School Heads' Level of Competence in Leadership and Management Dimensions among Cluster Schools a Mixed Methods Study

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ABSTRACT

School leaders must continuously improve by strengthening competencies to align with the Department of Education's vision. This study examined teachers' perceptions of school heads' level of competence. A descriptive explanatory sequential research design was employed. The respondents of this study were the 116 teachers and 11 school heads selected through total enumeration. Validated research tool was used are the dimensions of leadership, dimensions of management, principal competence questionnaire and semi-structured interviews question. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Kendall's Tau B correlation and regression analysis, while the six-step framework for systematic thematic analysis developed by Naeem et al. (2023) used for qualitative data. Findings revealed that a very high leadership practices, very high management practices, and very high school heads competence, and strong positive relationships were found. Qualitative results generated six major themes: (1) context-responsive and situational leadership, (2) behavioral complexity through role fluidity, (3) resilient and values-driven leadership, (4) strategic networking, (5) conflict-resolving leadership, and (6) sacrificial and service-oriented leadership. This study concludes that teachers view school heads as highly competent, linking leadership and management with competence. It recommends enhancing systematic support, and sustainable leadership to translate competence into improved educational outcomes.

Keywords: Dimension; Leadership; Management; Supervisory Competence

INTRODUCTION

School leaders must continuously improve by strengthening competencies to align with the Department of Education's vision. The pursuit of quality education, shared by educators, parents, and society, remains a central force (Catalogo, 1992). Competence—anchored in knowledge, skills, and attitudes—is central to the PPSSH domains.

Teachers view school heads who foster growth and shared decision-making as more competent, directly contributing to sustainable improvement (Pujianto et al., 2023).This evolving view of competence raises the need to examine leadership within complex contexts such as clustered schools. Clustered school arrangements, where one head supervises multiple schools, demand governance, supervision, and decision-making skills. Cluster heads must excel in instructional supervision and fiscal management. Exploring this context reveals competence not just as administration but as a reflection of thriving teachers and schools.

While studies highlight governance and management, little is known about how leadership dimensions shape competence in clustered schools. Competence, assessed through leadership and management practices, reflects conditions enabling enduring success. Addressing this gap offers insights into optimizing strategies for effectiveness in clustered systems. Thus, this study examines teacher-perceived school heads' level of competence, bridging leadership theory with the realities of clustered school governance. Furthermore, a critical dimension of this study involves exploring how external factors – including local resource constraints, broader national policy frameworks, and community stakeholder involvement – actively interact with perceived leadership and management competence with clustered school system.

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Adaptive Leadership Model, established by Heifetz et al., (1990), Contingency Leadership Theory by Fred

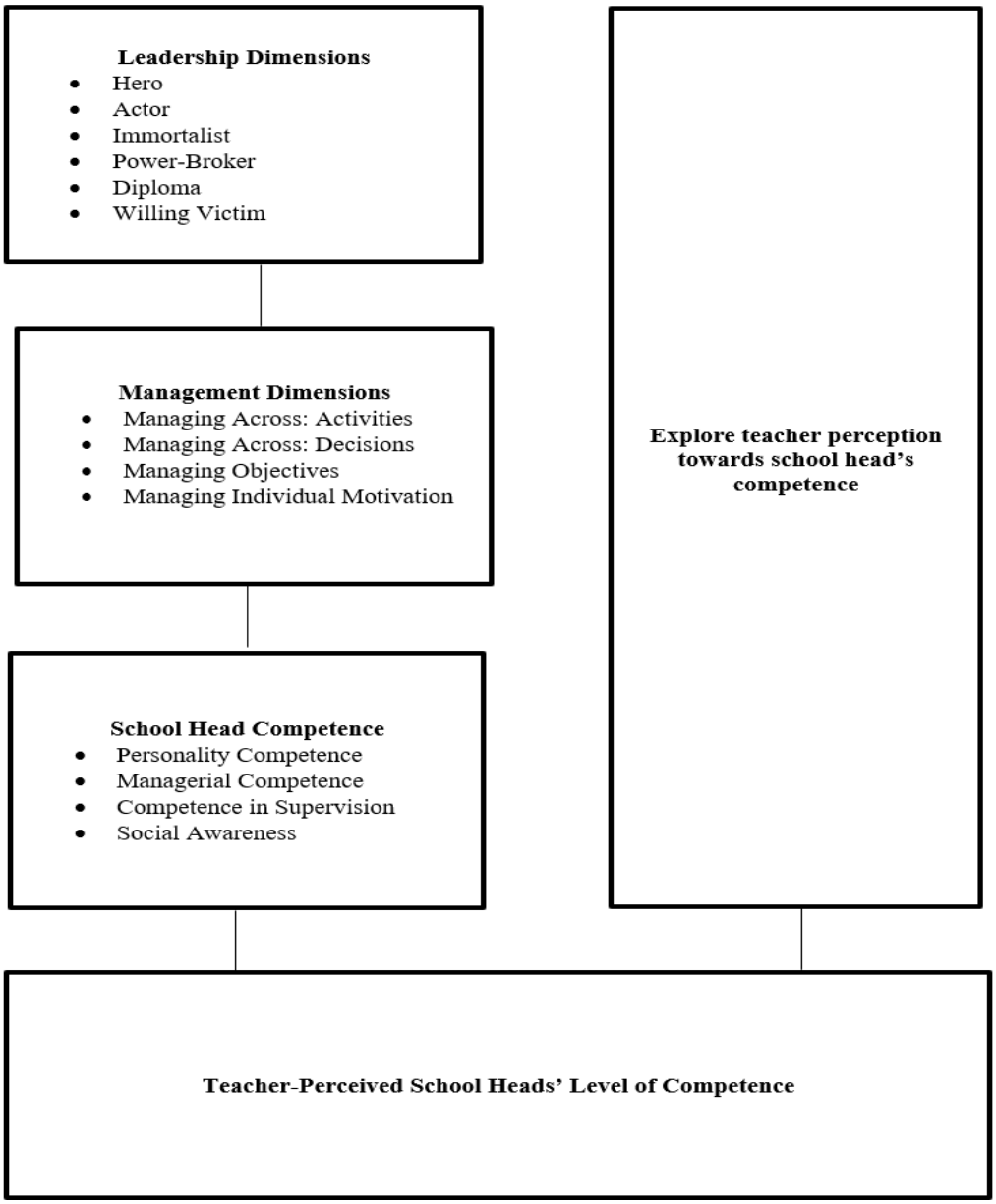
Fiedler (1960) & Situational Leadership Theory Hersey & Blanchard (1977).

Contingency Leadership Theory posits that leadership effectiveness depends on the fit between a leader's style and the favorableness of the situation.

Situational Leadership emphasizes adaptability is evident when school heads shift from a directive approach for novice teachers to a more delegative style for experienced staff. different situations require distinct leadership approaches, the idea that there is no one-size-fits-all method is reinforced, with effective leaders adjusting their styles in response to the demands of each situation (Jerab, 2023).

Adaptive leadership experiences influence leaders' self-identity and reputation, affecting their future adaptability (London, 2023). This enables organizations to appropriately prepare for change and take into account a variety of elements influencing the intricate structure of a leadership relationship (Khan,2023).

Schematic Diagram of the Study



Statement of the Problem

This study examined school head in cluster school's competence in various dimensions of leadership, management. Specifically, this sought to answer the following questions.

1. What is the level of leadership practices of the school head's in cluster schools along the dimensions as a hero, actor, immortalist, power-broker, diploma, and willing victim as perceived by the teacher.

2. What is the level of management practices of the school heads in cluster schools along the aspects of managing across activities, managing down decisions, managing objectives, and managing individual motivation as perceived by the teacher.

3. What are the teacher's perceptions on the school heads' competence in terms of personality competence, managerial competence, competence in supervision, and social awareness.

4. Is there a significant relationship between perceived leadership practices and the competence of the school heads?

5. Is there a significant relationship between perceived management practices and the competence and personality of the school heads?

6. How do school head describe their leadership, management and and competence in handling cluster schools?

Significant of the Study

This study focused on the clustered schools of one of the Division of Misamis Occidental, during the School Year 2024–2025. It assessed the teachers' perceptions of their school heads' competence, specifically across the dimensions of leadership and management. The teachers evaluated the school heads quantitatively

Research Design

This study employed the explanatory sequential mixed methods design. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design contains two phases; quantitative results from the first phase were explained in more depth with follow-up qualitative data.

Research Environment

The study was conducted among twenty-two clustered public elementary schools in one of the District's Schools, Division of Misamis Occidental, during the School Year 2024–2025. These clustered schools comprised both mother schools and annexes, reflecting the organizational structure adopted by the district to manage resources and instructional delivery more efficiently.

Research Respondent

The study was participated in by a total of 127 respondents, consisting of 11 school heads and 116 teachers from the clustered public elementary schools in the Division of Misamis Occidental during the School Year 2024–2025. The study employed a total enumeration sampling design, wherein all qualified school heads and teachers within the clustered schools of the division were included as respondents.

Research Instrument

The following instrument are utilized in the study:

A. Dimensions of Leadership (Archetype) Questionnaire. the tool assessed the level of dimensions of leadership of the school head, an adaptation from Birkinshaw (2010). The questionnaire contains the following dimensions: Hero, Actor, Immortalist, Power-Broker, Diplomat, and Willing Victim, with 30 items

B. Dimensions of Management Questionnaire, the tool assessed the level of dimensions of management of the school head, an adaptation from Birkinshaw (2010). The questionnaire contained the following dimensions: Managing Across: Activities, Managing Down: Decisions, Managing Objectives, and Managing Individual Motivation with 20 items.

C. Teachers' Perception Toward the School Head Competence Questionnaire. The questionnaire assessed the level competence of the school head, an adaptation from Rustamadji et al. (2024). The questionnaire will be utilized to gather pertinent data and information. The questionnaire contains the following constructs: personality competence, managerial competence, competence in supervision, and social awareness with 17 items

Validation of Research Instrument

Prior to its administration, the research instruments underwent three stages of validation: (1) Face Validation and and two rounds of Item-Content Validation which involved three internal validators, including the adviser, and three external validators, which included five experts composed of three internal validators and two external validators. A Cronbach's alpha analysis was conducted to evaluate the internal consistency of the questionnaire, confirming that the instrument was both reliable and valid for the study.

Data Analysis

In the qualitative phase of this study, the statistical software Minitab was employed to apply a range of rigorous procedures and techniques, ensuring comprehensive, valid, and reliable results. Descriptive statistics were first calculated using frequency and percentage analyses, as well as mean and standard deviation measurements, to clearly summarize the data's distribution and central tendencies. These analyses provided a clear overview of teachers' perceptions across leadership and management dimensions.

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was utilized to determine the strength and direction of linear relationships among continuous variables, particularly between perceived leadership and management dimensions.

Kendall's tau-b correlation coefficient (τ), a non-parametric measure of association, was applied to assess concordance and discordance in ranked data, offering a strong evaluation of relationships when assumptions of normality were not met.

Regression analysis. This procedure modeled how leadership and management dimensions collectively predict perceived competence levels of school heads. The regression outputs provided insights into the relative contribution of each dimension, enabling identification of the most influential predictors of competence.

For the qualitative data the study employs Naeem et al.'s (2023) six-step thematic analysis framework, a systematic approach designed to strengthen the rigor and depth of qualitative inquiry. Naeem et al. (2023) introduce a six-step thematic analysis process that enhances the rigor and depth of analysis, . The Six Steps of the Framework: Transcription and Familiarization: Keyword Selection, Coding: Theme Development: Conceptualization: Model Development:

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study's data is presented in this chapter in a methodical manner to ensure coherence and clarity. The analysis draws attention to emerging patterns, correlations, and themes.

Level of leadership practices of the school heads in cluster schools along the dimensions as a hero, actor, immortalist, power-broker, diploma, and willing victim as perceived by the teacher.

The findings indicate that all leadership dimensions obtained a very high rating, with a composite mean M=3.74 and low standard deviation SD = 0.370, suggesting strong and consistent teacher perceptions of school heads' leadership practices. Teachers perceive their school heads as embodying diverse leadership

styles—democratic, delegative, transformational, transactional, and visionary—though classroom management practices may also be shaped by contextual factors (Bugna & Lomarda, 2025). Adebayo & Shiva (2026) emphasize that effective leadership fosters environments where teachers feel valued and empowered, which contributes to improved school performance

These findings imply that while school heads are perceived as strong leaders, leadership development programs should not only reinforce visionary and adaptive competencies but also encourage sustainable servant leadership practices that balance resilience with humility and care. Crucially, institutional professional development programs for school heads must prioritize adaptive leadership, crisis management, and participatory decision-making. Shifting the focus toward these training domains ensures that administrative and supervisory competence is not merely subjectively perceived by teachers, but actively evidenced through sustained, long-term school effectiveness.

Table 1 Teachers' Perceptions of School Heads' Leadership Practices Across Leadership Dimensions

Factors	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Hero	2.6	4	3.76	0.384	Very High
Actor	2.4	4	3.76	0.39	Very High
Immortalist	2.6	4	3.76	0.391	Very High
Power broker	2.6	4	3.75	0.395	Very High
Diplomat	2.4	4	3.74	0.417	Very High
Willing Victim	2.6	4	3.67	0.425	Very High
Composite Score	2.67	4	3.74	0.37	Very High

Level of management practices of the school heads in cluster schools along the aspects of managing across activities, managing down decisions, managing objectives, and managing individual motivation as perceived by the teacher.

Table 2 displays the level of management practices of the school heads in cluster schools along the aspects of managing across activities, managing down decisions, managing objectives, and managing individual motivation as perceived by the teacher. The findings show that all management dimensions were rated very high, with a composite mean M= 3.74 and low standard deviation SD = 0.382, indicating strong and consistent teacher perceptions of school heads' management practices.

According to Madlos & Tantiado, (2026) school heads management practices particularly decision-making, directing, and planning positively influence teachers' engagement, especially when teachers are actively involved in the decision-making process. Effective managers adopt both macro-level perspectives, such as strategic planning and budgeting (Kilag et al., 2023), and micro-level approaches that address daily instructional needs.

The implications of these findings are significant: sustaining strong coordination and clear objectives will continue to enhance efficiency and trust, but balancing these strengths with greater attention to teachers' motivation and participatory decision-making could further empower teachers and enrich school performance.

Table 2 Teachers' Perceptions of School Heads' Management Practices Across Management Dimensions

Factors	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Managing Across: Activities	2.8	4	3.77	0.388	Very High
Managing Down: Decisions	2.6	4	3.72	0.41	Very High
Managing Objectives	2.8	4	3.77	0.375	Very High
Managing Individual Motivation	2.6	4	3.72	0.429	Very High
Composite Score	2.7	4	3.74	0.382	Very High

The teacher's perceptions on the school heads competence in terms of personality competence, managerial competence, competence in supervision, and social awareness.

Table 3 shows Teachers' Perceptions of School Heads' Competence and Personality Across Dimensions. The findings indicate that all competence and personality dimensions were rated very high, with a composite mean M=3.77 and low standard deviation SD=0.369, reflecting strong and consistent teacher perceptions of school heads' competence.

Competent school leaders provide clear guidance, support instructional improvement, and foster positive environments that motivate teachers to excel. Semblante and Sambo (2025) further emphasized that supervisory competence encompasses instructional supervision, motivational support, and managerial behavior, aligning with Bagiw (2025), who stressed managerial competence as essential for organizational effectiveness, and Lao (2024), who highlighted relational leadership's role in fostering collaboration and morale.

In conclusion, the findings highlight the need for correlational analysis to determine whether perceived competencies are significantly associated with leadership and management practices. Professional development programs should reinforce visionary, supervisory, and adaptive leadership skills, ensuring that competence is both perceived and evidenced in sustainable school effectiveness. To build upon these baseline perceptions, subsequent evaluations must incorporate objective performance indicators – such as localized student achievement data or external agency evaluations – to balance subjective teacher perceptions with measurable, hard outcomes.

Table 3 Teachers' Perceptions of School Heads' Competence and Personality Across Dimensions

Factors	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Personality Competence	2.6	4	3.79	0.371	Very High
Managerial Competence	2.75	4	3.74	0.406	Very High
Competence in Supervision	2.75	4	3.77	0.386	Very High
Social Awareness	2.5	4	3.77	0.405	Very High
Composite Score	2.71	4	3.77	0.369	Very High

Relationship between perceived leadership practices and the competence and personality of the school heads

Table 4 presents the relationship between teachers' perceptions of school heads' leadership practices and their competence and personality. The findings reveal that all leadership dimensions have strong, positive, and statistically significant relationships with all dimensions of competence and personality (Kendall's Tau B ranging from 0.613 to 0.758, $p < .001$), with the composite leadership score showing a strong overall correlation ($\tau = 0.747$).

In analyzing the results, the consistently high coefficients suggest that increases in perceived leadership practices are associated with higher perceived competence across personality, managerial, supervisory, and social domains, with the Power-Broker, Immortalist, and Diplomat dimensions showing comparatively stronger associations. As an insight, the uniformly significant and strong relationships imply that leadership behaviors are closely linked to competence perceptions; thus, leadership practices may serve as a key explanatory factor in how teachers evaluate school heads' overall competence, warranting further examination through regression or predictive analysis.

When school heads demonstrate integrity, strategic vision, and relational diplomacy, teachers perceive them as highly competent across domains. Estrada & Gumban (2024) support this by showing that competence significantly influences teacher performance, though the link to student achievement is less direct. Complementing this, Alagos & Servillon (2024) emphasize that innovativeness and leadership competence are related to productivity among school heads, while Estrada & Dasig (2025) highlight that participative and visionary leadership styles significantly boost teacher motivation and performance. These findings collectively

suggest that competence perceptions are not merely technical but are deeply relational and leadership-driven. In conclusion, the evidence affirms that leadership practices are central to competence perceptions, with strong and significant correlations across all dimensions.

Table 4 Relationship Between Teachers' Perceptions of School Heads' Leadership Practices and Their Competence and Personality

Leadership	Competence and Personality	Correlation Coefficient(Kendall's Tau B)	p-value
Hero	Personality Competence	0.713	<.001**
	Managerial Competence	0.684	<.001**
	Competence in Supervision	0.651	<.001**
	Social Awareness	0.639	<.001**
Actor	Personality Competence	0.64	<.001**
	Managerial Competence	0.669	<.001**
	Competence in Supervision	0.627	<.001**
	Social Awareness	0.693	<.001**
Immortalist	Personality Competence	0.729	<.001**
	Managerial Competence	0.7	<.001**
	Competence in Supervision	0.674	<.001**
	Social Awareness	0.693	<.001**
Power-Broker	Personality Competence	0.743	<.001**
	Managerial Competence	0.758	<.001**
	Competence in Supervision	0.696	<.001**
	Social Awareness	0.661	<.001**
Diplomat	Personality Competence	0.702	<.001**
	Managerial Competence	0.735	<.001**
	Competence in Supervision	0.706	<.001**
	Social Awareness	0.664	<.001**
Willing Victim	Personality Competence	0.633	<.001**
	Managerial Competence	0.663	<.001**
	Competence in Supervision	0.642	<.001**
	Social Awarenss	0.613	<.001**
Leadership (Composite Score)	Competence and Personality (Composite Score)	0.747	<.001**

Relationship between perceived leadership practices and the competence of the school heads.

The results presented in Table 5 further reinforce the strong association between teachers' perceptions of school heads' management practices and their competence and personality. The data reveal that all management dimensions are positively and significantly correlated with competence and personality ($\tau = 0.666–0.824$, $p < .001$), with the composite management score ($\tau = 0.788$) showing a robust overall relationship. Particularly, the dimensions of Managing Across: Activities and Managing Objectives demonstrate comparatively higher correlations with managerial and supervisory competence, suggesting that coordination of tasks and alignment of goals are central to how teachers evaluate competence.

This finding underscores that structured managerial behaviors—such as clear objective-setting, systematic coordination, and supervisory oversight—play a substantial role in shaping perceptions of school heads' overall heightened instructional competence.

Furthermore, the competence of school heads in their supervisory roles and managerial behavior contributed to the teachers' satisfactory performance (Landawe et al., 2024). The more the school heads give much focus to the professional development of teachers, the higher the teachers tend to enhance their professional competence. Effective leadership competencies are instrumental in promoting a culture of Continuing Professional Development among teachers. The evidence suggests a compelling link between school head leadership competencies and significant advancements in teacher CPD (Ambon et al., 2025).

The findings affirm that management practices are central to competence perceptions, with strong and significant correlations across all dimensions. Teachers consistently view school heads as competent when managerial behaviors—particularly coordination and goal alignment—are demonstrated. The implication of these results is that professional development programs for school heads should prioritize structured managerial competencies, focusing on coordination, supervision, and goal alignment.

Table 5 Relationship Between Teachers' Perceptions of School Heads' Management Practices and Their Competence and Personality

Management	Competence and Personality	Correlation Coefficient(Kendall's Tau B)	p-value
Managing Across: Activities	Personality Competence	0.789	<.001*
	Managerial Competence	0.824	<.001*
	Competence in Supervision	0.818	<.001*
	Social Awareness	0.73	<.001*
Managing Down: Decisions	Personality Competence	0.721	<.001*
	Managerial Competence	0.771	<.001*
	Competence in Supervision	0.727	<.001*
	Social Awareness	0.713	<.001*
Managing Objectives	Personality Competence	0.741	<.001*
	Managerial Competence	0.823	<.001*
	Competence in Supervision	0.788	<.001*
	Social Awareness	0.666	<.001*
Managing Individual Motivation	Personality Competence	0.714	<.001*
	Managerial Competence	0.778	<.001*

	Competence in Supervision	0.718	<.001*
	Social Awareness	0.681	<.001*
Management (Composite Score)	Competence And Personality (Composite Score)	0.788	<.001*

Test for Normality

Table 6 presented the test of normality, one of the assumptions in using parametric tests is that the data are normally distributed. The Shapiro–Wilk test was used to assess the normality of each study variable. The results revealed that all variables did not follow a normal distribution, as evidenced by statistically significant p-values ($p < .05$). Thus, the null hypothesis of normality was rejected, indicating that the data were not normally distributed. Additionally, the frequency distributions revealed that responses were predominantly concentrated within the "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" categories, resulting in tied ranks (see Appendix). Since the variables were also measured using ordinal Likert-scale responses, Kendall's Tau B was employed as a more appropriate nonparametric measure of association to determine the strength and direction of the relationships among the study variables.

Table 6 Test for Normality

Variable	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	p-value
Leadership Practices	0.729	116	<.001
Management Practices	0.702	116	<.001
Competence and Personality	0.679	116	<.001

Qualitative Phase

School head describe their leadership, management and competence in handling cluster schools

Theme 1: Context-Responsive and Situational Leadership Adaptation

School leaders are increasingly recognized for their ability to adapt leadership styles to context, stakeholder needs, and resource constraints. This recognition stems from the reality that schools operate in diverse and often unpredictable environments, where rigid leadership approaches are insufficient. . For instance, leaders in multigrade schools often adjust their supervisory practices to provide more hands-on support, while those in larger integrated schools emphasize structured coordination. As one participant explained,

"The integrated school requires more systems and coordination,

while the multigrade school needs more physical support.

I switch approaches depending on which school I am dealing

with" (P3).

This situational responsiveness ensures that teachers feel supported, parents are engaged, and learners' needs are met despite systemic limitations. These reflections highlight foresight, trust, and communication as central to adaptive leadership. Recent studies reinforce the importance of situational leadership adaptation in education. Putri et al. (2024) emphasize that school heads must increase maturity and apply communication styles appropriate to their teams. In line with this, Mojica et al. (2024) found that localized management policies strengthen stakeholder trust and operational efficiency, aligning with participants' emphasis on adapting to resource constraints

Theme 2: Behavioral Complexity through Role Fluidity

School heads demonstrated behavioral complexity by fluidly shifting roles to meet organizational, instructional, and relational demands. School leadership is enacted as role fluidity, where school heads embody multiple identities to sustain school functioning. Their lived experiences confirm that effective leadership in schools is not static but dynamic, requiring leaders to act as "actors on a stage," adjusting their roles based on the demands of the moment. As one participant explained,

"In the first school, I act like a manager… In the second school,

I act like a teacher, counselor, and leader. I change roles depending

on the needs."P4

In the face of a complex, chaotic, and fickle world, schools must cultivate the ability to adapt quickly—not only through flexible organizational structures but also through horizontal and interconnected systems (Johnson, 2025). Building on this perspective, Pinheiro et al. (2025) argued that collaborative and regenerative leadership thrives in complex school systems, noting that leadership can no longer be confined to a mere position or symbolically located at the top of an organizational chart.

Theme 3: Resilient and Values-Driven Leadership (Immortalist)

The narratives of school heads reveal how resilience and values-driven leadership are enacted in practice. Leaders prioritized safety during floods, coordinated with barangay officials during community conflicts, encouraged hope after storm damage, resisted pressures to falsify attendance records, and upheld integrity during national testing. These accounts demonstrate leadership anchored in moral courage, ethical standards, and unwavering commitment to learners and stakeholders despite adversity. Participants pointed out that

"When the first school experienced heavy flood, I stayed strong…

I made sure the learners were safe." (P1), and "During a

community conflict near the multigrade school, I

coordinated with barangay officials and reassured everyone

that safety would be maintained." (P3).

Resilience has been widely recognized as a critical leadership trait. Suslovic and Lett (2024) claimed that resilience is the individual capacity to persist and cope with recurrent negative experiences, while Nguyen et al. (2024) highlighted it as a leadership competency essential for navigating crises. Rosel et al. (2023) emphasized that adaptive and servant leadership fosters resilience in resource-limited schools, particularly when principals empower stakeholders through awareness campaigns and training in the pre-disaster phase. The result implies that leadership development programs must intentionally cultivate resilience and values-driven competencies among school heads. Training should emphasize crisis management, ethical decision-making, and collaborative problem-solving while aligning with policy frameworks such as DepEd's competency standards.

Theme 4: Strategic Networking and Mediation

School leaders mobilize social capital and external partnerships to sustain school resources and operations. The narratives of school heads reveal how strategic networking and power brokering are essential in sustaining school operations. Leaders actively reached out to barangay officials, LGUs, alumni, and private sectors to secure resources such as temporary classrooms, paints, emergency kits, and infrastructure support. For example, one school head explained,

"I reached out to the barangay, LGU, and private sectors…

because of these partnerships, we received materials for

temporary classrooms and school supplies." (P1).

Fostering strong networking environments is essential for equipping educational leaders to drive meaningful reforms and promote equity in education (Kakembo et al., 2025). It is a given that a principal must develop a collaborative partnership with parents and staff; however, the external school environment encompasses a much larger scope of diverse community entities (Kladifko, 2013). Hallinger (2023) shows that the quality of principal leadership affects building school-community leadership. The implication of the findings is that leadership development programs must intentionally cultivate networking skills and strategic mediation competencies among school heads. Policies should encourage schools to institutionalize partnerships with LGUs, NGOs, alumni, and private sectors, while embedding transparency and accountability mechanisms. Moreover, resilience frameworks must integrate networking as a core leadership function, ensuring that schools can sustain operations even in resource-constrained or crisis contexts.

Theme 5: Diplomatic and Conflict-Resolving Leadership

School leaders mediate conflicts, foster dialogue, and sustain harmonious relationships among stakeholders. The participants consistently described themselves as mediators navigating tensions among teachers, parents, and community members, revealing a leadership approach grounded in calm communication, active listening, and fair decision-making. Their accounts illustrate this clearly:

Participants shared,

"There was a misunderstanding between teachers of both schools

regarding shared resources… I spoke calmly, explained clearly, and

helped them agree," (P1) while P2 recounted,

"Parents disagreed about changing the location of their waiting area…

I listened carefully and helped them agree." (P2)

Building on these empirical insights, recent scholarship provides a broader lens for understanding how such diplomatic practices are shaped by cultural and contextual factors.

Rebugio (2025) emphasizes that contextual adaptability is essential in culturally diverse and resource-limited settings, where values such as bayanihan influence how conflicts are resolved; however, the study also notes that mediation efforts may falter when communication is unclear or key stakeholders are excluded. Similarly, Day et al. (2021) assert that conflict-competent leaders cultivate trust and psychological safety, enabling stakeholders to engage in collaborative problem solving. Citrawijaya, et., al., (2024).) further underscore the importance of transparent communication, resilience, and structured conflict-management systems, especially during periods of institutional strain.

The implications of this theme point to the need for structured conflict-resolution mechanisms, leadership training focused on communication and emotional intelligence, and school-wide systems that promote transparency and shared responsibility. Strengthening GPTA meetings as venues for dialogue, clarifying resource-sharing protocols, and embedding conflict-resolution modules in DepEd leadership programs can further support school heads in managing tensions constructively. As conflicts are inevitable in diverse school communities, the ability of leaders to mediate fairly and diplomatically becomes a cornerstone of effective and humane school governance.

Theme 6 Sacrificial and Service-Oriented Leadership (Willing Victim)

School heads absorb burdens and extend personal resources to sustain institutional functioning and protect their teams. They willingly absorb institutional burdens and personal costs to protect their teachers and sustain

school functioning, often positioning themselves as "willing victims" for the sake of organizational stability. This captures how school heads willingly absorb institutional burdens and personal costs to sustain school operations and protect their teachers, and the participants' narratives consistently reveal this pattern of self-sacrifice. As P1 recounted,

> "When both schools needed reports at the same time, I sacrificed my rest
>
> days… I worked late at night so my teachers would not feel overloaded." (P1)

Similarly, P2 emphasized,

> "I volunteered to handle most of the paperwork so my teachers could focus on teaching," (P2)

Transitioning from these lived experiences to broader scholarship, analysis of these accounts aligns with recent studies showing that the role the principal plays in promoting teacher well-being is multi-faceted, encompassing the creation of a positive school culture and traditions, developing and maintaining a conducive green school environment, and promoting teacher adaptability (Kwatubana, 2024). These findings resonate with the participants' descriptions of taking on additional burdens so teachers could focus on instruction. Building on this, research on effective administrative practices highlights that principals who demonstrate strong administrative skills can significantly boost teacher morale and engagement (Jose & Escote, 2024), which mirrors how P1, P2, and P4 absorbed administrative tasks to reduce teacher overload. This is consistent with Amadi and Osazuwa's (2019) assertion that it is the responsibility of the school head, as the chief executive officer of the school, to ensure that teachers work in an environment that promotes their work performance—an expectation reflected in P6's willingness to sacrifice rest for the welfare of a pregnant teacher.

The findings highlight the urgent need to strengthen systemic support structures, as the reliance on principals' personal sacrifice exposes persistent gaps in funding, staffing, and administrative assistance; thus, DepEd must ensure the timely release of MOOE, streamline reporting systems, and establish contingency funds to prevent school heads from using personal resources. Equally important is the reframing of leadership expectations by moving away from valorizing the "self-sacrificing principal" and instead promoting a model of sustainable servant leadership that balances service with healthy boundaries, shared responsibility, and institutional backing.

Joint Display of Meta-Inferences in an Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods Design

Table 7 present the Joint Display of Meta-Inferences in an Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods Design the matrix reveals a clear integrated pattern that **school heads are perceived as highly effective because they enact adaptive, context-sensitive leadership that is operationalized through flexible management practices and reinforced by relational, ethical, and socially responsive behaviors—resulting in strong perceptions of competence.**

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings in this explanatory sequential mixed methods study reveals a coherent and reinforcing pattern across leadership practice, management practices, and competence and personality. The quantitative phase established that school heads were perceived at a **very high level** across all domains, with composite means of 3.74 for leadership and management, and 3.77 for competence and personality. Moreover, strong and statistically significant relationships were found between leadership and competence ($r = 0.747$) and between management and competence ($r = 0.788$), indicating that both leadership and management practices are key predictors of perceived competence.

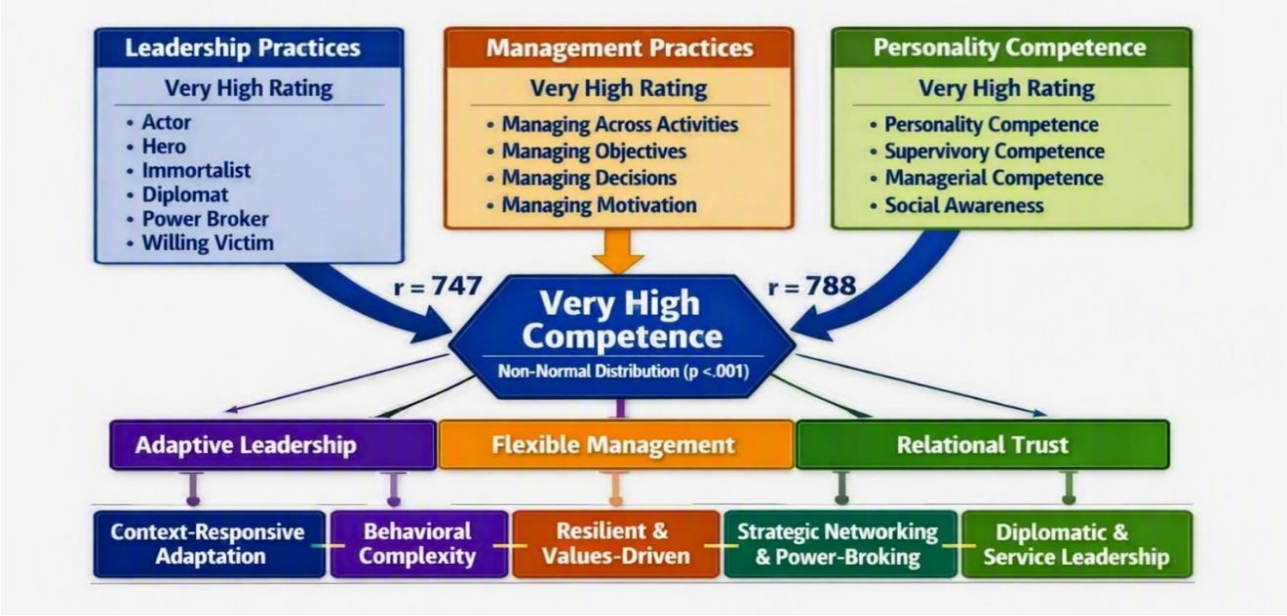
This integration also reveals that leadership, management, and competence are not independent constructs but form a **dynamic and interdependent system**. Leadership provides the strategic and behavioral foundation, management translates this into structured practices, and competence reflects the perceived outcomes of these processes. Thus, effectiveness emerges from the alignment of **adaptability, operational efficiency, and relational credibility**.

Table 7 Joint Display of Meta-Inferences in an Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods Design

Research Focus	Quantitative Results (QUAN)	Qualitative Findings (QUAL)	Integration Type	Meta-Inference (Integrated Meaning)
Leadership Practices	Very High across all dimensions (M = 3.74); strongest in Actor, Hero, Immortalist	Context-responsive leadership; role fluidity; resilience; ethical leadership; diplomacy; self-sacrifice	Convergence + Expansion	High leadership ratings are grounded in leaders' ability to adapt roles, respond to context, and sustain ethical and resilient practices in complex school environments.
Management Practices	Very High across all dimensions (M = 3.74); strongest in Managing Across Activities & Managing Objectives	Differentiated planning; multi-site coordination; inclusive decision-making; data-driven planning; motivational support	Convergence + Expansion	Strong management ratings reflect adaptive, flexible, and context-sensitive management systems, especially in handling multiple schools and limited resources.
Competence & Personality	Very High across all domains (M = 3.77); highest in Personality Competence	Relational leadership; empathy; integrity; transparency; developmental supervision; social responsiveness	Convergence + Expansion	Perceived competence is built through relational trust, ethical credibility, and visible commitment, not just technical ability.
Leadership → Competence Relationship	Strong positive correlation (r = 0.747, p < .001)	Leaders demonstrate adaptability, diplomacy, and strategic networking	Explanation	Leadership practices directly shape perceptions of competence, especially through influence, resilience, and conflict management.
Management → Competence Relationship	Strong positive correlation (r = 0.788, p < .001)	Effective coordination, inclusive decisions, and goal alignment	Explanation	Competence is reinforced by efficient management systems, particularly in coordination, delegation, and goal achievement.
Cross-Cutting Pattern	Consistently Very High across all domains	Adaptive, relational, and context-driven leadership behaviors	Meta-Integration	Leadership, management, and competence form a unified system, where adaptive leadership drives effective management, leading to high perceived competence.
Contextual Insight	Slightly lower score in Willing Victim dimension	Evidence of sacrifice, workload absorption, and personal resource	Complementarity	While sacrifice exists, it is strategically balanced, suggesting sustainability rather

		use		than overextension.
Core Mechanism	High composite means and strong correlations	Continuous adaptation, stakeholder engagement, and ethical grounding	Full Integration	School effectiveness emerges from adaptive leadership → flexible management → relational trust → perceived competence

The Final Integrated Meta-Inference Model of School Leadership captures the joint display of meta-inferences within an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, illustrating how quantitative and qualitative strands converge to explain the phenomenon of perceived competence among school heads. Quantitatively, the leadership and management dimensions both feed into perceived competence, as evidenced by strong correlation values ($r = .747$ and $r = .788$), signifying that effective leadership behaviors and management practices jointly predict high levels of competence. This competence, represented by the central hexagon, serves as the pivotal link between the quantitative measures and the qualitative insights that emerged from the study.



Model Of Teacher-Perceived School Heads' Level Of Competence in Leadership and Management Dimensions

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following are the findings of the study:

1 All leadership dimensions obtained a Very High rating indicating strong and consistent teacher perceptions of school heads' leadership practices.

2. All management dimensions obtained Very High, suggesting a strong and consistent teacher perceptions of school heads' management practices.

3. All competence and personality dimensions obtained Very High, reflecting strong and consistent teacher perceptions of school heads' competence.

4. All leadership dimensions have strong, positive, and significantly show relationships with all dimensions of competence and personality

5. The findings indicate that all management dimensions have strong, positive, and statistically significant relationships with all competence and personality dimensions

6. All variables did not follow a normal distribution, as evidenced by statistically significant p-values

7. There are five themes emerged for teacher perception towards school heads' competence: Context-Responsive and Situational Leadership Adaptation, Behavioral Complexity through Role Fluidity, Resilient and Values-Driven Leadership, Strategic Networking and Power-Brokering, Diplomatic and Conflict-Resolving Leadership and Sacrificial and Service-Oriented Leadership

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the following are the conclusions:

The study concludes that teachers hold consistently strong and highly favorable perceptions of school heads across all domains of leadership, management and competence. The Very High ratings obtained in every leadership, management, and competence dimension demonstrate that school heads are viewed as highly effective instructional and organizational leaders whose behaviors are both visible and valued in the school environment. These consistently elevated perceptions are further reinforced by the correlational findings, which reveal strong, positive, and statistically significant relationships between all leadership dimensions and all competence and personality dimensions, as well as between all management dimensions and all competence and personality dimensions. This indicates that teachers perceive leadership and management practices as deeply intertwined with the school heads' competence, character, and professional disposition. Although the variables did not follow a normal distribution, the robustness of the statistical relationships affirms the stability and consistency of these perceptions across respondents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the finding and conclusions of the study, the following are the recommendations:

1. Department of Education (DepEd) may ensure the timely release of MOOE, cutting down on unnecessary reporting, and providing sufficient staffing so school heads are not burdened with personal sacrifice, DepEd can strengthen school leadership. Training courses should also emphasize how stakeholder participation, policy frameworks, and resource allocation relate to management and leadership skills in clustered schools.

2. School Heads may continue fostering a school climate of fairness, calm communication, and relational trust, especially in handling teacher concerns and community issues.

3. Teachers may work collectively to support school programs, maintain instructional quality, and uphold a culture of cooperation and mutual respect.

4. Stakeholders may recognize the emotional and professional demands placed on school heads and teachers and contribute to initiatives that promote their welfare.

5. Longitudinal designs should be used by future researchers to track how management and leadership practices change over time and affect students' outcomes and teacher performance. To improve generalizability and facilitate comparative analysis, they should also look at contextual elements like school size community, and resource availability while extending research across several divisions or regions.

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