection and with weak participation in school activities (Lacanilao, 2020). Barriers such as political interference, inadequate staffing, weak leadership skills, and limited resources hinder engagement (Dabesa & Cheramlak, 2021), and SIP implementation often falls short because of insufficient technical support, resources, and stakeholder awareness (Francisco et al., 2024).

The literature consistently identifies school heads as central actors in cultivating partnerships through communication, inclusive leadership, and participatory governance. Commonly reported challenges include communication gaps, limited participation, resource constraints, and fluctuating stakeholder interest, which are particularly pronounced in rural and underserved contexts. However, few studies have examined school heads' bottlenecks and stakeholder engagement simultaneously and explicitly linked them to the formulation of an SIP, and fewer still have done so in island and rural settings such as Samar Island, where leadership dynamics and community relationships may differ from urban contexts. Existing studies also tend to treat stakeholder engagement as a general practice rather than measuring its level and its relationship with the bottlenecks school heads encounter.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 2010), which holds that organizations operate within a web of relationships with stakeholders whose interests hold intrinsic value. In schools, these include internal stakeholders such as teachers, learners, and personnel, and external stakeholders such as parents, community members, government bodies, and private partners. School heads must recognize and balance these often competing interests. The shift from closed to open organizational systems underscores the importance of external linkages (Scott, 2010), and the inclusion of external representatives in governance makes educational institutions more responsive to societal needs (Amara & Magalhães, 2010).

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework. The profile of school heads (age, sex, highest educational attainment, administrative position, and length of service) is treated as the independent variable that shapes how school heads experience partnership work. Bottlenecks in stakeholder partnership—communication, stakeholder involvement, resources, and interest of support—are the mediating variables, and the level of stakeholders' engagement is the dependent variable. The findings serve as inputs to an enhanced SIP.

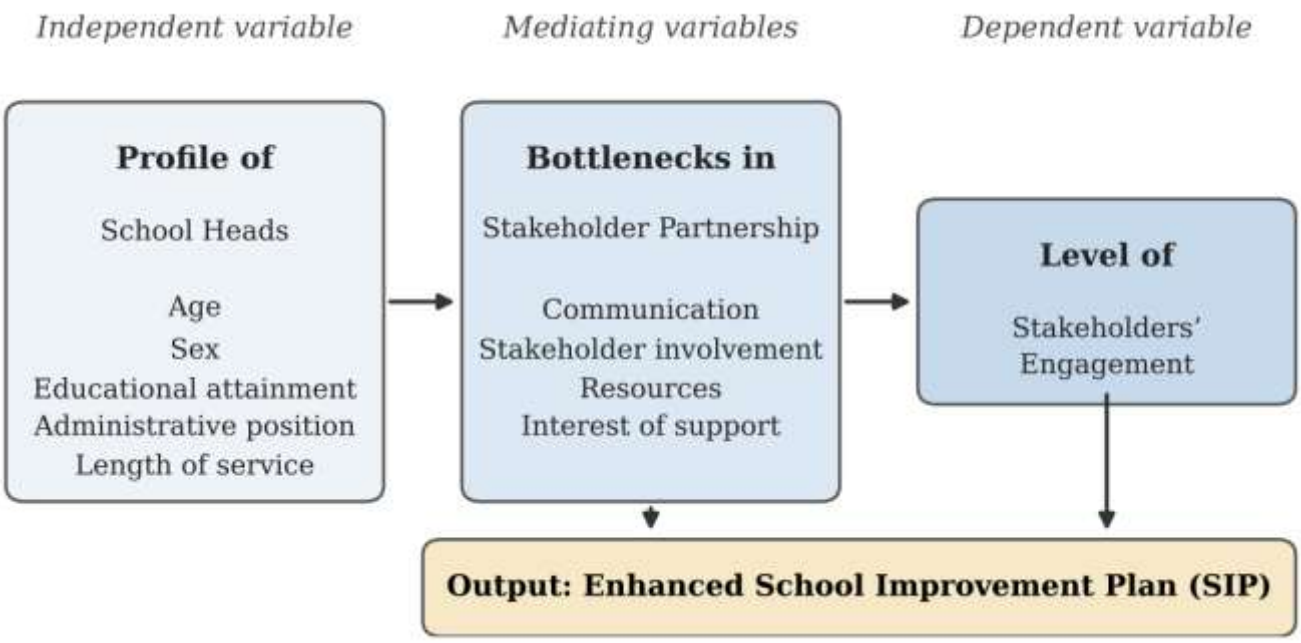

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

1.2 Research Questions and Hypothesis

The study determined school heads' bottlenecks and engagement strategies as basis for an enhanced SIP. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, highest educational attainment, administrative position, and length of service as school head?

2. What are the school heads' bottlenecks in stakeholder partnership in terms of communication, stakeholder involvement, resources, and interest of support?

3. What is the level of stakeholders' engagement?

4. Is there a significant relationship between school heads' bottlenecks in stakeholder partnership and the level of stakeholders' engagement?

5. What School Improvement Plan can be formulated based on the findings?

The study tested the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between school heads' bottlenecks in stakeholder partnership and the level of stakeholders' engagement.

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a descriptive-correlational design, which describes variables and measures the degree of association between them (Clarete et al., 2023). The descriptive component characterized the respondents' profile, the frequency of bottlenecks in stakeholder partnership, and the level of stakeholders' engagement. The correlational component determined whether the bottlenecks were significantly related to the level of engagement. Confirmatory interviews were conducted to clarify and triangulate the survey results.

2.2 Research Locale and Respondents

The study was conducted in the public elementary schools of the Schools Division of Borongan City, Eastern Samar, distributed across five districts. The respondents were the 164 school heads, department heads, subject core heads, and grade level chairmen of the division, distributed as shown in Table 1. Total enumeration was used because the population was small and accessible, thereby minimizing sampling error and increasing the reliability of the findings.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by district

District	**Number of Respondents**
Borongan 1 District	41
Borongan 2 District	34
Borongan 3 District	23
Borongan 4 District	32
Borongan 5 District	34
Total	164

2.3 Research Instrument

A researcher-made questionnaire with three parts was used. Part I gathered the respondents' profile. Part II measured the frequency of bottlenecks in stakeholder partnership across four dimensions—communication, stakeholder involvement, resources, and interest of support—with 15 items each. Part III measured the level of

stakeholders' engagement through 15 engagement-strategy items. Both Parts II and III used five-point Likert scales (Table 2).

The instrument underwent content validation by the researcher's adviser and subject-matter experts, who reviewed the items for clarity, relevance, and appropriateness. It was then pilot-tested among school heads in public elementary schools of the Schools Division of Eastern Samar who were not part of the study. Revisions were made based on their feedback and the item analysis. Reliability testing yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89, indicating high internal consistency.

Table 2. Scales used in interpreting the bottlenecks and the level of engagement

Scale	Mean Range	Bottlenecks	Engagement
5	4.20–5.00	Always Encountered	Highly Engaged
4	3.40–4.19	Frequently Encountered	Moderately Engaged
3	2.60–3.39	Occasionally Encountered	Somewhat Engaged
2	1.80–2.59	Rarely Encountered	Slightly Engaged
1	1.00–1.79	Never Encountered	Not Engaged

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was secured from the Schools Division Office. The questionnaire was administered face-to-face so that the researcher could explain the purpose of the study and the instructions; respondents were given sufficient time to answer, and follow-ups were made to improve the retrieval rate. Retrieved questionnaires were checked for completeness, and unclear responses were clarified with the respondents. To validate the quantitative results, the researcher conducted confirmatory telephone interviews with selected school heads using a semi-structured guide. Interview excerpts were translated from Filipino into English and are identified by respondent codes.

2.5 Data Analysis

The profile was analyzed using frequency and percentage. The bottlenecks and the level of engagement were analyzed using the mean and standard deviation and interpreted using the scales in Table 2. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to assess the relationship between bottleneck dimensions and engagement level, tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all respondents after they were informed of the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the study and of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Participation was voluntary, and deliberate effort was made to minimize power dynamics so that respondents could express their views freely. Identities were protected through coded references, data were stored securely and used solely for the study, and findings were reported honestly and shared with participants. The study was reviewed and approved by the institutional ethics review committee before data collection.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Profile of the Respondents

Table 3 shows that the respondents were concentrated in the middle-age brackets, with the largest groups aged 51–55 (21.95%) and 46–50 (20.73%). Most were female (62.80%). The majority held graduate-level preparation, either master's degree units (44.51%) or a master's degree (31.71%), while only 4.27% held a doctorate. The most common positions were Principal I (26.83%) and Head Teacher III (25.00%), and most respondents had 20 to 29 years (43.29%) or 30 to 39 years (31.10%) of service.

Table 3. Profile of the respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
Age		
25–30 years old	5	3.05
31–35 years old	13	7.93
36–40 years old	27	16.46
41–45 years old	24	14.63
46–50 years old	34	20.73
51–55 years old	36	21.95
56–60 years old	24	14.63
61–65 years old	1	0.61
Sex		
Male	61	37.20
Female	103	62.80
Highest Educational Attainment		
Master's degree units	73	44.51
Master's degree	52	31.71
Doctorate degree units	32	19.51
PhD/EdD degree	7	4.27
Administrative Position		
Principal IV	3	1.83
Principal III	9	5.49
Principal II	20	12.20
Principal I	44	26.83
Head Teacher IV	1	0.61
Head Teacher III	41	25.00
Head Teacher II	20	12.20
Head Teacher I	25	15.24
Length of Service as School Head		
40 years and above	9	5.49
30–39 years	51	31.10
20–29 years	71	43.29
10–19 years	32	19.51
Less than 10 years	1	0.61

Note. n = 164

The concentration of respondents in the middle-age brackets implies that school leadership is entrusted to individuals with professional maturity, institutional knowledge, and decision-making capacity. The predominance of women reflects the historically female-dominated teaching profession from which Philippine school heads are drawn (Manimtim & Perez, 2021), and women leaders are often associated with collaborative and relationship-oriented leadership (Sanchez & Thornton, 2017). Experienced school heads tend to demonstrate stronger instructional leadership and stakeholder management (Dellomas & Deri, 2022), and experienced principals exert substantial influence on school climate and teacher collaboration (Grissom et al., 2021). The small number of doctorate holders, however, suggests barriers to completing terminal degrees, such as workload and limited access to doctoral programs. Since most respondents occupied entry- and mid-level administrative positions, leadership development and mentoring programs remain relevant to prepare them for higher responsibilities.

3.2 Bottlenecks in Stakeholder Partnership

Communication. Table 4 shows that communication bottlenecks were rarely encountered (M = 2.21, SD = 0.705). The most frequent concern was reaching all relevant stakeholders because of barriers such as technology and access (M = 2.38), followed by delayed feedback from stakeholders (M = 2.26) and low participation in meetings due to poor communication planning (M = 2.24). Explaining the school's vision, mission, and goals was the least encountered (M = 2.05), suggesting that school heads communicate institutional direction clearly.

Table 4. School heads' bottlenecks in stakeholder partnership in terms of communication

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I struggle to reach all relevant stakeholders due to communication barriers (e.g., technology, access).	2.38	0.686	Rarely Encountered
I often encounter delays in receiving feedback from stakeholders, causing communication breakdowns.	2.26	0.748	Rarely Encountered
I find it challenging to get stakeholders to participate in meetings or discussions due to poor communication planning.	2.24	0.736	Rarely Encountered
I feel there is a lack of effective communication channels that allow regular updates with stakeholders.	2.23	0.712	Rarely Encountered
I find it difficult to align stakeholder expectations through communication.	2.23	0.695	Rarely Encountered
I face difficulty in getting timely responses from stakeholders regarding urgent school matters.	2.23	0.677	Rarely Encountered
I find it difficult to address concerns or conflicts among stakeholders due to unclear communication strategies.	2.22	0.692	Rarely Encountered
I struggle to engage all stakeholders through available communication platforms (e.g., email, meetings).	2.20	0.742	Rarely Encountered
I notice confusion among stakeholders due to inconsistent messaging from the school leadership.	2.20	0.711	Rarely Encountered
I feel there are limited opportunities to hear stakeholder voices due to poor communication structures.	2.20	0.648	Rarely Encountered
I sometimes overwhelm stakeholders with too much or irrelevant information, leading to confusion.	2.18	0.720	Rarely Encountered
I feel that I lack adequate communication training or strategies to engage stakeholders effectively.	2.18	0.673	Rarely Encountered
I find it difficult to convey important school policies and updates to stakeholders effectively.	2.17	0.731	Rarely Encountered
I experience misunderstandings from stakeholders due to unclear communication about school decisions.	2.13	0.628	Rarely Encountered
I have difficulty explaining the school's vision, mission, or goals clearly to stakeholders.	2.05	0.777	Rarely Encountered
Grand Mean	**2.21**	**0.705**	**Rarely Encountered**

Interviews indicate that the issue is not the absence of channels but whether stakeholders understand and respond. As one school head explained:

"Although we have access to Facebook and Messenger groups, communication involves more than merely transmitting information; it also requires ensuring comprehension and responsiveness." (Bor-1)

Another described the burden of follow-ups on urgent matters: "In urgent situations, I find myself repeatedly following up for answers, which makes me feel that I am the only one who treats the matter with urgency" (Cat-

2). These results suggest that communication systems are functional and that improvement lies in refining stakeholder reach and feedback loops rather than overhauling structures. This is consistent with findings that transparent and consistent communication fosters stakeholder participation in Philippine schools (Cruzat et al., 2022) and that leaders who diversify communication platforms adapt effectively to digital-era communication demands (Uzorka et al., 2025; Bowman et al., 2022).

Stakeholder involvement. Table 5 shows that involvement bottlenecks were likewise rarely encountered (M = 2.28, SD = 0.700). The most frequent were motivating stakeholders to support curriculum-based programs and innovations (M = 2.59) and sustaining interest in the school's long-term goals (M = 2.52), followed by getting LGUs and NGOs to collaborate (M = 2.34) and ensuring participation in planning and evaluation (M = 2.31). Involvement in institutionalized programs such as Brigada Eskwela (M = 2.14) and alignment with DepEd's mission and vision (M = 2.14) posed the fewest difficulties.

Table 5. School heads' bottlenecks in stakeholder partnership in terms of stakeholder involvement

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I find it challenging to motivate stakeholders to support curriculum-based school programs and innovations.	2.59	0.750	Rarely Encountered
I find it hard to sustain stakeholders' interest and involvement in the school's long-term educational goals.	2.52	0.731	Rarely Encountered
I face obstacles in getting local government units (LGUs) and NGOs to collaborate on school improvement projects.	2.34	0.722	Rarely Encountered
I find it difficult to ensure stakeholder participation in the planning and evaluation of school programs.	2.31	0.697	Rarely Encountered
I experience challenges in engaging parents and the community in implementing health and nutrition programs.	2.30	0.657	Rarely Encountered
I encounter difficulties in ensuring consistent participation from stakeholders in DepEd's child protection programs.	2.27	0.760	Rarely Encountered
I face challenges in creating a culture of shared responsibility for student learning and development among stakeholders.	2.26	0.679	Rarely Encountered
I struggle to involve all relevant stakeholders in disaster preparedness and risk reduction programs.	2.24	0.682	Rarely Encountered
I struggle to get parents and community members actively involved in co-curricular programs and activities.	2.23	0.697	Rarely Encountered
I struggle to maintain long-term stakeholder engagement in DepEd's thrusts and initiatives.	2.23	0.695	Rarely Encountered
I encounter resistance from some stakeholders when implementing new DepEd policies or reforms in the school.	2.22	0.674	Rarely Encountered
I find it hard to secure financial or material support from stakeholders for school development programs.	2.21	0.707	Rarely Encountered
I find it difficult to align stakeholder expectations with the goals and priorities set by DepEd.	2.17	0.688	Rarely Encountered
I find it difficult to involve stakeholders in supporting DepEd's school thrusts and national programs (e.g., Brigada Eskwela).	2.14	0.691	Rarely Encountered
I experience challenges in aligning stakeholder involvement with DepEd's mission, vision, and educational goals.	2.14	0.664	Rarely Encountered
Grand Mean	**2.28**	**0.700**	**Rarely Encountered**

The interviews clarify that the challenge lies in sustaining participation in academic programs rather than in overt resistance:

"During Brigada Eskwela, many people help at the beginning. However, when it comes to academic programs, the support becomes irregular. In the end, the teachers are the ones who carry the load again." (Sam-3)

Another school head noted that "resistance exists, but it is not always verbally expressed; instead, it becomes evident through the absence of participation" (Cal-1). Stakeholders, therefore, respond readily to visible, institutionalized programs but less to reform-oriented and long-term initiatives whose benefits are less immediate. Similar patterns were reported by Arguelles and Sarsale (2025), who identified motivation as a common challenge in long-term initiatives, and by Holmes et al. (2021), who emphasized that stakeholder motivation depends on leaders' ability to articulate the relevance and long-term benefits of school initiatives.

Resources. Table 6 shows that resource-related bottlenecks were rarely encountered (M = 2.44, SD = 0.718), although this dimension registered the highest mean among the four. The most frequent concerns were obtaining sufficient material support (M = 2.51) and securing financial resources from stakeholders (M = 2.51), followed by engaging stakeholders in decision-making due to limited financial backing (M = 2.50) and securing logistical support (M = 2.48). Maintaining communication despite limited resources was the least encountered (M = 2.32).

Table 6. School heads' bottlenecks in stakeholder partnership in terms of resources

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I encounter challenges in obtaining sufficient material support from stakeholders.	2.51	0.763	Rarely Encountered
I face difficulties in securing financial resources from stakeholders.	2.51	0.705	Rarely Encountered
I have difficulty engaging stakeholders in strategic decision-making due to limited financial backing.	2.50	0.705	Rarely Encountered
I encounter challenges in securing transportation or logistical support for stakeholder activities.	2.48	0.739	Rarely Encountered
I find it difficult to organize stakeholder meetings because of insufficient funding.	2.46	0.730	Rarely Encountered
I struggle with coordinating long-term stakeholder commitments because of inconsistent resource availability.	2.46	0.721	Rarely Encountered
I face difficulties in ensuring stakeholder collaboration on school events due to budget constraints.	2.46	0.713	Rarely Encountered
I encounter difficulties in providing stakeholders with timely updates on school activities due to resource constraints.	2.44	0.685	Rarely Encountered
I encounter issues in getting stakeholders involved in school projects due to limited incentives.	2.42	0.700	Rarely Encountered
I experience challenges in aligning stakeholder expectations with available school resources.	2.41	0.708	Rarely Encountered
I struggle to sustain ongoing projects involving stakeholders because of resource shortages.	2.40	0.724	Rarely Encountered
I have trouble gaining access to technical or expertise-based support from stakeholders.	2.40	0.732	Rarely Encountered
I experience challenges in accessing appropriate venues for stakeholder meetings due to funding limitations.	2.40	0.688	Rarely Encountered
I face challenges in promoting stakeholder involvement in school improvement plans due to limited funding for incentives.	2.36	0.673	Rarely Encountered
I struggle to maintain consistent communication with stakeholders due to resource limitations.	2.32	0.791	Rarely Encountered
Grand Mean	**2.44**	**0.718**	**Rarely Encountered**

School heads reported that programs continue despite constraints: "Despite limited Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE), programs continue to be implemented, often relying primarily on volunteerism" (ES-2). Another acknowledged that "stakeholders sometimes ask whether there is an allowance; I also understand their reality" (Cal-3). The results suggest that volunteerism and social capital buffer resource scarcity, but initiatives requiring financial and logistical inputs remain vulnerable. Comparable observations were made by Pobre et al. (2025), who found that schools compensate for financial constraints by maximizing local support networks, and by Bowman et al. (2022), who noted that resource constraints affect the scale of initiatives without necessarily reducing stakeholder commitment.

Interest of support. Table 7 shows that bottlenecks related to stakeholders' interest were rarely encountered (M = 2.42, SD = 0.728). The most frequent were stakeholders' focus on short-term gains rather than long-term educational goals (M = 2.53) and the withdrawal of support due to shifting priorities (M = 2.51), while inconsistent support for programs and reluctance to give resources without immediate benefits were the least encountered (M = 2.35).

Table 7. School heads' bottlenecks in stakeholder partnership in terms of interest of support

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Stakeholders often focus on short-term gains rather than long-term educational goals.	2.53	0.730	Rarely Encountered
Stakeholders may withdraw their support due to shifting priorities.	2.51	0.713	Rarely Encountered
Limited stakeholder interest in collaborative efforts weakens partnerships.	2.49	0.755	Rarely Encountered
Educational leaders face challenges in engaging stakeholders with low levels of interest.	2.48	0.730	Rarely Encountered
Stakeholders often lack genuine interest in supporting educational initiatives.	2.43	0.684	Rarely Encountered
It is difficult to sustain stakeholder support over the lifecycle of a project.	2.41	0.798	Rarely Encountered
Competing priorities among stakeholders reduce their commitment to providing support.	2.41	0.767	Rarely Encountered
Stakeholders prioritize their own interests over the needs of the educational institution.	2.41	0.708	Rarely Encountered
Stakeholders' lack of understanding of institutional goals reduces their willingness to support initiatives.	2.41	0.682	Rarely Encountered
Stakeholders are less likely to support initiatives that do not align with their personal or organizational interests.	2.39	0.743	Rarely Encountered
Misalignment of interests between stakeholders and the school hinders partnerships.	2.39	0.696	Rarely Encountered
Insufficient communication about mutual benefits diminishes stakeholders' interest in collaboration.	2.38	0.694	Rarely Encountered
Educational leaders find it challenging to secure stakeholder support for new initiatives.	2.36	0.790	Rarely Encountered
There is inconsistent support from stakeholders for educational programs.	2.35	0.706	Rarely Encountered
Stakeholders are reluctant to provide resources unless they see immediate benefits.	2.35	0.723	Rarely Encountered
Grand Mean	**2.42**	**0.728**	**Rarely Encountered**

One school head explained the short-term orientation of support:

"Stakeholders tend to show greater interest in feeding programs and material donations, whereas initiatives such as literacy improvement and values formation are more challenging, as their outcomes are not immediately visible." (NorSam-2)

The issue is therefore a mismatch in time horizons rather than a lack of goodwill. Stakeholders are more responsive to programs with immediate and tangible outcomes (Caballes & Panol, 2021), and support tends to decline when long-term goals are not consistently reinforced by school leaders (Uzorka et al., 2025). Regularly communicating progress and showing how short-term actions contribute to long-term goals may help sustain commitment.

Summary of bottlenecks. Table 8 and Figure 2 summarize the four dimensions. The overall mean of 2.34 indicates that bottlenecks in stakeholder partnership were rarely encountered. Communication posed the fewest bottlenecks (M = 2.21), while resources (M = 2.44) and interest of support (M = 2.42) were relatively more frequent. The pattern suggests that school heads operate within functional partnership structures and that the remaining bottlenecks are situational—concentrated in sustaining long-term, curriculum-based, and resource-dependent initiatives—rather than systemic. Communication alone does not guarantee active participation; stakeholders may be well informed yet not consistently involved in decision-making and implementation.

Table 8. Summary of school heads' bottlenecks in stakeholder partnership

Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Communication	2.21	0.705	Rarely Encountered
Stakeholder Involvement	2.28	0.700	Rarely Encountered
Resources	2.44	0.718	Rarely Encountered
Interest of Support	2.42	0.728	Rarely Encountered
Overall Mean	**2.34**	**0.713**	**Rarely Encountered**

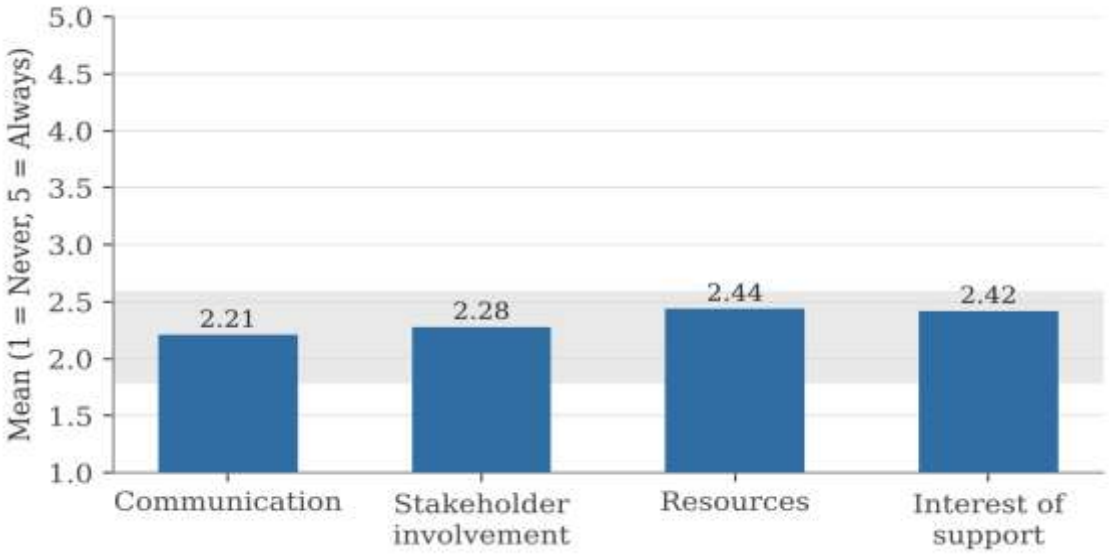

Figure 2. Mean frequency of bottlenecks by dimension (shaded band: rarely encountered, 1.80–2.59)

3.3 Level of Stakeholders' Engagement

Table 9 and Figure 3 show that stakeholders were highly engaged (M = 4.35, SD = 0.777). The highest-rated strategies were transparent communication to keep stakeholders informed (M = 4.52), encouraging community involvement in activities such as Brigada Eskwela and feeding programs (M = 4.51), and regular consultation meetings (M = 4.51). The lowest-rated were collaboration with LGUs for school facilities (M = 4.00) and

collaborative technical-vocational programs with local businesses (M = 3.52), both interpreted as moderately engaged.

Table 9. Level of stakeholders' engagement

Engagement Strategy	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Implementing transparent communication strategies to keep stakeholders informed on school matters.	4.52	0.739	Highly Engaged
Encouraging community involvement in school activities (e.g., Brigada Eskwela, feeding programs).	4.51	0.755	Highly Engaged
Engaging stakeholders in regular consultation meetings to address school concerns and issues.	4.51	0.755	Highly Engaged
Involving parents in decision-making processes through active Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA).	4.50	0.739	Highly Engaged
Fostering a collaborative environment among school staff and stakeholders to address key challenges.	4.48	0.779	Highly Engaged
Partnering with community organizations for student welfare and school programs.	4.48	0.730	Highly Engaged
Establishing regular channels for feedback from stakeholders regarding school initiatives.	4.46	0.754	Highly Engaged
Facilitating professional development activities for teachers with the support of external partners.	4.42	0.759	Highly Engaged
Leveraging technology to improve communication and engagement with stakeholders.	4.42	0.759	Highly Engaged
Strengthening alumni engagement for school development projects and student mentorship programs.	4.39	0.833	Highly Engaged
Coordinating with health organizations to promote student and staff health and wellness programs.	4.38	0.794	Highly Engaged
Seeking financial or material support from external stakeholders for school infrastructure needs.	4.33	0.776	Highly Engaged
Engaging in partnerships with NGOs to promote inclusive education for marginalized students.	4.29	0.814	Highly Engaged
Collaborating with local government units (LGUs) for the improvement of school facilities.	4.00	0.743	Moderately Engaged
Creating collaborative programs with local businesses for technical-vocational training of students.	3.52	0.923	Moderately Engaged
Grand Mean	**4.35**	**0.777**	**Highly Engaged**

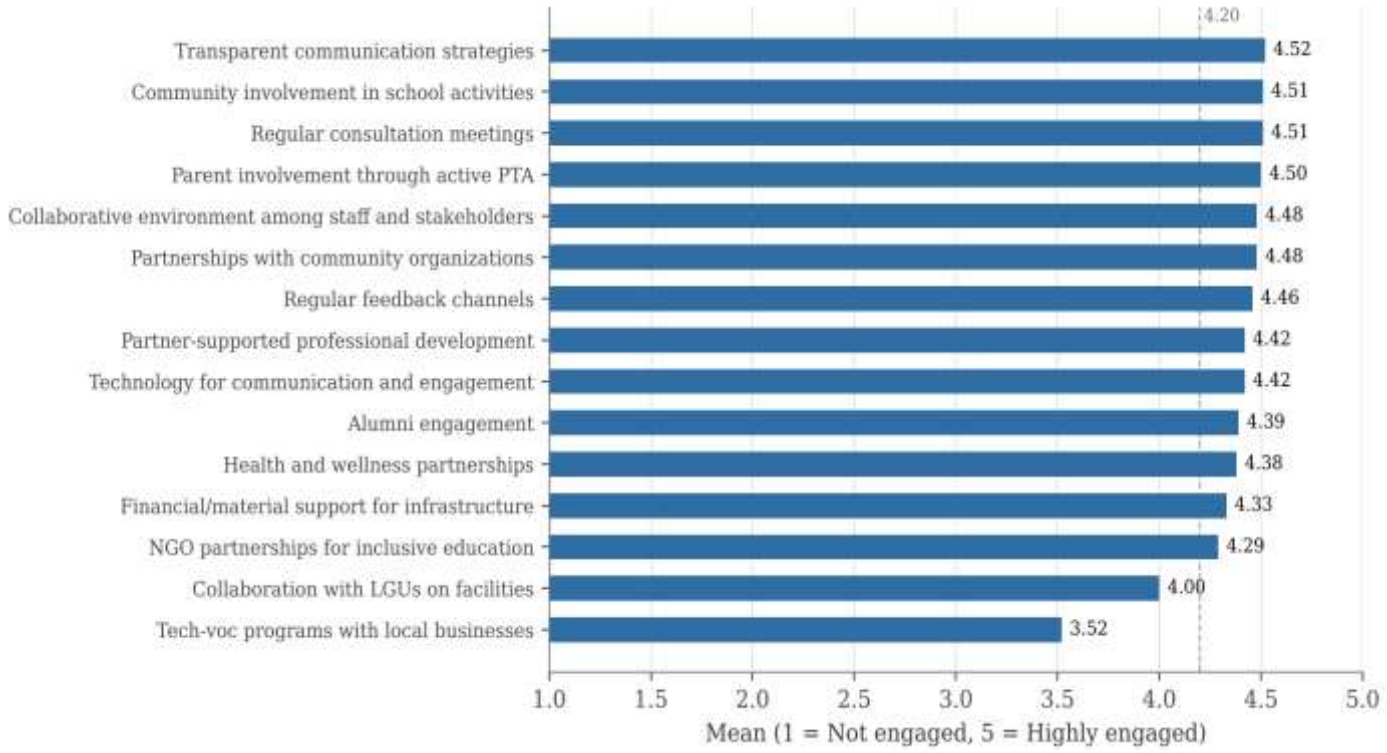

Figure 3. Level of stakeholders' engagement by strategy (dashed line: lower bound of "highly engaged," 4.20*)*

The interviews support the central role of communication and visible programs in engagement:

"When stakeholders feel that they are consistently informed and updated about school initiatives and developments, they tend to develop greater confidence in the institution and in the leadership… they participate more actively, as they feel assured that their involvement is meaningful." (Sam-3)

"In programs such as Brigada Eskwela and feeding initiatives, nearly the entire barangay becomes actively involved… Because the outcomes of these initiatives are visible and easily understood, the community is more inclined to engage and extend assistance." (NorSam-2)

These results indicate that school heads have cultivated inclusive and participatory school cultures in which engagement is sustained rather than sporadic. The comparatively lower engagement with LGUs and local businesses, however, shows that inter-agency and private-sector partnerships are less developed, possibly due to bureaucratic procedures, competing priorities, and limited local enterprise in rural communities. The findings agree with studies showing that transparent communication and inclusive decision-making enhance community participation (Dellomas & Deri, 2022), that active parent-teacher associations strengthen shared governance (Tatoy, 2025), and that participatory leadership builds stakeholder trust and supports long-term improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 2021).

3.4 Relationship between Bottlenecks and Stakeholders' Engagement

Table 10 and Figure 4 present the results of the correlation analysis. All dimensions were significantly related to the level of stakeholders' engagement ($p < .05$); hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. Communication ($r = .712$) and stakeholder involvement ($r = .699$) showed strong positive relationships, while support system ($r = .236$), resources ($r = .192$), and interest of support ($r = .157$) showed weak but significant positive relationships.

Table 10. Relationship between school heads' bottlenecks and the level of stakeholders' engagement

Bottleneck Dimension	r	p-value	Interpretation
Communication	.712	.028	Significant
Stakeholder Involvement	.699	.001	Significant
Resources	.192	.014	Significant
Support System	.236	.002	Significant
Interest of Support	.157	.045	Significant

Note. Dependent variable: level of stakeholders' engagement; significant at $p < .05$.

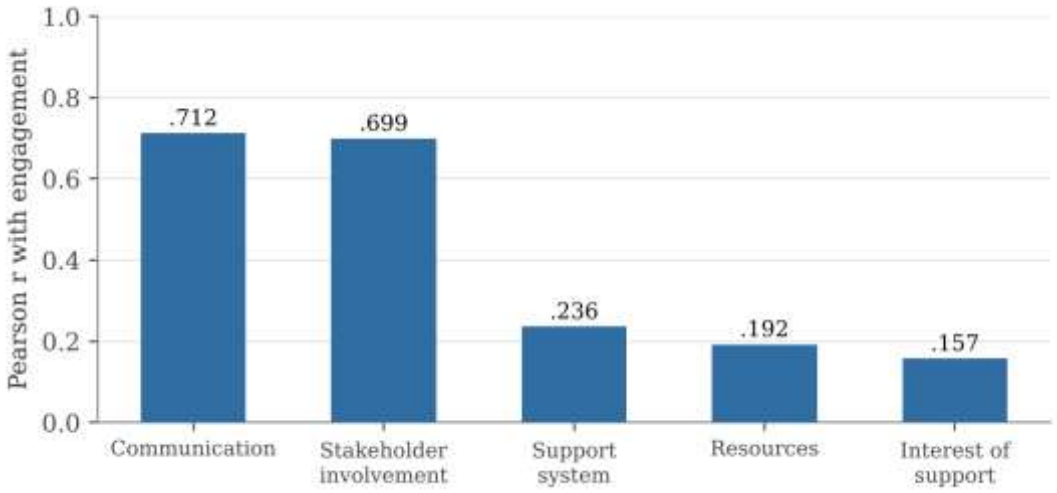

Figure 4. Correlation of each bottleneck dimension with the level of stakeholders' engagement

Because the bottleneck items measure how often school heads encounter difficulties, the positive coefficients indicate that schools with higher engagement also reported communication and involvement bottlenecks somewhat more often. A plausible reading is that school heads who engage stakeholders more intensively—holding more consultations, running more partnership programs, and reaching more stakeholders—are more exposed to the communication and coordination demands that accompany such work. Communication and involvement are thus the relational processes most closely bound to engagement, whereas material conditions such as resources and interest of support are only weakly related. This supports the view that leadership influence on engagement operates largely through communication and participation rather than through resources (Leithwood, 2021), and that relational leadership practices strengthen trust between schools and communities (Khalifa et al., 2021).

The implication is that as schools deepen engagement, they must also strengthen the communication and participation mechanisms that make such engagement manageable. Professional development for school heads should therefore emphasize stakeholder mapping, multi-channel communication, structured feedback, and shared decision-making, and these competencies can be developed regardless of a school's resource level.

3.5 Proposed Enhanced School Improvement Plan

The findings informed an enhanced SIP aligned with DepEd's four pillars of access, equity, quality, and resilience and well-being (Table 11). Because engagement is already high and bottlenecks are rare, the SIP focuses on systematizing and institutionalizing effective practices rather than corrective intervention. Under access, community mapping, school–barangay enrollment campaigns, and parent communication platforms become routine governance mechanisms. Under equity, stakeholders are embedded in planning, monitoring, and evaluation, especially for curriculum-based and equity-focused programs, through strengthened School Governing Councils. Under quality, professional learning communities and partner-supported training are

formalized, and feedback platforms are refined. Under resilience and well-being, mental health, child protection, and disaster preparedness programs are co-managed with stakeholders and LGUs through formal coordination protocols. Implementation is monitored quarterly using enrollment records, meeting minutes, assessment results, and activity reports.

Table 11. Enhanced School Improvement Plan aligned with DepEd's four pillars

Pillar and Objective	Key Activities	Persons Responsible	Success Indicators
Access: Increase enrollment, reduce absenteeism, and ensure access through community collaboration	Community mapping of school-age children; enrollment campaign with barangay officials; house-to-house advocacy for out-of-school learners; parent–school communication groups; partnership agreements with LGU	School Head, teachers, barangay officials, PTA, SGC	Increased enrollment; reduced absenteeism; more learners supported
Equity: Promote inclusive participation and support learners with learning gaps and socio-economic challenges	Stakeholder consultations; inclusion of parents and community leaders in school planning; remedial sessions; donation drives for learning materials	School Head, teachers, PTA, SGC, community partners	Increased stakeholder participation in planning; reduced learning gaps among disadvantaged learners
Quality: Improve instruction and strengthen communication and feedback systems	Teacher training and professional learning communities; community experts for enrichment; digital communication platforms; stakeholder feedback surveys	School Head, master teachers, ICT coordinator, external partners	Improved learner performance; higher feedback response and meeting attendance
Resilience and Well-being: Promote learner well-being and strengthen school–community support in emergencies	Mental health awareness; child protection programs and referral system; disaster drills with LGU; parenting seminars	School Head, guidance and DRRM coordinators, Child Protection Committee, LGU	Higher participation in well-being programs; improved safety preparedness; fewer welfare cases

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The school heads possess substantial experience, graduate-level preparation, and stable tenure, providing a strong foundation for stakeholder partnership. Bottlenecks in communication, stakeholder involvement, resources, and interest of support are rarely encountered; the remaining concerns center on sustaining long-term and curriculum-based initiatives, securing financial and material support, and countering stakeholders' short-term orientation. Stakeholders are highly engaged, particularly in visible and welfare-oriented programs, but partnerships with LGUs and local businesses are less developed. Communication and stakeholder involvement are the dimensions most strongly related to engagement, underscoring that relational and participatory leadership practices matter more to engagement than material resources.

It is recommended that (1) DepEd provide continuing professional development for school heads on strategic communication, stakeholder mapping, and participatory governance, alongside mentoring and support for

advanced studies; (2) school heads institutionalize multi-channel communication and structured feedback systems and involve stakeholders in the planning and evaluation of curriculum-based programs; (3) schools formalize partnerships with LGUs, local businesses, and NGOs through agreements and regular coordination; (4) schools communicate the progress and long-term value of academic programs to sustain stakeholder interest; and (5) the enhanced SIP be adopted, monitored, and evaluated. Future studies may use larger samples across divisions, examine the direction of the relationship between bottlenecks and engagement, and include the perspectives of parents and community partners.

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