

The Wind Behind Leadership: A Phenomenological Study of Secondary School Department Heads

Donna Bella O. Aposaga

Major in Educational Management, Doctor of Philosophy, Faculty of the Graduate School La Carlota
City College La Carlota City

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100800253>

Received: 20 August 2026; Accepted: 25 August 2026; Published: 01 September 2026

ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of secondary school department heads in a large public secondary school in Bacolod City. It aimed to understand the experiences, relationships, motivations, and challenges that influenced and sustained their leadership. Eight department heads were purposively selected as participants. Data was gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis. Six themes emerged from the participants' narratives: Leadership Found Them Before They Sought It; Leading in the Middle—Between People and Expectations; Leadership with a Heart—Care as a Way of Leading; Walking the Talk—Leadership Earns Influence Through Example; Keeping the Wind—Purpose, Faith, and the Growth of Others; and Shaped by the Storm—Leadership as Becoming. The findings showed that leadership was not always a planned career path. For many participants, it began when others recognized their potential and encouraged them to lead. Their leadership was shaped by the difficult position of working between teachers and school administrators, while care, empathy, and personal example helped them gain trust and influence. Purpose, faith, and seeing others grow sustained their commitment. Challenges also became important sources of reflection and growth. The study concluded that the “wind behind leadership” was not a single force but the interaction of trust, relationships, responsibility, purpose, and lived experience. Based on the findings, the WIND Program, a mentoring, leadership development, and knowledge-transfer initiative, was proposed to support leadership continuity and prepare emerging middle leaders amid changing educational structures.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the foundation of the study by introducing the leadership experiences of secondary school department heads. It discusses the background and purpose of the inquiry, the theoretical and conceptual foundations, the research questions, significance, scope and limitations, and the key terms used in the study. This chapter also establishes the direction of the study and provides the basis for exploring the forces that influenced, sustained, and shaped the department heads' leadership journeys.

Background of the Study

Educational leadership plays an important role in improving schools, supporting teachers, and strengthening instruction. Leadership, however, is not limited to principals and other senior school officials. Many responsibilities are shared by people who work at different levels of the school organization. Department heads are among these leaders. They work closely with teachers while also responding to the expectations of school administrators. Their duties include supervising instruction, guiding teachers, supporting curriculum implementation, and coordinating department activities. Because of this position, department heads help connect school plans with what actually happens in classrooms. Their work provides an important view of leadership at the middle level of the school.

In the Philippines, improving school leadership remains part of the effort to strengthen basic education. The Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP) 2030 recognizes leadership and institutional capacity as important areas in improving educational outcomes. The MATATAG Agenda also gives attention to creating

schools that are more responsive to learners and present educational needs. These directions require school leaders to turn policies and programs into actual practice. Department heads take part in this process by helping teachers understand curriculum requirements, addressing instructional concerns, and supporting school programs. Their leadership is therefore closely connected to how educational changes are carried out within the school.

Studies on middle leadership show that the position is important but often demanding. Middle leaders contribute to teacher development, collaboration, and instructional improvement (Lipscombe et al., 2021). At the same time, they work between administrative expectations and the concerns of teachers. A department head may need to guide and support colleagues while also monitoring work and ensuring that school requirements are completed. Changing conditions in education also require leaders to adjust and remain resilient when faced with new demands (Harris & Jones, 2022). These realities suggest that middle leadership is more than completing assigned duties. Personal values, relationships, difficult experiences, and commitment may also shape how department heads lead and continue in their roles.

Much of the existing research on educational leadership has focused on leadership styles, competencies, teacher motivation, organizational commitment, and school performance. These studies provide useful information about leadership and school outcomes. However, they give less attention to how leaders personally experience their roles and understand the difficulties that come with leadership. Department heads also receive less attention than principals and school heads, despite their direct involvement in teacher support and instructional practice (Lipscombe et al., 2021; Harris et al., 2022). Numerical findings can show patterns, but they cannot fully explain why leaders continue despite difficulties, what gives meaning to their work, or how their experiences influence the way they lead. Their own stories are needed to understand this side of leadership.

This gap is relevant to a large public secondary school in Bacolod City. Department heads the research locale serve between school administration and classroom teachers. They supervise their departments, guide teachers, support instructional programs, and respond to concerns that arise in everyday school work. The size of the school and the different needs of its departments may expose these leaders to varied responsibilities and challenges. Yet limited research has explored the lived experiences of department heads in Philippine public secondary schools. Phenomenological studies focused specifically on department heads in Western Visayas and Negros Occidental also appear limited. Because of this, little is known about how department heads in this setting understand their leadership experiences, face challenges, and find reasons to remain committed to their work.

The present study therefore explored the “wind behind leadership” among department heads of the school in focus. The phrase refers to the personal, professional, and relational forces that shape and sustain their leadership. Through a phenomenological approach, the study examined their lived experiences, motivations, values, challenges, and the meanings they formed from their leadership journeys. By listening to their narratives, the study sought to understand middle leadership from the perspective of those who experience it every day. The findings may provide useful insights for leadership development and future research while giving greater attention to department heads whose work remains important but is less visible in educational leadership literature.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of the study was developed around the idea of the “wind behind leadership.” The metaphor of wind represents the forces that move, sustain, and sometimes challenge a leader. At the beginning of the study, these forces were understood mainly in terms of personal motivations, professional relationships, challenges, and reflection. However, the experiences shared by the department heads showed a more human and continuing process. Leadership did not simply come from holding a position. It developed through being trusted, working with people, facing difficult situations, and finding reasons to continue. This view agrees with contemporary studies that describe middle leadership as relational, context-dependent, and closely connected with the everyday realities of school work (Harris et al., 2022; Lipscombe et al., 2021).

The first part of the framework is Recognition and the Call to Lead. This emerged from the theme Leadership Found Them Before They Sought It. Many of the department heads did not initially plan to become leaders.

Instead, principals, mentors, and former department heads recognized their potential and encouraged them to accept greater responsibilities. Their stories suggest that leadership identity may begin when another person first sees the capacity to lead. The participants' narratives specifically showed movement from hesitation toward acceptance after others expressed trust in their potential. This supports the broader understanding that leadership development is influenced by professional relationships, opportunities, and experiences that allow individuals to gradually see themselves as leaders (Daniëls et al., 2021).

The second component is Navigating the Middle. Department heads occupy a difficult space between teachers and school administration. They work closely with teachers, but they are also expected to supervise, correct, implement policies, and maintain standards. The findings showed that leadership in this position required constant judgment. Department heads learned when to listen, when to show understanding, and when to make a firm decision. Their experiences reflect the nature of middle leadership described by Lipscombe et al. (2021), where leaders often work between different levels of the school and respond to competing expectations. Leadership, therefore, was not simply about balancing tasks. It was also about maintaining relationships without losing professional responsibility. This tension is clearly reflected in participants' experiences of managing former peers and negotiating closeness and authority.

The third part of the framework is Leading Through Care. The participants repeatedly spoke about empathy, compassion, respect, and understanding. They recognized that teachers carried different personal situations, abilities, and struggles. Because of this, knowing the person behind the work became important in their leadership decisions. Care, however, did not mean ignoring poor performance or lowering expectations. Rather, the department heads tried to combine understanding with accountability. Research on compassionate leadership similarly explains that genuine care involves recognizing another person's difficulty and responding meaningfully to it (Ramachandran et al., 2023). In the present study, care became a practical way of influencing teachers and building trust. The findings indicate that the participants tried to remember the person while still ensuring that the work was done.

Closely connected with care is the fourth component, Leading Through Example. This reflects the theme Walking the Talk: Leadership Earns Influence Through Example. The department heads believed that they could not continuously ask teachers to perform tasks that they themselves were unwilling to do. For them, leadership became visible in daily actions, work habits, and willingness to carry difficult responsibilities. Their experiences showed that formal authority could require compliance, but personal example helped build genuine professional trust. This finding is consistent with current middle-leadership literature, which views leadership as strongly connected with practice, interaction, and influence within the everyday life of schools (Lipscombe et al., 2021). In simple terms, the participants learned that before asking others to move, they first had to show their willingness to move.

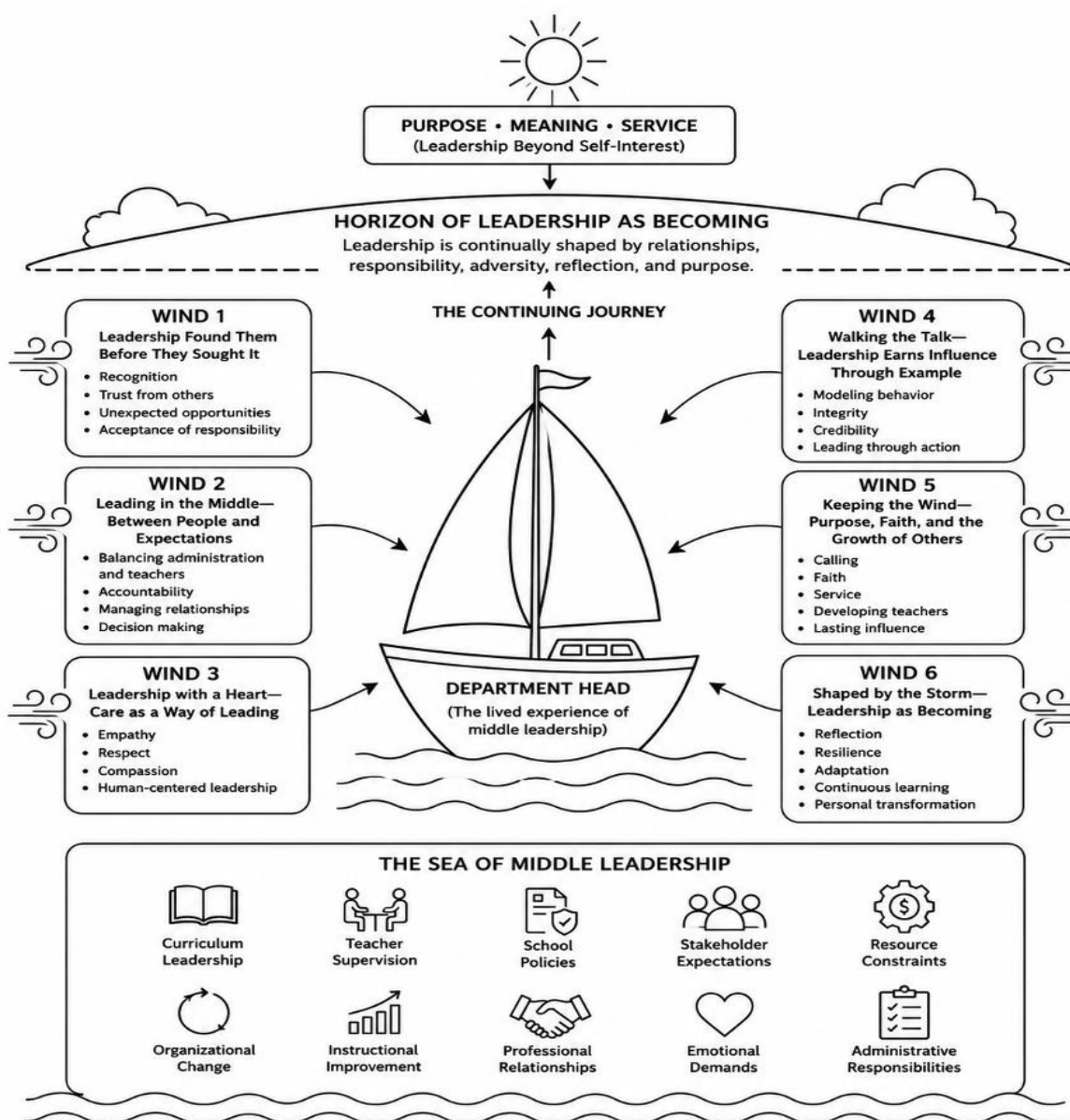
The fifth component is Purpose, Faith, and the Growth of Others. These were the sustaining winds of leadership. The department heads experienced tiredness, resistance, disappointment, and moments when remaining in the position became difficult. Still, they found reasons to continue. For many, these reasons came from seeing teachers improve, colleagues succeed, and learners benefit from their work. Faith and prayer also became personal sources of strength for some participants. The findings showed that leadership was sustained by purposes that extended beyond personal recognition or promotion. Educational leadership research similarly recognizes purpose, professional relationships, and commitment to others as important in sustaining leaders during difficult periods (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023; Harris & Jones, 2022). In this study, the department heads appeared to regain their own strength when they saw that their leadership had helped another person move forward.

The final component is Leadership as Becoming. This emerged from the theme Shaped by the Storm. The department heads did not describe themselves as complete or fully prepared leaders when they entered the position. They made mistakes, experienced emotional struggles, questioned decisions, and encountered situations that tested their confidence. Yet these experiences also changed them. Through reflection and continued practice, they became more careful, patient, adaptive, and aware of people. Their stories show that resilience was not only about enduring pressure. It also involved learning, unlearning, and changing one's way of leading. The participants themselves described leadership as an unfinished process of adjustment and

continued growth. This understanding is consistent with research that views leadership development as a continuing process shaped by experience, reflection, and changing professional demands (Daniëls et al., 2021; Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023).

In hindsight, the Wind Behind Leadership Framework presents leadership as a continuing movement rather than a fixed set of qualities. A person may first be recognized and called to lead, then learns to navigate the middle. Leadership is expressed through care and personal example, while purpose, faith, and the growth of others provide reasons to continue. Difficult experiences, or the “storms” of leadership, further shape the person through reflection and adaptation. The framework therefore suggests that the essence of department head leadership lies in the continuing effort to move people forward while also being changed by the experience of leading them. This interpretation directly reflects the eidetic insight generated from the participants' stories.

Figure 1. Simulacrum of the Study



Objectives of the Study

This phenomenological study primarily aimed to explore and understand the following overarching question: What are the lived experiences of department heads regarding their role as the “wind” or driving force in leading their respective departments?

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do department heads describe the experiences and relationships that influenced their entry into and development as middle leaders?
2. How do department heads experience and navigate the relational, professional, and organizational demands of leading their respective departments?
3. What personal values, leadership practices, and sources of meaning sustain department heads in carrying out their leadership responsibilities?
4. How do challenges, reflection, and adaptation shape the continuing development of department heads as educational leaders?
5. What is the essence of the lived leadership experiences of department heads as the “wind” or driving force of their respective departments?
6. What leadership development program can be proposed based on the lived experiences and leadership needs revealed by the study?

Significance of the Study

The study contributed to the literature on educational leadership by presenting the lived experiences of department heads as middle leaders in a Philippine public secondary school. It showed how their motivations, relationships, challenges, and personal values influenced the way they understood and practiced leadership. The findings offered useful insights to the following groups:

Department of Education. The study is helpful as it may offer context-based information about middle leadership in a large public secondary school. Its findings may help the Department of Education review and improve programs related to leadership preparation, instructional supervision, and the development of school-based leaders. The results were also relevant to the goals of the Basic Education Development Plan 2030 and other DepEd initiatives that emphasized stronger leadership and improved teaching and learning.

School Administrators. The study is beneficial as it may provide school administrators with a clearer view of the actual conditions experienced by department heads. It showed that middle leaders carried instructional, relational, and organizational responsibilities at the same time. The findings may serve as a basis for developing mentoring arrangements, leadership support mechanisms, and professional development activities suited to the needs of department heads and other emerging leaders.

Department Heads. The findings are important as it may give department heads an opportunity to reflect on the experiences that shaped their leadership. The shared stories showed how personal values, professional relationships, challenges, and a sense of purpose influenced their decisions and actions. These insights may help department heads better understand their leadership identity and identify practical ways to remain committed despite changing school demands.

Teachers. The study is beneficial as it may provide a better understanding of the responsibilities and difficulties faced by department heads. The findings showed that department heads worked between administrative expectations and the needs of teachers. Greater awareness of this role may encourage stronger cooperation, better communication, and shared responsibility for improving instruction and learner outcomes.

Educational Leadership Scholars and Researchers. The study is of essential value as it may add a phenomenological account of middle leadership to the existing literature. It addressed the limited number of qualitative studies focused on department heads in Philippine public secondary schools. The findings may support further discussions on leadership identity, meaning-making, resilience, instructional leadership, compassionate leadership, and the everyday practice of leading from the middle.

Future Researchers. The study is of is valuable as it may serve as a reference for future research on educational leadership, middle leadership, instructional supervision, resilience, and leadership identity. It may also provide

a useful conceptual and methodological guide for researchers who plan to examine similar leadership experiences in other schools, divisions, or regions.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study explores the lived experiences of selected department heads in a public secondary school during the School Year 2026–2027. Using a phenomenological research design, it seeks to understand how department heads experience their leadership roles and the different factors that influence and sustain them. In particular, the study focuses on their motivations, values, relationships, challenges, and reflections, which together form what this study describes as the “wind behind leadership.” Data are gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews with purposively selected department heads who have substantial experience in leading their respective departments. The interview data are then analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s reflexive thematic analysis to identify meaningful patterns across the participants’ lived experiences.

The study is limited to department heads from one public secondary school and does not include principals, assistant principals, master teachers, classroom teachers, or other school personnel. Because of this, the findings are not intended to represent all department heads in the Philippines. Instead, the study aims to provide a rich and in-depth understanding of leadership as experienced by department heads within a specific school context. The purpose is not to make broad generalizations but to gain deeper insights into the meanings that participants attach to their leadership experiences.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined conceptually and operationally based on how they were used and understood in the study.

Adaptation. Conceptually, adaptation refers to the process of adjusting one’s thinking, behavior, or leadership practice in response to changing situations, people, demands, or organizational conditions. Adaptive leadership involves learning from experience and modifying responses when previous approaches are no longer effective (Harris & Jones, 2022).

In this study, adaptation refers to how department heads changed their leadership approaches based on the needs of teachers, the demands of the school, and lessons learned from previous experiences. It included becoming more careful in decision-making, setting clearer boundaries, using different ways of dealing with people, and learning or unlearning practices as leadership situations changed.

Department Head. Conceptually, a department head is a middle leader who supports instruction, guides teachers, coordinates departmental work, and connects school-level directions with classroom practice (Lipscombe et al., 2021).

In this study, department head refers to the officially designated leaders of academic departments and special programs in the school under study. They were the participants whose leadership experiences formed the main source of data.

Educational Leadership. Educational leadership refers to the process of influencing and supporting people toward the improvement of teaching, learning, and school practices (Bush, 2022).

In this study, educational leadership refers to how the department heads guided teachers, made decisions, handled challenges, supported professional growth, and carried out their leadership responsibilities.

Essence of Leadership. The essence of a lived phenomenon refers to its deeper or central meaning as understood through the shared experiences of participants.

In this study, the essence of leadership refers to the central meaning drawn from the department heads’ stories: leadership was a continuing process of moving others

forward while the leaders themselves were also being shaped by the experience of leading. This meaning emerged from the combined experiences of recognition, leading in the middle, care, personal example, purpose, and growth through difficulty.

Human-Centered Leadership. Human-centered leadership gives attention to people, relationships, and individual circumstances while carrying out leadership responsibilities. It recognizes empathy and compassion as important parts of leading others (Ramachandran et al., 2023).

In this study, human-centered leadership refers to the department heads' practice of listening, understanding teachers' situations, showing empathy, and treating people with respect while still maintaining professional expectations.

Leadership as Becoming. Leadership development is a continuing process shaped by professional experience, relationships, learning, and reflection (Daniëls et al., 2021).

In this study, leadership as becoming refers to the gradual way the participants developed as leaders through experience. It reflected their process of learning, unlearning, adjusting, and being changed by the people, challenges, and responsibilities they encountered.

Leadership by Example. Leadership by example refers to influencing others through one's own actions, professional behavior, and consistency rather than depending only on formal authority.

In this study, leadership by example refers to what the participants commonly described as "walking the talk" or "leading by doing." It reflected their belief that leaders should first demonstrate the work, discipline, and commitment they expected from others.

Leadership Potential and Recognition. Leadership potential refers to the developing capacity of a person to influence, guide, and take responsibility for others. Leadership development may be shaped by professional opportunities, relationships, and experiences that allow individuals to gradually grow into leadership roles (Daniëls et al., 2021).

In this study, leadership potential and recognition refers to the participants' experiences of being noticed, trusted, encouraged, or selected by principals, mentors, and former leaders before they fully saw themselves as leaders.

Lived Experiences. Lived experiences refer to how individuals personally encounter, understand, and give meaning to events in their everyday lives. In qualitative research, attention is given to how people describe experiences from their own point of view (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

In this study, lived experiences refers to the stories, memories, feelings, challenges, and reflections shared by the department heads about their leadership journey.

Meaning-Making and Reflection. Meaning-making refers to the process of interpreting experiences and developing an understanding of what those experiences mean to the individual. Reflection allows leaders to examine their actions and learn from professional experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

In this study, meaning-making and reflection refers to how department heads looked back on their leadership experiences, recognized lessons, reconsidered their actions, and developed a deeper understanding of themselves as leaders.

Middle Leadership. Middle leadership describes leadership carried out between senior school administration and classroom-level practice. Middle leaders often coordinate, influence, and support the work of teachers while also responding to wider school expectations (Lipscombe et al., 2021).

In this study, middle leadership refers to the position and experience of department heads as they worked between school administrators and teachers. This included balancing relationships, expectations, support, and accountability

Purpose-Driven Leadership. Purpose-driven leadership refers to leadership sustained by a clear sense of meaning and commitment beyond personal rewards or formal position. A leader's sense of purpose may influence continued engagement and commitment during difficult situations (Daniëls et al., 2021).

In this study, purpose-driven leadership refers to the reasons that kept department heads committed to their roles. This included service, faith, responsibility, and the satisfaction they experienced from seeing teachers and learners grow.

Resilience. Conceptually, resilience refers to a leader's capacity to continue functioning, recover from setbacks, and remain committed despite pressure, uncertainty, or difficult working conditions. In educational leadership, resilience is shaped not only by personal strength but also by relationships, professional support, experience, and the wider school context (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023; Daniëls et al., 2021).

In this study, resilience refers to how the department heads sustained their leadership despite resistance, workload, emotional strain, self-doubt, and other challenges. It was reflected in their willingness to continue serving, remain purposeful, seek support, and carry their responsibilities during difficult periods.

Wind Behind Leadership. Conceptually, the wind behind leadership refers to the underlying personal, relational, and contextual forces that influence, sustain, and shape an individual's leadership journey. Rather than focusing on formal authority or position, it emphasizes the internal and external influences that motivate leaders, guide their decisions, help them persevere through challenges, and contribute to the continuing development of their leadership identity. These forces may include recognition by others, relationships, values, purpose, reflection, resilience, and meaningful experiences, all of which interact to influence how leadership is understood and practiced (Braun & Clarke, 2022; De Nobile, 2021; Harris & Jones, 2022).

In this study, the wind behind leadership refers to the combination of motivations, relationships, experiences, challenges, values, and personal reflections that influence, sustain, and shape the lived leadership experiences of secondary school department heads. It represents the interconnected forces that move them toward leadership, help them remain committed to their responsibilities, and continually transform them as leaders throughout their professional journey.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

Leadership in schools is often discussed in relation to school performance, teacher development, and learner outcomes. However, leadership is also a personal and relational experience. School leaders work with people, make difficult decisions, respond to expectations, and learn from situations that do not always have simple solutions. This is especially true for department heads who work between school administrators and teachers. Lipscombe et al. (2021) described school middle leaders as important links between wider school goals and everyday professional practice. Their position gives them influence, but it also exposes them to competing demands.

In the Philippine setting, leadership has become more important as schools respond to curriculum changes, learning recovery, teacher support needs, and organizational reforms. The Basic Education Development Plan 2030 recognized leadership and management as important parts of improving basic education (Department of Education, 2022). These expectations are not carried by principals alone. In large secondary schools, department heads and other teacher leaders also help guide instruction, mentor teachers, and translate school directions into actual practice. For the researcher, this raises a simple but important question: What happens to the person while doing the work of leading others?

The literature review was therefore organized around the main ideas that became important in the study. These included the recognition of leadership potential, the experience of leading from the middle, care as a leadership practice, leadership through personal example, purpose and the development of others, and leadership growth through difficulty. These areas provided a closer literature base for understanding the experiences later shared by the department heads.

Recognition, Mentoring, and the Beginning of Leadership

People do not always enter leadership because they planned to become leaders. In some cases, leadership begins when another person notices their ability and gives them a chance to take responsibility. Daniëls et al. (2021) explained that leadership development is influenced by professional experience, learning opportunities, and the setting where leadership is practiced. This suggests that leadership identity may develop gradually. A teacher may first see himself or herself mainly as a classroom practitioner but mentoring and leadership exposure can slowly change that understanding.

Mentoring is important in this process because it provides both guidance and professional affirmation. Leadership development is stronger when aspiring leaders are given opportunities to observe, participate, receive feedback, and reflect on actual leadership work (Daniëls et al., 2021). This is also relevant to distributed leadership, where leadership capacity is developed among different members of the school rather than being kept within one formal position (Harris et al., 2022). Recognition alone may not immediately create a leader. Still, being trusted by a respected principal, mentor, or senior colleague may encourage a person to consider responsibilities that were previously outside his or her career plans.

This issue has particular value in the Philippine public-school context. DepEd's professional standards have placed continuing professional growth, people development, and leadership capacity within the work of educational leaders (DepEd, 2020). Yet formal training often comes after a person has already entered a leadership role. In practice, potential leaders may first be identified through their work habits, professional relationships, and willingness to accept responsibility. I see this as an important gap in leadership development. Schools may have capable future leaders, but their potential can remain unnoticed when there is no deliberate mentoring or leadership exposure.

For this study, the literature helped explain why recognition became important in the participants' stories. Their experiences showed that the beginning of leadership was not always ambition. Sometimes, it was trust received from another person. This suggests that leadership succession in schools should not begin only when a position becomes vacant. It may begin much earlier, when experienced leaders recognize potential and give others a meaningful opportunity to grow.

Leading in the Middle: Relationships, Authority, and Competing Expectations

Middle leadership has a distinct place in the school organization. Department heads are close to classroom teachers, but they are also expected to carry school policies, supervise work, and support administrative directions. Lipscombe et al. (2021) found that middle leaders commonly experience role complexity because they work across different levels of the organization. They are expected to influence colleagues while remaining part of the same professional community. This makes middle leadership highly relational.

The problem becomes more difficult when leaders supervise former peers. Friendship and professional closeness may help build trust, but these same relationships can make correction and accountability uncomfortable. Research on relational leadership explains that leadership develops through interactions between leaders and others, where trust, vulnerability, and influence are continuously negotiated (Scandura & Meuser, 2022). A department head cannot always rely on formal authority. Teachers have their own professional experience, beliefs, and expectations. Because of this, the leader must learn when to listen and when to decide.

In Philippine public schools, this middle position may become more demanding because leaders also work within policy changes and increasing instructional expectations. The BEDP 2030 placed greater attention on improving teaching quality, school management, and learner outcomes (DepEd, 2022). These broad goals eventually reach departments and classrooms. Department heads often become the people who explain expectations, address teacher concerns, and help make school directions workable at the learning-area level. The policy may come from above, but its everyday implementation still depends greatly on relationships.

The literature convinced the researcher that leading in the middle should not be treated as a smaller version of principal leadership. It has its own tensions. Middle leaders must remain close enough to understand teachers

but must also create enough professional distance to make difficult decisions. This is why the department heads' experience of balancing care, collegiality, and accountability deserves separate attention in leadership research.

Human-Centered and Compassionate Leadership

Leadership involves tasks and decisions, but people experience leadership through the way they are treated. Compassionate leadership has received greater attention because organizations increasingly recognize the emotional and relational side of work. Ramachandran et al. (2023) explained that compassionate leadership begins with noticing the difficulties of others and responding in a meaningful way. In schools, this can be seen when leaders listen to teachers, recognize personal circumstances, and provide appropriate support.

Care, however, should not be confused with the absence of standards. A leader may understand a teacher's situation while still expecting professional responsibility. This balance is important. Scandura and Meuser (2022) emphasized that leadership relationships involve trust and mutual influence, suggesting that the quality of interaction affects how people respond to leadership. Teachers may be more open to correction when they believe that the leader understands their situation and treats them with dignity.

This idea has strong relevance in the Philippine school setting, where professional relationships often extend beyond formal work transactions. Schools operate as social communities, and leaders frequently deal with personal concerns alongside instructional responsibilities. DepEd's Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads also emphasized people management, professional development, and building connections within the school community (DepEd, 2020). Although these standards were written for school heads, the relational expectations are also visible in the work of department heads.

From the researcher's view, care became important because department heads were leading people they worked with every day. They could not separate the teacher completely from the person's life and struggles. Yet they also had a department to lead. The literature therefore supports a more balanced understanding of compassionate leadership: to lead with a heart is not to ignore accountability, but to remember the person while dealing with the work.

Leadership Through Example and Professional Credibility

Formal designation gives a leader authority, but it does not automatically produce influence. Middle leaders often depend on professional credibility because they work closely with colleagues who observe their daily actions. Lipscombe et al. (2021) explained that middle leadership is strongly connected with professional practice, teacher relationships, and the ability to influence instructional work. In this setting, what a leader repeatedly does may carry as much weight as what the leader says.

Leading by example becomes important when leaders ask others to accept difficult work or improve their practice. Harris et al. (2022) viewed distributed leadership as leadership formed through interaction and shared professional activity rather than position alone. This perspective helps explain why visible participation matters. A leader who is willing to work, learn, and carry responsibility may gain a different kind of authority—one based on professional respect.

The Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads emphasized personal and professional attributes, integrity, and professional effectiveness as part of educational leadership (DepEd, 2020). These ideas are especially meaningful in a school environment where teachers can directly observe the consistency of their leaders. Policies may describe expected leadership behavior, but credibility is tested in ordinary situations: meeting deadlines, handling problems, treating people fairly, and being present when work becomes difficult.

For the researcher, the idea of "walking the talk" is simple, but it should not be dismissed as a common leadership expression. In middle leadership, it may be a practical source of influence. Department heads have limited room to lead from a distance. Their work is visible. Because of this, example becomes part of the leadership message itself. Before leaders ask people to move, their own actions may show whether the direction is worth following.

Purpose, Faith, and the Growth of Others

Leadership can become tiring when responsibilities continue and results are not immediately seen. For this reason, researchers have examined what helps leaders remain committed during demanding periods. Leadership development literature suggests that personal values, professional purpose, and commitment to others influence how leaders understand and continue their work (Daniëls et al., 2021). Purpose gives responsibility a meaning beyond completing tasks.

In educational leadership, the growth of other people can become an important source of professional meaning. School leaders influence learner outcomes largely through the conditions they create for teachers and teaching (Leithwood et al., 2021). This means that leadership success may not always appear as a personal accomplishment. Sometimes, it is seen in a teacher who becomes more confident, a colleague who accepts a larger responsibility, or a learner who succeeds because instructional support improved. Such outcomes may renew a leader's sense that the work has value.

The Philippine context also gives importance to service and collective responsibility. DepEd's leadership standards emphasized developing people and building professional capacity as part of effective school leadership (DepEd, 2020). For some leaders, faith may also become a personal source of strength. This dimension should be understood carefully because faith is experienced differently by each person. Still, when leaders themselves identify prayer or spiritual belief as part of how they cope and find purpose, their accounts should not be removed from the interpretation simply because these are personal experiences.

The researcher noticed that purpose changes the way leadership difficulty is understood. Pressure remains pressure. It does not become easy simply because a leader has a sense of calling. However, seeing the growth of teachers and learners may give leaders a reason to stay through difficult periods. In this sense, leadership is sustained not only by personal strength but also by evidence that one's effort has helped another person move forward.

Challenges, Reflection, and Leadership as Becoming

Educational leaders work in conditions where uncertainty and pressure are common. Chatzipanagiotou and Katsarou (2023) found that school leadership during disruptive periods required adaptability, collaboration, and resilience. Their review showed that leaders had to respond to changing conditions while supporting the people within their organizations. Harris and Jones (2022) reached a related conclusion, arguing that contemporary school leadership requires adaptive responses rather than dependence on fixed leadership routines.

Resilience should not be understood only as enduring hardship. Leadership challenges can also lead to reflection and changes in practice. Daniëls et al. (2021) described leadership development as an ongoing process connected with experience and professional learning. A difficult conversation, a wrong decision, or resistance from colleagues may expose limitations that formal training does not always reveal. Reflection allows leaders to examine these experiences and reconsider how they will respond in the future.

This is relevant to Philippine schools, where leaders continue to work through reform, instructional demands, resource concerns, and changing organizational arrangements. The BEDP 2030 itself recognized persistent weaknesses and complex challenges within the basic education system (DepEd, 2022). Leaders working close to teachers are not separated from these pressures. They often experience policy change through the practical problems of implementation. For the researcher, this means that resilience is not simply an individual personality trait. The school environment, professional support, and opportunities for reflection also affect how leaders respond to difficulty.

Leadership as becoming offers a useful way of understanding this process. Leaders are not necessarily complete when they receive an appointment. They continue to learn while already responsible for other people. Some lessons come from success, but many come from discomfort, mistakes, and situations that require them to change. The literature supports the interpretation that leadership development remains unfinished. The storm

does not automatically create a better leader; growth happens when experience is examined, learned from, and allowed to change the way a person leads.

Middle Leadership Continuity in a Changing Educational Structure

The literature on distributed and middle leadership becomes more relevant as school leadership arrangements continue to change. Harris et al. (2022) argued that leadership is not confined to one person or one formal role. It is distributed through interactions, responsibilities, and professional expertise. In the same way, Lipscombe et al. (2021) showed that middle leaders carry important functions related to teacher development, instructional improvement, and the connection between school goals and classroom work.

This is important in the Philippine context because DepEd continues to review career progression and organizational arrangements for teachers and school leaders. Even when formal titles or positions change, the work of mentoring teachers, coordinating instruction, addressing professional concerns, and translating school directions into practice remains necessary. The current study's Chapter 5 already recognizes that leadership functions may need to be preserved during organizational transition. The issue, therefore, is not only whether a particular position continues to exist. A more practical question is who will carry the leadership work previously attached to that position.

From the researcher's perspective, this gives the experiences of department heads a new importance. Their stories contain professional knowledge developed over years of leading teachers and departments. If this knowledge remains only with the person, it may be lost when leadership arrangements change. Mentoring and deliberate knowledge transfer are therefore necessary. Leadership continuity requires schools to prepare people before gaps become visible.

This literature supports the proposed WIND Program as more than a training activity for department heads. It may serve as a leadership continuity and knowledge-transfer mechanism for current and emerging middle leaders. The lessons of experienced department heads can be shared with master teachers, learning area coordinators, teacher leaders, and others who may carry similar functions. Positions may change, but schools still need people who can guide, connect, mentor, and move others forward.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology of the study which includes the research design, the participants of the study, research instrument, data collection methods, trustworthiness of the study, ethical considerations, and data analysis.

Research Design

The study used a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived leadership experiences of department heads. It focused on how they experienced their roles, faced leadership challenges, and found meaning in leading their departments. Particular attention was given to the personal and professional experiences that sustained their leadership. These experiences were represented in the study through the idea of the "wind behind leadership."

A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to understand leadership from the participants' own experiences. It did not measure leadership styles, competencies, or performance. Instead, the inquiry examined how department heads understood their leadership journeys and the meaning they attached to important experiences. Qualitative research is appropriate when the purpose is to explore people's experiences and interpretations in depth (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

Phenomenology was used because the study centered on a shared lived experience. The participants had all experienced leadership as department heads, although their individual situations and leadership journeys differed. Phenomenological inquiry gives attention to how people experience and make sense of a phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2023). In this study, the phenomenon was the experience of leading an academic department

in a public secondary school. The study sought to understand what shaped the participants as leaders and what helped them continue in their roles.

The study followed an experiential and interpretive orientation. The participants' accounts remained the main source of data, while the researcher actively engaged with their narratives during analysis. Reflexive awareness was maintained through analytic notes and a reflexive journal. This approach was consistent with Reflexive Thematic Analysis, which recognizes that themes are developed through the researcher's careful and reflexive engagement with qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021, 2022).

Through this design, the study examined the shared meanings found across the leadership experiences of department heads. Their narratives provided a closer understanding of the motivations, relationships, difficulties, and values that shaped their leadership. These experiences helped explain the personal and professional forces described in the study as the "wind behind leadership."

Participants of the Study

The participants were selected department heads of a large public secondary school in Bacolod City who had direct experience in leading academic departments. They were chosen because their positions placed them between school administration and classroom teachers. Their work involved supervising instruction, supporting teachers, helping implement the curriculum, and managing department concerns. These responsibilities gave them firsthand experience of the leadership phenomenon explored in the study.

Phenomenological research requires participants who have personally experienced the phenomenon being investigated and can provide detailed accounts of that experience (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Neubauer et al., 2023). For this reason, the study focused on department heads with sufficient experience in middle leadership. Their years of service allowed them to reflect on different responsibilities, relationships, and challenges encountered while leading their departments.

Participants had to meet the following criteria: (1) officially designated as department heads of academic learning areas at the school in focus; (2) had served as department heads for at least three years; (3) were directly involved in instructional supervision, curriculum implementation, teacher support, and department management; (4) voluntarily agreed to participate and provided informed consent; (5) could describe their experiences in English, Filipino, or Hiligaynon; and (6) were available for an in-depth interview and necessary follow-up clarification.

The three-year service requirement was used to ensure that the participants had enough experience in department leadership. The selected department heads had encountered different responsibilities and situations related to teachers, instruction, and school requirements. Their experiences were not expected to be the same. However, their shared position as department heads provided a common basis for exploring the phenomenon.

Through their narratives, the study examined how department heads experienced leadership and understood the events that shaped their journeys. Their accounts provided the basis for interpreting the shared meanings and experiences that formed the "wind behind leadership."

Instrument

The main instrument used in the study was a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix F). It was designed to gather detailed accounts of the leadership experiences of department heads. Since the study focused on the "wind behind leadership," the questions explored the participants' motivations, relationships, challenges, values, and experiences that shaped their leadership journeys.

A semi-structured interview guide was appropriate because it provided direction while allowing participants to describe their experiences freely. The researcher used common guiding questions for all participants but asked follow-up questions when clarification or deeper explanation was needed. This format is useful in qualitative research because it allows the interview to remain focused while giving participants space to discuss experiences that may not have been expected by the researcher (Knott et al., 2022).

The interview guide was developed from the Objective of the Study and the main purpose of the study. The questions focused on the leadership experiences of department heads, including their motivations, relationships, challenges, and the meaning they attached to their roles. Open-ended questions were used to allow participants to describe experiences they considered important. The guide did not require participants to answer according to predetermined themes or categories. This allowed the researcher to remain open to different experiences and patterns of meaning found across the participants' narratives.

The interview guide was organized into three sections. The first section contained opening questions about the participants' leadership background and years of experience as department heads. The second section included the main questions about their leadership journeys, important experiences, sources of motivation, relationships, and challenges encountered in their roles. Follow-up questions were asked when clarification or further description was needed. Semi-structured interviews provide enough direction for the inquiry while allowing the researcher to explore relevant experiences raised during the conversation (Knott et al., 2022).

The final section allowed participants to share other experiences, reflections, or insights that had not been discussed earlier. This gave them an opportunity to raise matters they considered important to their leadership journeys. The interview guide therefore provided a common direction for all interviews without limiting the participants' responses to the researcher's initial assumptions about leadership.

Prior to data collection, the interview guide have undergone an expert validation to establish content validity and ensure alignment with the objectives of the study (see Appendices D & E). The instrument was reviewed by experts in Educational Management, qualitative research, and educational leadership, and evaluated the clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the interview questions. Their recommendations were incorporated to strengthen the instrument and improve its capacity to generate meaningful responses.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data gathering began after the researcher obtained the required approval from the Graduate School and permission from the school principal. After approval was granted, department heads who met the inclusion criteria were identified. Each potential participant was personally informed about the purpose of the study, the interview process, confidentiality measures, and the voluntary nature of participation.

Participants who agreed to join the study were given an informed consent form. They were provided enough time to read the information and ask questions before signing the form. Only those who voluntarily gave consent were included in the study. Individual interviews were then scheduled at a time and place convenient to each participant. A private and comfortable setting was used to reduce interruptions and allow participants to speak freely.

The researcher conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews using the reviewed interview guide. Each interview began with general questions about the participant's leadership background before moving to more detailed experiences as a department head. Open-ended and follow-up questions were used to explore motivations, relationships, leadership challenges, and experiences that participants considered important. The interviews lasted approximately 45 to 90 minutes, depending on the depth of the participant's responses.

With permission, each interview was audio-recorded to preserve the participants' accounts. Field notes were also prepared to document relevant observations and the researcher's initial reflections. After every interview, the recording was transcribed verbatim and checked against the original audio. Participant names and identifying details were replaced with codes to protect confidentiality.

Participants were given an opportunity to review their transcripts for accuracy and clarify statements when needed. This process focused on confirming the interview record and the intended meaning of their responses. It did not require participants to approve the researcher's final themes or interpretations.

The verified transcripts and field notes were then organized for analysis using Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis. The researcher repeatedly engaged with the data, developed codes, and constructed patterns

of shared meaning through a reflexive process. Braun and Clarke's approach treats themes as analytic interpretations developed through active engagement with the data rather than as findings that simply appear on their own.

Throughout data gathering and analysis, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal. Notes on decisions, observations, assumptions, and developing interpretations were recorded. All interview files, transcripts, consent forms, and related documents were securely stored and accessed only for the purposes of the study.

Ethical Considerations

The study observed ethical principles to protect the rights, privacy, and well-being of the participants. Before data gathering, the researcher secured the required approval from the Graduate School and permission from the school administration. Participants were clearly informed about the purpose of the study and what their participation would involve.

Participation was voluntary. Department heads were free to accept or decline the invitation without any negative consequence. Before the interview, each participant received an informed consent form explaining the purpose of the research, interview procedures, possible discomfort, and confidentiality measures. They were also informed of their right to refuse any question or withdraw from the study at any time.

The identities of the participants were protected. Participant codes were used instead of real names in the transcripts and research report. Details that could reveal a participant's identity were handled carefully during the presentation of findings. Research data were used only for academic purposes and were managed in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173).

Audio recordings, transcripts, and other electronic research files were stored in password-protected digital storage accessible only to the researcher and authorized academic personnel. Consent forms and other printed documents were kept separately in a secure place. Research records will be retained according to institutional requirements and securely destroyed after the approved retention period.

The interviews involved minimal risk, although some participants could experience discomfort when discussing difficult leadership situations or workplace concerns. The researcher conducted the interviews with respect and sensitivity. Participants could pause the interview, decline to discuss a particular experience, or end their participation when they wished.

Reflexivity was also observed as part of responsible qualitative research. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal to record assumptions, decisions, and personal reflections during data collection and analysis. Rather than claiming complete removal of personal views, the researcher remained aware of how previous experiences and assumptions could influence the interpretation of participants' narratives. Reflexive practice is important in Reflexive Thematic Analysis because the researcher takes an active role in making sense of qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021, 2022).

Trustworthiness of the Study

The trustworthiness of the study was considered through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria provided a practical guide for maintaining a careful and transparent qualitative research process.

Credibility. Credibility was strengthened through careful interviewing, participant clarification, and continued engagement with the interview data. Follow-up questions were used when participants' responses required further explanation. The researcher also read the transcripts repeatedly to develop a closer understanding of the participants' leadership experiences.

Participants were given an opportunity to review their interview transcripts and clarify statements when necessary. This process focused on the accuracy of the interview record and the intended meaning of their

responses. Participants were not asked to approve the final themes because theme development remained part of the researcher's interpretive work under Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021, 2022).

The researcher also consulted the thesis adviser regarding the research process and developing interpretations. These discussions provided opportunities to question assumptions and consider other possible readings of the data. The purpose was not to achieve coding agreement but to strengthen reflection and analytical thinking.

Transferability. Transferability was supported by providing enough information about the research setting, participants, and leadership context. The study described the roles of the department heads and the conditions surrounding their leadership experiences. Relevant participant excerpts were also presented in the findings.

These descriptions allow readers to understand the setting in which the experiences occurred. Readers and future researchers may then decide whether the findings have possible relevance to other schools or middle leadership settings. The study did not claim statistical generalization.

Dependability. Dependability was addressed by maintaining clear records of the research process. The researcher kept interview schedules, field notes, transcripts, analytic notes, coding records, and documents showing the development of themes. Important methodological and analytical decisions were also recorded.

An audit trail was maintained to show how the study moved from interview data to coding and theme development. This documentation made the research process easier to follow and provided a record of changes made during the analysis.

Confirmability. Confirmability was supported through reflexive journaling and careful documentation of the analysis. The researcher recorded personal assumptions, questions, and developing interpretations throughout the research process. This helped maintain awareness of the researcher's role in interpreting the participants' accounts.

The reflexive journal, analytic notes, verbatim transcripts, and audit trail provided a clear connection between the interview data and the final interpretation. In this study, confirmability did not mean that the researcher was completely neutral or absent from the analysis. Instead, it involved being open and transparent about how interpretations were developed.

Data Analysis. The interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). RTA was selected because it allows the researcher to examine patterns of shared meaning across participants' accounts. The approach also recognizes that the researcher actively develops themes through repeated, reflective, and interpretive engagement with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021, 2022). This was suitable for the study because the inquiry focused on how department heads experienced and understood their leadership journeys.

The analysis followed the six phases described by Braun and Clarke (2021, 2022).

Familiarizing with the Data. The researcher first became closely familiar with the interview data. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and checked against the original recordings. Each transcript was read several times. Initial thoughts, questions, and observations were recorded in analytic notes and the reflexive journal.

Generating Initial Codes. The transcripts were then coded. Sections of data related to the research questions were identified and given short codes that captured their possible meaning. Coding was mainly inductive and remained open to experiences discussed by the participants. The researcher did not use the earlier "Wind" dimensions as a fixed coding framework. Codes were reviewed and revised as engagement with the data continued.

Constructing Initial Themes. The researcher examined connections among the codes and began developing possible themes. Attention was given to broader patterns of shared meaning across the participants' accounts. The purpose was not to group similar answers or count repeated statements. Instead, the researcher considered how different experiences could be connected to explain important aspects of department heads' leadership journeys.

Reviewing and Developing Themes. The initial themes were reviewed against the coded extracts and the complete dataset. The researcher examined whether each theme presented a clear idea and contributed to answering the research questions. Some themes were combined, revised, or removed as the analysis developed. This stage involved repeatedly returning to the transcripts and reconsidering earlier interpretations.

Defining and Naming Themes. Each final theme was given a clear focus and name. The researcher identified the central idea of each theme and examined how it contributed to understanding the leadership experiences of department heads. Theme names were written to capture the meaning of the participants' experiences rather than simply describe an interview topic.

Producing the Report. The final themes were organized into an analytical narrative that addressed the research questions and the purpose of the study. Selected verbatim excerpts were used to illustrate the participants' experiences and show the connection between the data and the interpretation. The findings were then discussed in relation to relevant educational leadership literature and the theoretical perspectives of the study.

Throughout the six phases, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal and analytic notes. These records documented developing ideas, analytical decisions, and changes made during theme construction. Through this process, the analysis examined the personal, relational, and professional experiences that shaped the participants' leadership journeys and contributed to the interpretation of the "wind behind leadership."

The development of the six themes involved a gradual movement from the participants' individual accounts toward broader patterns of shared meaning. After becoming familiar with the transcripts, the researcher identified meaningful extracts and assigned initial codes that stayed close to what the participants had described. As analysis continued, these codes were examined not only for what participants said, but also for what their experiences appeared to mean in relation to leadership. For example, accounts of being encouraged by principals and mentors, despite having no original intention of becoming department heads, were interpreted around the idea of "being seen before seeing oneself." In another pattern, experiences involving former peers, professional relationships, resistance, correction, and accountability were interpreted as showing how "closeness complicates authority." These interpretive codes helped move the analysis beyond simply grouping similar answers toward understanding the meanings that connected different leadership experiences. This process was consistent with the study's reflexive thematic approach, where themes were developed through the researcher's active and continuing engagement with the dataset rather than treated as categories that automatically appeared from the transcripts. The study's audit trail documents these interpretive codes and their development into broader patterns.

Related codes were then brought together around central organizing ideas and developed into candidate themes. Reluctance, recognition, mentoring, trust, and acceptance of responsibility eventually formed Leadership Found Them Before They Sought It. Experiences involving former peers, authority, resistance, accountability, and administrative expectations were brought together under Leading in the Middle—Between People and Expectations. Accounts of empathy, compassion, fairness, respect, and understanding teachers' circumstances contributed to Leadership with a Heart—Care as a Way of Leading, while modeling, leading by doing, and "walking the talk" formed Walking the Talk—Leadership Earns Influence Through Example. The sustaining experiences of service, faith, purpose, teacher development, and learner success were interpreted through Keeping the Wind—Purpose, Faith, and the Growth of Others. Finally, experiences of mistakes, emotional pressure, self-doubt, reflection, learning, unlearning, and adaptation were brought together in Shaped by the Storm—Leadership as Becoming.

The themes were not accepted simply because similar statements appeared several times. Each was reviewed against the coded excerpts and the complete dataset to determine whether it represented a coherent and meaningful interpretation of the participants' experiences. Some experiences could reasonably relate to more than one theme. For example, care appeared within both the relational tensions of Theme 2 and the human-centered practices of Theme 3, while growth was present in both the sustaining purpose of Theme 5 and the personal transformation described in Theme 6. In these instances, the researcher considered the main meaning carried by the account rather than forcing complete separation among themes. This process resulted in six

conceptually distinct but interconnected themes that together provided the strongest interpretation of the participants' leadership journeys.

Presentation, Analysis, And Interpretation Of Data

This chapter presents the gathered data based on the participants' response during the interviews. It is by looking through their experiences as department heads that their stories are known, and the significant roles they perform in the success of an institution. Information gathered during these interviews give a glimpse of the background and character of the participants.

Participants Profiles

The study involved eight department heads of a large public secondary school in Bacolod City. To protect their identities and maintain confidentiality, the participants were assigned the codes DH1 to DH8. They represented different learning areas and special programs and held Head Teacher III, V, or VI positions. Their years of experience as department heads ranged from about five to seventeen years. This variation was valuable to the study because it brought together leaders who had spent many years in the position and those who were still relatively newer to department leadership.

Participant 1 (DH1)

DH1 was a Head Teacher VI who had led the Filipino Department since 2010. Her years in the position exposed her to the changing demands of department leadership. She admitted that becoming a department head was never part of her original career plan.

I did not dream of being a department head at this school. What I dreamt is to retire and to be a teacher all my life."

DH1

That movement toward leadership was partly influenced by a former principal who recognized her potential. In her words,

"Maybe she sees a potential, a leadership potential in me."

DH1

Over time, however, DH1 began to view leadership beyond the position itself. Her experience gradually took on the meaning of service and personal calling. She explained:

"Because I have embraced the position, not the position, but I call it a calling."

DH1

Her story showed a leader who did not initially seek the role but eventually found meaning in helping teachers grow professionally and personally.

Participant 2 (DH2)

DH2, a Head Teacher VI, had served as head of the TLE Department since 2009. With about seventeen years in the position, she was among the most experienced participants. The nature of TLE itself added complexity to her work because, as she explained:

"TLE is a very broad area. We have different specializations, different needs, and sometimes different concerns."

DH2

Her decision to lead was also shaped by a desire to improve how the department was viewed within the school. DH2 remembered feeling that:

“if you belong to the TLE department, you are just a second-class department.”

DH2

This perception pushed her to work toward greater visibility and recognition. She stressed:

“I want to prove to anyone also, even to the students, that this is not just only a TLE.”

DH2

Her profile reflected a department head whose leadership was closely connected with advocacy for her learning area and the professional improvement of her teachers.

Participant 3 (DH3)

DH3 was a Head Teacher V who became head of the English Department in 2021. Compared with the longer-serving participants, she considered herself relatively new to the position. Her first years as department head coincided with a challenging period in education, requiring considerable adjustment and flexibility.

When asked to describe her leadership journey, DH3 did not present a smooth or idealized picture. Instead, she said:

“I believe I can describe it as, uh, just like a roller coaster ride.”

DH3

She further explained:

“There are ups and downs, there are happiness, there are laughter, there are also sadness.”

DH3

Like DH1, she originally prefers classroom teaching, stating:

“I really love working in a classroom, I really love teaching.”

DH3

Nevertheless, a sense of responsibility and the desire to continue improving instruction in the English Department encouraged her to accept the position. Her experience illustrated how leadership may emerge from responsibility rather than from a deliberate desire for authority.

Participant 4 (DH4)

DH4, a Head Teacher III, had handled the Special Program in the Arts and Special Program in Sports since 2018. Her leadership setting was distinct because the two programs had specialized requirements and concerns. She described her experience as:

“both challenging and fulfilling because these are special programs with very distinct needs.”

DH4

Her entry into department leadership was particularly difficult because of the transition from peer relationships to supervisory responsibilities. Reflecting on her early experience, she said:

“It was actually quite a hard journey. It was not easy because of some factors especially when dealing with peers.”

DH4

She compared the experience to a steep climb, saying that:

“it was like a mountain... climb.”

DH4

DH4 also recognized the contribution of her graduate education, particularly in management and supervision, but admitted that:

“some of it were gained through experience.”

DH4

Her account reflected leadership as something gradually learned through formal preparation and actual encounters with people and problems.

Participant 5 (DH5)

DH5, a Head Teacher VI from the Values Education Department, had been a department head since 2009. Before assuming the role, she had served as a master teacher for six years. She believed that this experience, together with her training, prepared her in terms of subject content.

As she explained:

“Content-wise, I know I was prepared.”

DH5

Managing people, however, was a different experience. DH5 openly described herself as:

“a hardcore introvert” and admitted that *“being with people actually is draining me.”*

DH5

She further explained that one of her challenges was managing teachers who had previously been her colleagues and, in some cases, were older than her. Her experience revealed that expertise in a learning area did not automatically remove the relational difficulties of leadership. For DH5, leading a department required her to work through personal discomfort and learn how to manage relationships and make decisions involving people.

Participant 6 (DH6)

DH6, a Head Teacher VI, had handled the Night Class Department since 2010. Her department operated within a context different from regular daytime classes. She observed:

“The night class has a different situation compared with the regular daytime classes.”

DH6

She further noted that “our learners have different backgrounds and circumstances, so you really need to understand their situation.”

Looking back on her years as department head, She described the role as:

“challenging... but also satisfying.”

DH6

The satisfaction came from seeing the collective efforts of the department move toward its objectives. As she shared:

“What I have done together with my teachers are for the good and the improvement of the department.”

DH6

Her profile highlighted the importance of context in leadership. For DH6, understanding the realities of night-class learners formed an important part of how she understood her responsibility as a department head.

Participant 7 (DH7)

DH7, a Head Teacher III, had led the MAPEH Department since 2018. His department was closely involved in music, arts, physical education, health, sports, and numerous school activities. He humorously described his leadership experience as:

“very active.”

DH7

His journey toward leadership was influenced by earlier experiences in sports and coaching. He recalled that:

“five years from my teaching experience, I was already a leader in basketball tournament,”

DH7

including activities at the division, provincial, and Palarong Pambansa levels.

He later reflected:

“My experience as a coach gave me the experience to manage people and motivated me to lead teachers.”

DH7

His approach to leadership also emphasized modeling. As he explained:

“I’m not only a leader, but also a follower... “when I give instruction, I let them see how to do the task.”

DH7

Thus, DH7's profile showed how previous leadership experiences outside formal administration could shape the way a department head leads teachers.

Participant 8 (DH8)

DH8, a Head Teacher VI, became head of the Araling Panlipunan Department in 2021. With approximately five years in the position, she was one of the newer department heads in the study. Reflecting on the responsibilities attached to the position, she stated:

"I think you only fully understand the role once you are already experiencing it."

DH8

DH8 described her journey using an image similar to that of DH3:

"Actually, a roller coaster." She spoke of the increasing demands placed upon department heads, explaining that they were "bombarded with works coming from the higher office, unlike before."

DH8

Despite these pressures, she found encouragement in the cooperation of her teachers. Her leadership was also strongly directed toward supporting teachers. She shared:

"I always guide them and never leave them alone in their tasks."

DH8

She also encouraged teachers not to remain at the entry level of the profession, stating that:

"they have to be promoted."

DH8

Her account presented leadership as a combination of guidance, motivation, and concern for teachers' professional advancement.

Thematic Insights

The six themes presented in this chapter were developed through repeated engagement with the narratives of the eight department heads. The analysis began by examining meaningful portions of each interview and assigning initial codes that represented important experiences, actions, feelings, and reflections. As the researcher moved repeatedly between individual excerpts and the complete dataset, connections among these codes became clearer. Some codes described what happened, while others developed into more interpretive ideas about what those experiences meant. For example, participants' stories of reluctance, encouragement, and recognition were gradually understood as more than accounts of promotion. Together, they pointed to a leadership identity that often began when another person recognized the capacity to lead. In the same way, stories involving friendship, authority, correction, and accountability were interpreted as part of the difficult experience of leading from the middle.

These patterns were reviewed and refined until six themes were developed, each organized around a central meaning rather than simply around an interview question. The themes were also examined against the complete dataset to determine whether they remained faithful to the range and complexity of the participants' accounts. Some experiences crossed thematic boundaries, which was expected because leadership was experienced as an interconnected process. Care, for example, was relevant both to managing relationships and to the participants'

ways of leading, while growth appeared both as a reason to continue leading and as a personal consequence of difficult leadership experiences. Rather than forcing these experiences into completely separate categories, the researcher considered the dominant meaning they contributed to each theme. This process is also documented in the study's audit trail, where theme boundaries were reviewed and selected extracts were repositioned according to their principal analytic meaning.

The research questions guided the overall inquiry but did not serve as predetermined theme headings. Instead, the six themes provided different but related ways of answering those questions. Some themes contributed mainly to one research question, while others helped explain several dimensions of the leadership experience. Taken together, they show how the department heads entered leadership, navigated its demands, developed ways of leading people, found reasons to continue, and were themselves changed through experience. Their integration eventually provided the basis for understanding the deeper meaning of the “wind behind leadership.”

Table 1 presents the theme alignment matrix to connect research questions, participant experiences, themes, and conceptual framework before the detailed discussion of each theme.

Table 1. Alignment of Research Questions, Participant Experiences, Themes, and Conceptual Framework

Research Question	Main Experiences/Patterns in Participants' Narratives	Theme(s) Addressing the Question	How the Findings Answer the Question	Conceptual Framework
1. How do department heads describe the experiences and relationships that influenced their entry into and development as middle leaders?	Reluctance to seek leadership; attachment to teaching; recognition by principals and mentors; encouragement; trust; informal leadership experiences; acceptance of responsibility	Theme 1: Leadership Found Before They Sought It; supported by Theme 6	Leadership often began through recognition and trust from significant professional others rather than deliberate career ambition. Development continued as participants gradually accepted responsibility and learned through experience.	Recognition and the Call to Lead; Leadership as Becoming
2. How do department heads experience and navigate the relational, professional, and organizational demands of leading their respective departments?	Supervising former peers; collegiality versus authority; resistance; correction; accountability; administrative expectations; fairness; professional boundaries	Theme 2: Leading in the Middle—Between People and Expectations; supported by Themes 3 and 4	Participants navigated middle leadership through continuing judgment between maintaining relationships and fulfilling professional responsibility. Care, fairness, boundaries, and personal credibility helped them negotiate these demands.	Navigating the Middle; Leading Through Care; Leading Through Example
3. What personal values, leadership practices, and sources of meaning sustain department heads in carrying out their leadership responsibilities?	Empathy; compassion; respect; fairness; modeling; integrity; service; calling; faith; teacher development; learner success	Themes 3, 4, and 5	Participants were sustained by human-centered relationships, credibility earned through action, and purposes extending beyond personal advancement. Seeing others grow gave continuing meaning to leadership.	Leading Through Care; Leading Through Example; Purpose, Faith, and the Growth of Others
4. How do challenges, reflection, and adaptation shape the continuing development of department heads as educational leaders?	Conflict; workload; mistakes; emotional reactions; uncertainty; self-doubt; reflection; learning and unlearning; adaptation; resilience	Theme 6: Shaped by the Storm—Leadership as Becoming; supported by Themes 2 and 5	Difficult experiences became opportunities for reflection and adjustment. Participants described becoming more careful, patient, adaptive, and aware	Leadership as Becoming

			of people through experience.	
5. What is the essence of the lived leadership experiences of department heads as the “wind” or driving force of their respective departments?	Integration of recognition, relationships, responsibility, care, example, purpose, difficulty, reflection, and growth	Themes 1–6 collectively	The essence was not located in one theme. Across the six themes, leadership was understood as a continuing process of moving others forward while the leaders themselves were being shaped by the experience of leading.	The complete Wind Behind Leadership Framework
6. What leadership development program may be proposed based on the lived experiences and leadership needs revealed by the study?	Mentoring; recognition of potential; relational leadership; accountability; care; modeling; purpose; reflection; resilience; knowledge transfer	Themes 1–6 collectively	The combined leadership needs and strengths revealed by the six themes provided the empirical and conceptual basis for the proposed WIND Program.	Wind Behind Leadership Framework → WIND Program

Theme 1. Leadership Found Them Before They Sought It

The first theme, Leadership Found Them Before They Sought It, captures a striking pattern in the narratives: for most participants, becoming a department head was not originally part of a carefully planned career path. Leadership entered their lives through the encouragement, recognition, and, at times, persistent urging of people who saw leadership potential in them before they fully saw it in themselves.

“I did not... dream or plan to be a department head... What I dreamt is to retire and to be a teacher all my life,”

DH1

but recalled that a former principal encouraged her because:

“maybe she sees a potential, a leadership potential in me.”

DH1

DH2 expressed almost the same experience:

“I do not have any plans to become a department head,”

DH2

until a principal pushed her to consider the position and pointed out departmental concerns that she might help address. DH3 also confessed:

“I do not really want to be in a department head. I really love working in a classroom, I really love teaching,”

DH3

yet the encouragement of a former department head and her growing sense of responsibility eventually led her to accept the role. Similar stories were shared by DH5, DH7, and DH8, whose movement toward leadership was influenced by mentors, principals, or former department heads. In these stories, leadership seemed to begin not with ambition, but with being seen. This finding gives weight to the role of recognition and relational support in the formation of a leadership identity.

Contemporary research on middle leadership similarly describes leadership

development as a socially situated process in which professional identity is shaped through relationships, opportunities to exercise influence, and the expectations of others within the school organization (De Nobile, 2023; Lipscombe et al., 2021). Recognition from

significant others can strengthen a person's willingness to claim an identity that was previously uncertain or unimagined; recent identity research likewise shows that perceived recognition can influence confidence, self-belief, and persistence in a developing professional identity (Li & Singh, 2023).

The accounts further reveal that accepting leadership was often accompanied by hesitation rather than immediate confidence. The participants did not present themselves as naturally ambitious individuals waiting for promotion. DH5, for instance, explained that a mentor persuaded her to move from the master teacher position because:

"I have to go up for someone also to go up."

DH5

She later used the image of leaving a door open:

"You have to leave the door open for somebody to come in,"

DH5

suggesting that promotion was understood less as personal advancement and more as creating space for another teacher's growth. DH3 described her acceptance in terms of a call to responsibility:

"When a call is given to you... you have the responsibility to accept it."

DH3

DH7, meanwhile, traced his eventual decision to accumulated experiences as a coach and to a former principal who:

"pushed me to become a department head."

DH7

These narratives resonate with recent scholarship that views middle leaders as professionals whose leadership identity develops gradually from their previous teaching experiences, informal responsibilities, and interactions with senior leaders, rather than beginning only upon formal appointment (De Nobile, 2023; Lipscombe et al., 2021).

Mentoring literature also emphasizes that developmental relationships can help educators reinterpret their own capabilities and imagine professional roles they might not have independently pursued (Mullen & Fallen, 2022). In the Philippine public-school context, this finding is particularly meaningful because the Department of Education's professional standards locate career growth within a continuum of increasing responsibility, collaboration, and leadership practice rather than treating leadership as detached from teachers' earlier professional experiences (Department of Education, 2022). Thus, the participants' hesitation should not be read as an absence of leadership potential. Instead, their stories show how leadership potential sometimes remained quiet until another person named it, trusted it, and gave it room to emerge.

Viewed across the participants, the movement from teacher to department head was therefore not a simple promotion from one position to another. It involved a gradual renegotiation of who they believed themselves to be. DH1 initially wanted to remain a classroom teacher, DH3 continued to describe herself as:

"a teacher by heart,"

DH1

and DH5 admitted that she had:

“never dreamed of managing people.”

DH5

Their attachment to teaching did not disappear when they became leaders; rather, it became part of the foundation from which they learned to lead. This supports the observation of Lipscombe et al. (2021) that middle leaders occupy roles closely connected to teaching while simultaneously taking on broader responsibility for people, curriculum, and school improvement.

Such a transition can create uncertainty because leadership identity is not automatically produced by appointment. It is constructed through experience, interaction, and repeated participation in leadership work. Recent scholarship on school leadership development also stresses the importance of relational and contextual processes in preparing leaders, particularly opportunities for mentoring, professional learning, and supported engagement with authentic leadership responsibilities (Harris & Jones, 2022; Mullen & Fallen, 2022). The participants' stories add a human dimension to this discussion. Before they could fully say, I am a leader, someone else had often communicated, directly or indirectly, you can lead. That external belief became an early push toward a leadership identity they later learned to own.

One thing learned from the shared experience is that the wind behind leadership sometimes begins as the confidence of another person. A mentor's encouragement, a principal's trust, or a former leader's persistent invitation became a quiet but decisive force

that moved these teachers beyond the professional lives they had originally imagined. Leadership, in this sense, found them before they deliberately sought it. Yet the data also show that recognition alone was not enough; the participants still had to make the difficult decision to enter the role, carry its responsibilities, and gradually make sense of themselves as leaders.

Their narratives affirm contemporary views that leadership development is relational and experiential, with professional identity emerging through the interplay of individual agency and the social environment in which leadership is recognized and enacted (De Nobile, 2023; Lipscombe et al., 2021). More importantly, the findings reveal a locally grounded picture of department leadership in which advancement was not narrated mainly through status, authority, or personal ambition. It was narrated through trust, responsibility, and the belief that one could help more people by accepting a wider role. The first wind that moved these department heads, therefore, was not the desire for position. It was the experience of being seen as capable and, eventually, finding the courage and sense of responsibility to become what others had already seen in them.

Viewed in relation to the first research question, this theme explains how entry into middle leadership was shaped strongly by relationships and recognition. For several participants, leadership did not begin with a personal plan to seek authority. It began when principals, mentors, former department heads, or other significant people recognized their potential and encouraged them to take greater responsibility. The experience of being trusted gradually changed how they saw themselves and opened a leadership path that some had initially resisted. Theme 1 therefore connects directly with Recognition and the Call to Lead in the conceptual framework. It also begins to illuminate leadership as becoming, since accepting the position marked only the start of learning how to become the leader others had first believed they could be.

Theme 2. Leading in the Middle- Between People and Expectations

The second theme, Leading in the Middle: Between People and Expectations, reflects the department heads' difficult position between collegial relationships and institutional authority. They remained close to teachers as former peers, friends, and fellow educators, yet their appointment required them to supervise performance, enforce policies, correct practices, and make decisions that were not always welcomed. DH3 described this tension clearly when she spoke of establishing:

“a demarcation line between your role as a department head and your role as a friend.”

DH3

She wanted to remain approachable, but she also recognized that:

“sometimes I need also to sacrifice a collegial relationship once in a while”

DH3

so that she could steer the department toward improvement. DH4 likewise recalled that her early years were difficult:

“especially when dealing with peers,”

DH4

while DH5 explained the uneasiness of supervising people who had once occupied the same professional level:

“You managed people who were your colleagues before. You managed people who were older than you. You manage people who are more experienced than you.”

DH5

These narratives expose a defining feature of middle leadership. Department heads

are not distant administrators; they work within the same professional communities that they are expected to guide. Lipscombe et al. (2021) similarly found that school middle leaders occupy an intermediary position in which they must interpret senior leadership

expectations while preserving productive relationships with teachers. Their work is therefore shaped by role ambiguity, competing loyalties, and the constant negotiation of authority within collegial settings.

This position became more demanding when professional relationships collided with accountability. DH2 recalled considerable resistance from teachers who failed to submit lesson plans or attend departmental meetings. Rather than allowing the resistance to stop her work, she focused her energy on those who remained willing to learn:

“Those teachers, whom I considered as teachable... they are the one whom I give more of my time.”

DH2

DH4 acknowledged that her strict and meticulous approach sometimes intimidated teachers and led to conflict, yet she believed that ignoring poor practices would weaken the department:

“As a leader you cannot just go unnoticed of the wrong practices, you have to inform the teachers.”

DH4

DH5 articulated the tension most directly:

“I value people, and the relationship to me matters,”

DH5

but added:

“I cannot really compromise quality in terms of work.”

DH5

These accounts suggest that relational leadership did not mean avoiding correction or lowering expectations. Instead, participants had to decide when to accommodate, when to persuade, and when to hold their ground. Contemporary middle-leadership scholarship describes this as a central dilemma: middle leaders are expected to build trust and collaboration, but they are also held responsible for implementing standards, improving instruction, and addressing weak performance (De Nobile, 2023; Lipscombe et al., 2021).

In the Philippine setting, this tension is reinforced by the Basic Education Development Plan 2030, which places stronger expectations on school-level leadership for teacher support, instructional quality, accountability, and improvement (Department of Education, 2022).

The transcripts further show that participants responded to this tension in different ways. Some relied on patience and understanding; others emphasized fairness, consistency, professional boundaries, or adherence to rules. DH6 believed that a leader must be “fair and just” in assigning teaching loads and schedules and must remain prepared to accept the consequences of difficult decisions. DH4 argued that consistency and transparency helped teachers understand why certain standards were enforced:

“Even if you are strict, there is a reason for doing that.”

DH4

DH8 stressed that respect was the foundation of cooperation, explaining,

“Respect begets respect. If you respect your teachers, they will respect you as well.”

DH8

The differences among their approaches are analytically important. Middle leadership was not experienced through one fixed style. Participants adjusted their responses according to the people involved, the seriousness of the issue, and the demands of their departmental context.

This supports research describing middle leadership as contextual and relational rather than simply procedural. Harris and Jones (2022) argued that leadership under increasingly complex school conditions requires adaptability, professional trust, and shared responsibility, although such collaboration does not remove the need for clear accountability. The participants’ accounts give this tension a distinctly human form: they wanted teachers to feel supported, but they also knew that avoiding difficult conversations could compromise the department’s work.

A perspective gained from this experience is that the central struggle in this theme was not merely a balance between administrative and instructional duties. It was the more personal question of how to remain close enough to understand teachers while standing far enough away to lead them. The department heads occupied a relational middle space where authority could not be exercised through position alone. It had to be negotiated with people who possessed their own experience, expectations, and professional pride.

Their narratives show that successful middle leadership involved neither complete closeness nor rigid distance. Too much familiarity could weaken authority, but excessive distance could damage trust. The department heads therefore learned to move between compassion and correction, dialogue and decision, collegiality and accountability. In this sense, the “wind behind leadership” included the pressure created by competing

expectations. These pressures were difficult, but they also compelled participants to become more discerning, fair, and deliberate in the way they led.

Taken in relation to the second research question, the participants' experiences show that navigating middle leadership required more than performing administrative and instructional duties. Their challenge was to remain close enough to understand teachers while maintaining sufficient professional distance to supervise, correct, and make decisions. Relationships, authority, resistance, accountability, and administrative expectations therefore became interconnected parts of the same leadership experience. Theme 2 gives meaning to the framework component **Navigating the Middle**, while its connections with Themes 3 and 4 show how care and personal example helped participants manage this difficult position. The “wind” behind leadership was therefore not only what motivated them to lead, but also the judgment that enabled them to continue moving between people and institutional expectations.

Theme 3. Leadership with a Heart- Care as a Way of Leading

The third theme, Leadership with a Heart: Care as a Way of Leading, emerged from the participants' repeated references to compassion, empathy, kindness, respect, and understanding. What was noticeable in their stories was that care was not discussed as an added quality of a good leader; for many of them, it was part of how leadership was actually practiced. DH1 described herself as:

“a leader with a compassion”

DH1

and later expressed her leadership philosophy simply as:

“leadership with a heart.”

DH1

She explained that leadership was not only about

“authority, intellect, or making decisions,” but also about “recognizing the human side of the individual.”

DH1

DH3 was equally direct:

“A leader who cares. That's it. A leader who cares.”

DH3

She even understood her role through a family metaphor, saying,

“I am a mother to all these teachers in the department, and. I am just a grandmother to all the learners.”

DH3

DH7 on the other hand spoke of

“being a kind leader” and the need to “lead with empathy,”

DH7

while DH8 emphasized a basic principle in dealing with teachers:

“Respect begets respect.”

DH8

These words reveal a deeply relational view of leadership. This interpretation is consistent with contemporary work on compassionate leadership, which describes compassion as involving awareness of another person's difficulty, an empathic response, and a willingness to act in ways that provide meaningful support (Ramachandran et al., 2023). Rather than weakening leadership, compassionate practice can strengthen the quality of workplace relationships and people's sense of being valued. The participants' narratives suggest a similar understanding: teachers were first seen as people before they were treated merely as employees expected to complete tasks.

Care, however, did not mean that the department heads ignored standards or avoided difficult decisions. This distinction is important because compassionate leadership can easily be misunderstood as excessive leniency. DH5's account showed this tension when she said:

“I value people, and the relationship to me matters,”

DH5

yet firmly added,

“I cannot really compromise quality in terms of work.”

DH5

DH1 likewise spoke about understanding teachers' personal and family situations while still encouraging them to grow professionally. DH8 explained her approach more personally:

*“Because I push them, I motivate them, I love them, I understand them...
they will find the work lighter.”*

DH8

What emerges here is not permissive leadership but care with purpose.

Ramachandran et al. (2023), in their study of compassionate leadership, similarly cautioned against reducing compassion to kindness alone; compassionate leadership involves an active response to people's needs within the realities of organizational work.

In schools, this relational dimension is especially relevant because teachers' professional engagement is shaped not only by formal structures but also by the support and trust they experience in their working environment. Collie (2021) found that autonomy-supportive leadership and workplace relationships were associated with teachers' well-being and positive professional functioning. Although the participants in the present study did not use such technical terms, their accounts carried a comparable message: teachers were more willing to move when they felt that the person leading them understood where they were coming from.

The human character of their leadership was also evident in the way participants talked about individual differences among teachers. They recognized that teachers did not possess the same strengths, confidence, personal circumstances, or readiness to change. For DH3, caring meant understanding struggling teachers and helping them become more confident. DH1 wanted teachers to remember her as someone who pushed them

while also understanding their family situations. DH7's emphasis on empathy similarly reflected an attempt to see situations from another person's position rather than respond only through authority.

This pattern finds support in broader educational research. Aldrup et al. (2022), in a study, showed that empathy is closely connected with the quality of interpersonal interactions in educational settings, although they also noted that empathy is a complex construct and should not be treated as a simple guarantee of positive outcomes. Similarly, research on compassionate leadership emphasizes that genuine care requires noticing, understanding, and responding rather than merely expressing concern (Ramachandran et al., 2023).

For the department heads in this study, knowing their teachers appeared to matter.

Their leadership decisions were often filtered through an awareness that behind incomplete work, resistance, or professional difficulty was a person with a particular story. This does not mean that every problem was excused. Instead, understanding the person seemed to influence how the problem was approached.

In hindsight, the participants' stories challenge the idea that effective leadership must always be firm, distant, and emotionally detached. Their accounts suggest that, within the departmental setting, care itself became a way of leading. A teacher who felt respected could be easier to approach; a struggling teacher who felt supported could regain confidence; and a teacher who felt understood might become more willing to carry a difficult task. Yet the transcripts also show that care worked best when joined with direction, standards, and professional responsibility.

This is where the theme gains its deeper meaning. The “heart” in leadership was not simply softness. It was the department heads' effort to hold together two realities: the work must be done, but the person doing the work must not be forgotten.

In the context of school in focus, this human-centered way of leading appears to be one of the winds that sustained relationships and helped department heads influence teachers without relying solely on positional authority.

This theme contributes particularly to the second and third research questions by showing that the participants navigated relationships through empathy, compassion, respect, fairness, and understanding while still expecting teachers to fulfill their responsibilities. Their accounts suggest that care was not simply a personal trait added to leadership; it became part of how leadership was practiced. At the same time, care did not remove accountability. This balance gives substance to Leading Through Care in the conceptual framework and helps explain one of the personal values and practices that sustained the participants' influence. Within the wider meaning of the “wind behind leadership,” care became a relational force that allowed department heads to move people without losing sight of the person behind the work.

Theme 4. Walking the Talk—Leadership Earns Influence Through Example

The fourth theme, Walking the Talk: Leadership Earns Influence Through Example, reflects the participants' belief that the title of department head alone was not enough to make teachers follow. Across the interviews, leadership credibility was closely tied to visible action. DH2 expressed this directly when she advised future leaders to:

“walk the talk so that your teachers would really follow.”

DH2

DH4 held a similar view:

“I am not only telling them what to do, but I am showing them how to do it.”

DH4

She illustrated this in a very ordinary but meaningful way:

“If you want to have clean surroundings, so take the broom and start cleaning.”

DH4

DH6 described her philosophy as

“leadership is leading by doing” and added *“You must be the first one to do it.”*

DH6

DH7 likewise explained:

“I’m not only a leader, but also a follower,”

DH7

emphasizing that when he gave instructions, he also showed teachers how the task could be done. What connects these accounts is a practical understanding of leadership: before expecting action from teachers, the leader must be willing to act.

This is particularly relevant to middle leadership, where formal authority may be less important than professional credibility and influence. Lipscombe et al. (2021) observed that middle leaders influence school improvement largely through their close work with teachers, professional relationships, and knowledge of practice. De Nobile (2021) similarly argued that middle leadership is enacted through everyday interactions and influence rather than through hierarchical authority alone. The participants' repeated emphasis on example therefore appears less like a leadership slogan and more like a strategy for earning the right to lead.

The transcripts also suggest that modeling was closely connected with competence and consistency. DH4 did not simply expect teachers to meet standards; she believed that she had to demonstrate the same discipline she demanded from them. DH6 spoke of being the first to carry out a task, while DH7 shared an instance when he personally handled two classes because teachers were on official travel. These small acts mattered because teachers could see that their department head understood the actual work being asked of them. In this sense, leadership became embodied in everyday practice.

Research on school middle leadership supports this interpretation. Middle leaders often retain strong connections with classroom practice, and their credibility may depend on whether colleagues perceive them as knowledgeable, accessible, and professionally capable (Lipscombe et al., 2021). Recent research on educational leadership also continues to stress the importance of leaders creating trust and professional coherence through consistent practices rather than relying only on formal directives (Harris & Jones, 2022).

In the Philippine context, this idea is compatible with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads, which emphasize professional reflection, personal and professional effectiveness, and the modeling of ethical leadership practice (Department of Education, 2020). Although the participants did not explicitly refer to leadership standards during the interviews, their stories reflected a similar expectation: a leader should personally demonstrate the behavior, commitment, and work ethic expected from others.

A closer reading of the narratives, however, shows that leading by example was not merely about working harder than everyone else. It was also about reducing the distance between the leader and the people being led. When DH7 took over classes, or when DH4 spoke of taking the broom herself, these actions communicated that some tasks were not beneath the department head. Such behavior appeared to make leadership more visible and believable. This is important because department heads occupy a particularly sensitive position; they supervise teachers while remaining closely connected to the same instructional work.

Contemporary discussions of distributed and middle leadership emphasize that influence develops through participation, expertise, and relational trust within the professional community (Harris & Jones, 2022; Lipscombe et al., 2021). The participants' experiences add a more grounded meaning to this argument. Teachers were not simply asked to follow instructions from an office. They saw their leaders participate, demonstrate, and sometimes carry the same burden. For the researcher, this suggests that example became a form of leadership communication. The department heads' actions silently told teachers, I understand this work because I am willing to do it with you.

Viewed as part of the “wind behind leadership,” walking the talk reveals how the participants converted positional authority into personal influence. Their accounts suggest that leadership became credible when words and actions were aligned. A title may have given them responsibility for the department, but it did not automatically secure teachers' trust or cooperation. These had to be developed through consistent and visible practice. The participants seemed aware, perhaps from experience, that teachers closely observe the person who asks them to perform, improve, or sacrifice.

For this reason, they tried to lead from the front, not simply direct from above. This finding supports the view that middle leadership is deeply practice-based and relational, with influence emerging from what leaders repeatedly do within the everyday life of the school (De Nobile, 2023; Lipscombe et al., 2021). In the experiences of the department heads, the principle was remarkably simple: if they wanted teachers to move, they first had to show that they were willing to move themselves. Their example became another wind—quiet, visible, and strong enough to invite others to follow.

Theme 4 further answers the third research question by showing how leadership practice itself became a source of professional influence. Participants described credibility as something demonstrated through work, consistency, willingness to participate, and the practice of showing others what they expected them to do. Their accounts suggest that positional authority alone was insufficient to gain genuine followership. Instead, leadership became credible when expectations were visible in the leader's own behavior. This theme directly supports Leading Through Example in the conceptual framework and complements Theme 3: while care strengthened relationships, example strengthened professional trust. Together, these practices show that the participants' influence was sustained not simply by the position they occupied, but by how leadership was enacted in everyday work.

Theme 5. Keeping the Wind—Purpose, Faith, and the Growth of Others

The fifth theme, Keeping the Wind: Purpose, Faith, and the Growth of Others, reflects what seemed to sustain the participants when leadership became tiring, demanding, or personally difficult. Their narratives suggest that they did not remain in leadership simply because of position or career advancement. Instead, they repeatedly found meaning

in service and in seeing teachers and learners move forward. DH1 eventually described leadership as “*a calling*” and explained:

“We work not for the praises and not expecting any return.”

DH1

For her, what mattered was being able to say:

“damu na impart kag nabuligan” (I have shared what I know and helped many people).

DH1

DH3 found a similar source of motivation in the growth of struggling teachers:

“Every time I see this teacher, this struggling teacher, trying to become more confident because of me, that keeps me going.”

DH3

DH4 spoke proudly of students who received scholarships through the special programs, while DH6 found fulfillment when night-class learners progressed, earned honors, and entered the STEM strand.

These accounts show that purpose was made visible through other people's growth.

This interpretation is consistent with middle leadership scholarship, which identifies teacher development, instructional improvement, and the building of professional capacity as central contributions of middle leaders (Lipscombe et al., 2021). De Nobile (2021) likewise explains that the work of middle leaders is closely tied to influencing and supporting others within their immediate professional setting. In the participants' stories, however, this influence was also personal. Seeing another teacher gain confidence or a learner succeed appeared to reassure them that the difficulties of leadership were worth carrying.

Faith and personal conviction also emerged as quieter sources of strength. DH1 spoke of prayer as part of facing difficult situations. DH7 refers to God's guidance in his leadership journey, while DH8 reduced her response to overwhelming moments to three simple words:

“Pause and pray.”

DH8

For these participants, faith seemed to provide a private space for reflection, patience, and renewed courage when immediate solutions were not clear. This finding should be interpreted carefully. The data do not suggest that faith removed organizational problems or replaced practical decision-making. Rather, it appeared to function as one personal resource among the different ways participants made sense of pressure.

Research on school-leader resilience increasingly argues that resilience develops through the interaction of personal resources, relationships, and contextual supports rather than through individual toughness alone (Daniëls et al., 2021). Harris and Jones (2022) similarly noted that leadership during periods of uncertainty demands emotional and adaptive capacity as leaders continue to support others while dealing with their own pressures. The participants' references to prayer add a culturally meaningful layer to this discussion. In their lived experience, sustaining leadership sometimes involved acknowledging that not every burden could be managed through technical competence alone.

The participants were also clear that staying in leadership was not always easy. DH5 admitted:

“There were instances when leaving the position is easier than staying.”

DH5

This statement is important because it prevents the theme from becoming an overly idealized account of dedication. The department heads experienced fatigue, resistance, disappointment, and moments of doubt. Yet they repeatedly returned to people as a reason for continuing. DH8 was inspired by teachers who accepted difficult tasks without complaint, saying:

“That gives me an inspiration to do my duty well.”

DH8

DH3 drew strength from the confidence gained by struggling teachers, while DH4 saw meaning in the achievements of students whose talents had been developed through the programs she led. Their experiences echo broader evidence that school leadership is

sustained not only by formal preparation but also by relational and professional resources that help leaders maintain commitment under pressure (Harris & Jones, 2022). More specifically, the study of Lipscombe et al. (2021) shows that middle leaders' work is strongly connected with developing teachers and influencing practice.

The present findings extend this idea by showing the reverse relationship as well: while department heads helped teachers grow, witnessing that growth also helped sustain the department heads themselves. Leadership influence, therefore, appeared to move in both directions. An important insight to note from these narratives is that the “wind” that kept these department heads moving was renewed whenever they saw evidence that their work mattered. A teacher becoming more confident, a colleague receiving promotion, a learner earning a scholarship, or a night-class student succeeding academically became more than an accomplishment. These experiences gave meaning to leadership. This is perhaps why the participants rarely spoke of personal recognition as their strongest source of motivation. Their attention repeatedly shifted to the growth of others.

The finding is consistent with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads, which positions leadership around developing people, building professional capacity, and improving learner outcomes (Department of Education, 2020). Yet the transcripts give these formal expectations a more human meaning. The participants stayed not because leadership was always rewarding, but because, at certain moments, they could see the result of their staying. Purpose, faith, and the growth of others became sustaining winds—reasons to continue when leaving might have been easier.

Viewed against the third research question, Theme 5 explains why participants continued carrying leadership responsibilities even when the role became tiring or discouraging. Service, calling, faith for some participants, teacher development, learner success, and the professional growth of others gave the work a meaning that extended beyond personal advancement. These experiences formed the framework component Purpose, Faith, and the Growth of Others. The theme also contributes to understanding the wider “wind behind leadership” because the growth of others appeared to renew the participants' own reasons for continuing. Importantly, faith was not interpreted as a universal experience; rather, it formed one part of a wider pattern of purpose and meaning among those participants who identified it as significant.

Theme 6. Shaped by the Storm-Leadership as Becoming

The sixth theme, Shaped by the Storm: Leadership as Becoming, reflects how the department heads were gradually changed by the demands of leadership. Their accounts did not describe leadership as a quality they already possessed in complete form when they assumed the position. Rather, they learned while already carrying the responsibility to lead.

DH3 and DH8 described their journey as:

“a roller coaster ride,”

DH3 and DH8

while DH4 compared hers to:

“a mountain... climb.”

DH4

DH1 admitted that she had once been more emotional in responding to problems but had eventually learned to develop and associated change to “*prudence*”. She uttered:

“to pause and think,”

DH1

DH4 was equally open about her limitations:

"I have my imperfections and I reflect on my practices."

DH4

She further acknowledged the need

"to relearned and unlearned."

DH4

These statements show that leadership growth did not happen apart from difficulty. In many instances, it was the difficulty itself that forced participants to reconsider their reactions, assumptions, and ways of dealing with people. This finding agrees with Daniëls et al. (2021), who emphasized that educational leadership development is shaped by professional experience, learning, and the context in which leadership is practiced. Middle leaders, in particular, develop within complex roles where instructional, relational, and organizational demands continually intersect (Lipscombe et al., 2021). The participants' stories make this process more visible: they did not first become fully prepared leaders and then face challenges; they became leaders partly because they had to face them.

Reflection appeared to be an important part of this becoming. The participants spoke of recognizing mistakes, adjusting their approaches, and learning that one way of leading would not work for every person or situation.

DH4 described her leadership as:

"a learning opportunity...adaptive and progressive"

DH4

DH8, on the other hand, recalled her earlier uncertainty:

"Before I thought I can't handle those challenges."

DH8

Yet after years of dealing with teachers and leadership demands, she came to a different understanding of herself:

"I am already empowered."

DH8

The change in DH8's self-perception is particularly meaningful. Her challenges did not disappear; rather, her belief in her ability to respond to them changed.

Contemporary leadership scholarship views professional learning as more than the acquisition of techniques. It also involves changes in how leaders understand their role, exercise judgment, and respond to unfamiliar situations (Daniëls et al., 2021). Harris and Jones (2022) likewise argue that uncertain educational conditions require leaders to adapt rather than depend on fixed responses. This is especially relevant in Philippine basic education, where school leaders and middle leaders continue to work within changing curricular, instructional, and accountability demands under the Basic Education Development Plan 2030 (Department of Education, 2022). In the present study, reflection seemed to help participants turn experience into learning. They looked back, reconsidered, and moved differently the next time.

Still, the findings should not romanticize hardship as if every difficult experience automatically produces a stronger leader. The transcripts contained frustration, conflict, emotional reactions, and moments of self-doubt.

What appeared to make a difference was the participants' willingness to examine these experiences and make adjustments. DH1 learned to pause before reacting. DH4 spoke of unlearning practices. DH8 developed a stronger sense of personal capacity. These are small but significant shifts in leadership identity. Lipscombe et al. (2021) noted that middle leaders frequently work within ambiguous and demanding conditions, while Daniëls et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of situated and continuous leadership development.

The Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads also places reflection and continuing professional development within the broader expectation of personal and professional effectiveness (DepEd, 2020). Although the participants were department heads rather than school heads, the principle is relevant to their experiences. Leadership growth was not merely the accumulation of years in the position. Experience became developmental when participants were able to question themselves, learn from what had happened, and change the way they led.

Reading of their stories, the storms of leadership were therefore more than obstacles that the participants simply survived. Some experiences unsettled them. Others exposed personal limitations or forced them to make decisions they would once have avoided. Yet, over time, these encounters shaped a more reflective, adaptable, and grounded understanding of leadership. This is why leadership as becoming best captures the theme. The participants were still learning, even after many years as department heads. Their narratives did not suggest arrival at a final or perfect form of leadership. Instead, they revealed an unfinished process of learning, unlearning, adjusting, and continuing. Within the metaphor of the study, not all winds pushed gently from behind. Some came as storms. But it was often while moving through these storms that the department heads discovered what they could carry, what they needed to change, and the kind of leader they were gradually becoming.

Theme 6 provides the clearest response to the fourth research question. Participants' accounts of mistakes, pressure, self-doubt, emotional reactions, reflection, learning, unlearning, and adaptation showed that challenges did more than test their ability to endure. Difficult experiences gradually changed how they understood people, made decisions, responded to problems, and understood themselves as leaders. The theme therefore gives meaning to Leadership as Becoming in the conceptual framework. It also contributes directly to the fifth research question because the deeper essence of the participants' experience was not leadership as a completed state, but leadership as an unfinished process of formation. The storms of leadership did not automatically produce growth; rather, growth occurred as participants reflected on experience and allowed those experiences to change the way they led.

Summary of the Emergent Themes

The six themes were best understood not as separate findings but as connected dimensions of the department heads' leadership experiences. Theme 1 showed where the leadership journey often began: through recognition, trust, encouragement, and the eventual acceptance of responsibility. Theme 2 then revealed the difficult position that participants entered when they became leaders. They had to work between teachers and administration, relationships and authority, understanding and accountability. Themes 3 and 4 showed two important ways through which they learned to exercise influence within this middle space. They led through care for people, but they also understood that credibility had to be demonstrated through their own actions.

Theme 5 moved the interpretation from how leadership was practiced to why participants continued to practice it despite difficulty. Service, faith for some, commitment to teachers, and the growth of learners and colleagues provided meaning beyond the formal position. Theme 6, however, showed that continuing to lead did not leave the participants unchanged. Conflict, pressure, mistakes, uncertainty, and difficult decisions became experiences from which they reflected, adjusted, learned, and sometimes unlearned earlier ways of leading. In this sense, leadership development occurred while leadership was already being practiced.

Viewed together, the themes provide complementary responses to the first four research questions. Recognition and relationships influenced entry into leadership; middle-position tensions defined many of its demands; care, example, purpose, and service helped sustain leadership practice; and difficulty, reflection, and adaptation contributed to continuing development. These relationships should not be interpreted as a fixed sequence through which every participant passed in exactly the same manner. Rather, they represent an interpretive movement

across the shared accounts, with different dimensions becoming more or less visible depending on the participant and leadership situation.

The fifth research question brought these separate dimensions together by asking for the essence of the experience. Across the six themes, leadership appeared as **becoming** rather than simply being. Department heads moved other people forward, yet they were also being shaped by those they led, by the responsibilities they carried, by the purposes that sustained them, and by the difficulties they encountered. This interpretation is consistent with the analytic record, where the cross-theme synthesis was described as a continuing process in which participants moved others forward while themselves being shaped by trust, relationships, responsibility, purpose, and difficulty.

Eidetic Insight. The Wind Behind Leadership: A Convergence of Forces

The stories of the department heads reveal that the essence of their leadership lies not in the position they hold, but in the continuing decision to move people forward while being changed by the experience of leading them. For many, leadership was not initially sought. It began when another person recognized their potential and entrusted them with a responsibility they had not fully imagined for themselves. Yet accepting the position was only the beginning. The deeper experience of becoming a leader took place in the everyday realities of dealing with teachers, making difficult decisions, protecting relationships, maintaining standards, and carrying expectations from both above and below.

At the heart of their experiences is a persistent tension. The department head must be close enough to understand teachers, yet firm enough to correct them. The leader must care but cannot allow care to become an excuse for poor performance. The leader must give direction but must also be willing to do the work being asked of others. This is why the participants repeatedly spoke of compassion, respect, fairness, and “walking the talk.” Their leadership gained meaning not from authority alone, but from the credibility they built through visible action and genuine concern for people. They led from the middle, but they did not remain still in the middle; they learned how to move between being a colleague and a supervisor, between listening and deciding, and between understanding and demanding what was necessary.

What kept them moving was equally human. It was often the growth of another person. A struggling teacher becoming confident, a teacher earning a promotion, a learner receiving a scholarship, or a night-class student succeeding became quiet evidence that their leadership had mattered. Faith, personal conviction, and a sense of calling also gave some participants strength when leadership became difficult. Their resilience, however, should not be understood as simply being strong. The transcripts show tiredness, doubt, conflict, and moments when leaving seemed easier. They continued because they repeatedly found a reason to continue. In helping others grow, they rediscovered the purpose of their own leadership.

Thus, the “wind behind leadership” is not a single force. It is the convergence of being trusted, caring for people, carrying responsibility, leading by example, finding purpose in the growth of others, and learning through difficulty. Some winds pushed the department heads toward leadership; others sustained them. Still others came as storms that challenged and reshaped them. The essence of their lived experience is therefore found in leadership as becoming—a continuous process in which leaders move others forward while they themselves are being formed by the people, pressures, and purposes they encounter.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the summary of the findings including the conclusions drawn from the detailed analysis on the individual interviews with eight (8) participants. Lastly, a set of recommendations based on the findings and conclusions are also presented in this chapter.

Summary of Findings

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of secondary school department heads at a large public secondary school in Bacolod City and sought to understand the deeper forces that influence, sustain, and

shape their leadership. Through the participants' narratives, leadership emerged as more than a formal position or a set of administrative and instructional duties. Their stories revealed the personal, relational, and sometimes difficult realities of leading people while responding to the expectations of the school. Using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis, six themes were drawn from the shared patterns of meaning in the participants' experiences.

The first theme, Leadership Found Them Before They Sought It, revealed that leadership was not originally a planned career destination for several participants. Some wanted to remain classroom teachers, while others had not imagined themselves managing people or occupying a formal leadership position. Their movement into leadership was often influenced by principals, mentors, and former department heads who recognized their potential and encouraged them to take greater responsibility. What began as hesitation gradually became acceptance. The findings suggest that leadership identity may begin through the recognition and trust of others before individuals fully recognize themselves as leaders. For the participants, the first push toward leadership was not mainly ambition or the desire for position. It was often the experience of being trusted and being made to believe that they could contribute beyond their own classrooms.

The second theme, Leading in the Middle: Between People and Expectations, captured the unique tension experienced by department heads as middle leaders. They remained close to teachers as colleagues and, in some cases, friends, but were also expected to supervise, evaluate, correct, and uphold departmental standards. This position was not always comfortable. The participants encountered resistance, differences in personalities, varying levels of teacher competence, and situations where professional relationships had to be weighed against accountability. Their experiences showed that department leadership required continuous judgment. They had to know when to listen, when to understand, and when to make a firm decision. Leadership in the middle, therefore, was not simply about balancing administrative and instructional tasks. More deeply, it involved learning how to preserve human relationships without losing sight of professional responsibility.

The third theme, Leadership with a Heart: Care as a Way of Leading, showed that compassion, empathy, respect, and understanding were central to how the participants related with their teachers. Care was not viewed as separate from leadership. It was part of leadership itself. The department heads recognized that teachers had different strengths, limitations, family situations, and personal struggles. Knowing these realities influenced how they communicated, corrected, motivated, and supported their teachers. At the same time, care did not mean abandoning standards. The participants still expected quality work and professional responsibility. What became clear from their narratives was a form of leadership that tried to see the person behind the task. The findings suggest that the participants gained influence not only because they occupied a higher position, but because teachers could feel that they were respected and understood.

The fourth theme, Walking the Talk: Leadership Earns Influence Through Example, reflected the participants' strong belief that leadership credibility must be demonstrated through action. They repeatedly spoke about leading by doing, being the first to act, and showing teachers how a task should be performed. For them, giving instructions was not enough. A department head had to model the discipline, work ethic, and commitment expected from others. Their narratives showed that positional authority could require compliance, but personal example encouraged genuine followership. In the everyday work of the department, simple actions became important expressions of leadership. By carrying responsibilities alongside teachers and demonstrating their willingness to do difficult work, the participants gradually earned professional trust and influence.

The fifth theme, Keeping the Wind: Purpose, Faith, and the Growth of Others, revealed the forces that helped participants remain committed despite the pressures of leadership. The participants experienced tiredness, disappointment, resistance, and moments of doubt. For some, leaving the position had even seemed easier than staying. Yet they repeatedly found meaning in the growth of teachers and learners. A struggling teacher gaining confidence, a colleague receiving a promotion, a student earning a scholarship, or a learner succeeding academically became evidence that their work had value. Faith and prayer also provided personal strength for some participants during difficult situations. The findings showed that the department heads were sustained by reasons that extended beyond themselves. In helping others move forward, they found renewed purpose to continue leading.

The sixth theme, Shaped by the Storm: Leadership as Becoming, revealed that leadership identity was gradually formed through difficulty, reflection, and adaptation. Participants described their journeys as a “roller coaster” and a difficult climb. They admitted mistakes, emotional reactions, uncertainty, and personal limitations. Over time, however, these experiences taught them to pause, become more prudent, set boundaries, adjust their approaches, and understand people differently. Their challenges did not simply test their leadership; they changed the way they led. Resilience, therefore, was not merely the ability to endure pressure. It was visible in the participants' willingness to learn, unlearn, reflect, and continue becoming better leaders through experience.

All in all, the findings reveal that the wind behind leadership is formed by several interacting forces. Recognition and trust initially moved some participants toward leadership. Relationships taught them how to lead people. Care gave a human face to their authority, while personal example strengthened their credibility. Purpose, faith, and the growth of others sustained them when leadership became difficult. Challenges, meanwhile, gradually reshaped their understanding of themselves and their roles. These experiences show that department leadership is deeply lived. It develops in ordinary encounters with teachers, difficult decisions, moments of doubt, small achievements, and the continuing responsibility of helping others move forward.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the essence of leadership among the department heads of the school in focus of the study lies in becoming a leader through and with other people. Their leadership was not fully formed when they received their appointments. A title gave them a position, but experience taught them how to carry it. They became leaders through the trust placed in them, the teachers they struggled to understand, the standards they had to protect, the mistakes they reflected upon, and the people whose growth gave meaning to their work.

Also, the findings challenge the view of leadership as mainly an exercise of authority. The participants rarely defined themselves through power or rank. Instead, they spoke about responsibility, care, example, service, and the growth of others. Their stories suggest that a department head's influence becomes stronger when teachers see consistency between what the leader says and does and when professional expectations are accompanied by genuine human understanding. In this sense, leadership with a heart is not a weak form of leadership. It demands the difficult ability to care for people while still making decisions that may be uncomfortable but necessary.

Further, the study concludes that the position of a department head carries a distinct leadership reality. Department heads stand in a difficult middle space. They are close enough to teachers to understand their struggles but are also accountable for their performance. They receive expectations from school administration and higher offices while translating these demands into actual departmental work. This position creates tension, but it is also where much of their leadership takes place. Their effectiveness depends largely on how they negotiate relationships, professional standards, and institutional demands without losing their sense of purpose.

The significance of these findings becomes more apparent in light of continuing changes in the organizational and career structure of the Department of Education. As formal middle-leadership positions are reconsidered, reclassified, or reorganized, the experiences of the participants raise an important concern regarding the continuity of leadership functions at the departmental level. The findings show that mentoring teachers, coordinating instructional work, addressing professional concerns, and translating administrative expectations into daily practice are not merely attached to a position title. These are necessary leadership functions, particularly in a large and complex school such as the school in focus. Middle leadership research likewise recognizes that leadership may be carried through formal and informal roles and through the professional influence of individuals positioned close to classroom practice (Lipscombe et al., 2021). Thus, even when organizational structures change, the need for middle leadership may remain. The challenge for schools is to ensure that the leadership knowledge, relationships, and practices developed by experienced department heads are not lost during organizational transition.

Perhaps the deepest finding of the study is that the department heads were sustained by seeing others move forward. Their stories repeatedly returned to teachers who became confident, colleagues who were promoted, students who succeeded, and departments that improved. These moments gave them reasons to continue even

when leadership became tiring. Their resilience was therefore not simply personal toughness. It was closely tied to meaning. They continued because they could see that their presence, decisions, and efforts had made a difference in another person's journey.

Thus, the “wind behind leadership” is best understood as a deeply human and continuing force created by trust, relationships, service, purpose, and lived experience. At times, this wind gently encouraged the participants through the support of mentors and teachers. At other times, it came as resistance, pressure, and uncertainty. Both kinds of wind mattered. The supportive winds gave them strength, while the difficult winds shaped them.

Altogether, the department heads' stories reveal a simple but profound truth: leadership is not only about moving people toward a goal. It is also about what happens to the leader while trying to move others forward. In caring, deciding, struggling, reflecting, and continuing, the participants themselves were changed. This continuing process of being moved, tested, and formed captures the essence of their lived leadership. The wind behind leadership is, therefore, the meaning leaders find in carrying others forward—and the person they gradually become while doing so.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are offered.

The school in focus of the research should develop a more intentional mentoring and leadership development program for department heads and potential future leaders. The findings showed that several participants did not initially plan to become department heads. Instead, their leadership potential was first recognized by principals, mentors, and former leaders. Leadership preparation, therefore, may begin even before formal appointment through mentoring, coaching, shadowing, and opportunities to handle school or departmental responsibilities. This is consistent with the view that middle leadership develops through experience, professional relationships, and meaningful opportunities to lead (De Nobile, 2021; Lipscombe et al., 2021).

Also, the school administration may also provide regular professional support specifically for department heads as middle leaders. Their position places them between teachers and senior administrators, requiring them to maintain relationships while also ensuring accountability and quality of work. Leadership consultations, peer-sharing sessions, and reflective discussions may provide a safe professional space where department heads can discuss actual problems and learn from one another. Such support is important because middle leaders often experience competing expectations and relational pressures that are distinct from those encountered by classroom teachers or school principals (Lipscombe et al., 2021).

Likewise, leadership development programs should also give greater attention to the human and relational aspects of leadership. The participants repeatedly spoke of compassion, empathy, respect, fairness, and understanding. At the same time, they recognized the need to maintain professional standards. Training on conflict management, difficult conversations, mentoring, emotional awareness, and managing former peers may therefore be useful. These areas may help department heads lead with care without compromising their responsibility for instructional and departmental performance.

Further, the study recommends strengthening leadership by example and teacher development within each department. The participants believed that credibility was earned by “walking the talk” and showing willingness to perform the work expected of others. They also found meaning in seeing teachers improve, gain confidence, and receive promotion. Department heads may therefore be supported in providing regular mentoring, professional growth conversations, and career guidance to teachers. Middle leaders play an important role in developing teacher capacity because of their close connection to classroom practice and professional learning (Lipscombe et al., 2021).

Furthermore, attention should likewise be given to the well-being and reflective growth of department heads. The findings revealed experiences of fatigue, resistance, pressure, and moments of doubt. Their resilience should not be interpreted to mean that they can continually carry these demands without support. Regular reflective sessions, peer-support mechanisms, and reasonable reviews of leadership workload may help department heads

sustain their effectiveness. Leadership capacity is shaped not only by personal strength but also by the professional and organizational support available to leaders (Daniëls et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, the Department of Education and the Schools Division Office may consider more focused development programs for department heads as a distinct group of middle leaders. While leadership initiatives often emphasize principals and school heads, department heads directly support teachers, supervise instruction, and translate school and policy expectations into departmental practice. Programs designed around instructional supervision, mentoring, teacher development, conflict management, and adaptive leadership may better respond to the realities of their work. This recommendation supports the continuing emphasis of the Basic Education Development Plan 2030 on leadership capacity and human resource development (Department of Education, 2022).

Future researchers may extend this study by examining the lived experiences of department heads and other middle leaders across several public secondary schools, school divisions, and regions. Including schools that differ in size, location, organizational structure, and learner population may help determine which aspects of the Wind Behind Leadership Framework remain meaningful across different educational contexts and which may require modification. Studies involving newly appointed leaders, highly experienced middle leaders, master teachers, learning area coordinators, and teacher leaders may also provide useful comparisons, particularly as formal leadership arrangements within DepEd continue to evolve.

Further inquiry may focus more closely on specific dimensions identified in the present study, such as leadership recognition, mentoring, compassionate leadership, leadership credibility, faith and professional purpose, resilience, adaptation, and middle-leader identity development. Longitudinal studies may also follow emerging leaders over time to examine how leadership identity changes as they gain responsibility and experience. Once the WIND Program has been piloted, future researchers may evaluate its implementation, participant outcomes, mentoring processes, and sustainability across different schools. Such studies should not attempt to prove that the framework is universally applicable; rather, they may examine its transferability, contextual relevance, conceptual usefulness, and possible refinement in other educational settings. Future studies may also examine whether the Wind Behind Leadership Framework and the six-theme structure remain meaningful across different school, division, and regional contexts.

Finally, in view of the findings and the continuing changes in the DepEd organizational and career structure, the researcher recommends the pilot implementation of the WIND Program as a contextualized leadership-development, continuity, and knowledge-transfer mechanism in the school in focus. Rather than limiting the program to formally designated department heads, participation may include master teachers, subject area coordinators, subject group leaders, teacher leaders, and other personnel who currently perform or may later assume instructional and people-leadership functions. Experienced department heads may serve as mentors so that leadership knowledge developed through years of dealing with people, instruction, accountability, and organizational change can be passed on to emerging leaders. The program may focus on leadership-potential recognition, navigating middle leadership, compassionate but accountable practice, leading by example, mentoring and people development, and reflective and adaptive leadership. These areas correspond directly with the six themes identified in the study.

Before full institutional adoption, the proposed WIND Program may initially be implemented on a pilot basis among a manageable group of current and emerging middle leaders in the research locale. The pilot implementation may provide an opportunity to determine the feasibility, relevance, and usefulness of the program activities within the actual school setting. It may be evaluated using participation records, pre- and post-program leadership competency measures, mentoring and reflection outputs, knowledge-transfer documentation, and participant feedback. Results of the pilot may be used to identify necessary adjustments in the learning areas, mentoring arrangements, implementation schedule, resources, and evaluation procedures before the program is considered for wider implementation.

The pilot implementation of the WIND Program may also be evaluated using measurable indicators aligned with its objectives. Evaluation may consider mentoring participation and completion, leadership competency development, reflective outputs, knowledge-transfer activities, individual leadership growth plans, and feedback

from current and emerging leaders. Baseline and post-program assessments may be used where appropriate to identify perceived changes in targeted leadership competencies. Findings from the evaluation may serve as the basis for refining the program and determining its readiness for broader or continuing implementation.

PROPOSED MENTORING AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

WIND Program: Windward Initiative Nurturing and Development Program for Middle Leaders

Basis of the Program

The WIND Program was developed from the six themes drawn from the lived experiences of the department heads. The findings showed that leadership did not develop from formal appointment alone. For many participants, it began when principals, mentors, or former leaders recognized their potential and encouraged them to take greater responsibility. As they entered leadership, they had to learn how to work between teachers and administrators, manage relationships, maintain professional standards, care for people, model expected practices, and remain committed despite pressure and uncertainty. Their experiences also showed that leadership continued to change them through reflection, adjustment, and learning from difficult situations.

These experiences provided a clear basis for the program. Leadership Found Them Before They Sought It pointed to the need for leadership recognition, mentoring, and guided exposure. Leading in the Middle—Between People and Expectations revealed the need to prepare leaders for relational tensions, accountability, decision-making, and organizational change. Leadership with a Heart—Care as a Way of Leading emphasized empathy, fairness, respect, and care with accountability. Walking the Talk—Leadership Earns Influence Through Example highlighted credibility and modeling. Keeping the Wind—Purpose, Faith, and the Growth of Others showed the importance of mentoring, purpose, service, and developing other people. Finally, Shaped by the Storm—Leadership as Becoming pointed to reflection, adaptation, resilience, and continued leadership growth. These thematic connections are consistent with the study's analytic record, which shows that the proposed program was deliberately developed from the six themes and the leadership needs identified from the participants' experiences.

The program is also relevant to the continuing changes in the DepEd organizational and career structure. Even when formal positions or leadership arrangements change, schools continue to need personnel who can mentor teachers, coordinate instructional work, address professional concerns, manage relationships, and translate organizational expectations into everyday school practice. The experiences of the department heads therefore represent leadership knowledge that should not simply disappear when positions are reorganized. WIND provides a mechanism through which this knowledge may be transferred to master teachers, learning area coordinators, subject group leaders, teacher leaders, and other personnel who may assume middle-leadership functions in the future.

Rationale

The findings of the study showed that middle leadership develops through experience, relationships, mentoring, actual practice, and reflection. The department heads did not describe leadership as something that was completely learned before they assumed their positions. Instead, they learned while leading. They faced former peers, different personalities, resistance, demanding workloads, changing expectations, and difficult decisions. At the same time, they learned to listen, care, set boundaries, model good practice, mentor others, and find meaning in seeing teachers and learners grow. These experiences suggest that leadership development should provide more than formal training. Emerging leaders need opportunities to observe leadership, practice it in real situations, receive mentoring, reflect on their experiences, and learn from people who have already carried similar responsibilities.

For this reason, WIND is proposed as a school-based mentoring, leadership-development, leadership-continuity, and knowledge-transfer program. It recognizes that experienced department heads possess practical leadership knowledge that can complement formal professional-development activities. Through mentoring, shadowing, case conversations, reflective exercises, peer dialogue, leadership practice, and knowledge sharing, the program

seeks to provide current and emerging middle leaders with opportunities to learn leadership within the realities of school work. The program is not intended to replace existing DepEd leadership-development initiatives. Instead, it provides a contextualized mechanism through which the leadership lessons identified in this study may be preserved, shared, and further developed as organizational structures continue to change.

Description of the Program

The Windward Initiative Nurturing and Development Program for Middle Leaders (WIND) is a contextualized school-based program designed for personnel who currently perform or may eventually assume instructional and people-leadership responsibilities. Participants may include experienced department heads, master teachers, learning area or subject coordinators, subject group leaders, teacher leaders, and other personnel identified by the school as having emerging leadership potential. Experienced leaders will serve not simply as resource speakers but, where appropriate, as mentors who can share the practical judgment, experiences, and lessons developed through actual leadership practice.

The program consists of six interconnected learning areas derived directly from the themes of the study: Leadership Potential and Mentoring; Navigating Middle Leadership and Transition; Human-Centered and Compassionate Leadership; Credible and Exemplary Leadership; Purpose, Mentoring, and People Development; and Reflective, Adaptive, and Resilient Leadership. Activities will combine mentoring, leadership shadowing, case analysis, difficult-conversation exercises, reflective dialogue, leadership self-assessment, knowledge-sharing sessions, and individual leadership-development planning. The intention is to connect leadership learning with situations that leaders are likely to encounter in actual school settings.

WIND will initially be implemented as a pilot program rather than adopted immediately as a permanent institutional intervention. Baseline information, participation records, mentoring outputs, leadership-development evidence, reflective outputs, knowledge-transfer activities, and feedback from mentors and emerging leaders will be gathered during implementation. Findings from the pilot will be reviewed before wider adoption so that activities, timelines, mentoring arrangements, and assessment procedures may be improved based on actual experience.

Program Objectives

The WIND Program generally aims to preserve, develop, and sustain essential middle-leadership capacity through mentoring, experiential learning, reflection, and deliberate knowledge transfer between experienced and emerging school leaders.

Specifically, the program aims to:

1. identify and nurture emerging leadership potential through mentoring, leadership shadowing, and guided exposure to authentic leadership responsibilities;
2. strengthen the capacity of current and emerging leaders to navigate relational, professional, and organizational demands while balancing support, accountability, fairness, and professional standards;
3. develop human-centered and credible leadership practices characterized by empathy, respect, care, consistency, professional example, and responsible decision-making;
4. strengthen mentoring, people development, and leadership knowledge transfer so that the experiential knowledge of experienced leaders may contribute to the preparation of future leaders;
5. develop reflective, adaptive, and resilient leadership practices by helping participants learn from challenges, critical incidents, feedback, and changing organizational conditions; and
6. establish and evaluate a contextualized leadership-continuity mechanism that may be refined and considered for wider institutional adoption after pilot implementation.

Alignment of the Findings and WIND Program

Table 2. Alignment of the Emergent Themes, Leadership Needs, and WIND Program

Theme / Finding	Leadership Identified	Need	WIND Learning Area / Response	Intended Developmental Outcome
Theme 1: Leadership Found Them Before They Sought It	Recognition of leadership potential, mentoring, confidence, guided leadership exposure		Leadership Potential and Mentoring	Emerging leaders become more aware of their leadership capacity and gain supported experience before taking wider responsibilities
Theme 2: Leading in the Middle—Between People and Expectations	Managing peers, boundaries, conflict, accountability, competing expectations, organizational transition		Navigating Middle Leadership and Transition	Leaders strengthen their capacity to balance relationships, professional responsibility, and organizational expectations
Theme 3: Leadership with a Heart—Care as a Way of Leading	Empathy, fairness, listening, respect, compassion with accountability		Human-Centered and Compassionate Leadership	Leaders develop stronger relational practices while maintaining professional standards
Theme 4: Walking the Talk—Leadership Earns Influence Through Example	Credibility, consistency, integrity, modeling expected practices		Credible and Exemplary Leadership	Leaders strengthen professional influence through consistent and observable leadership practice
Theme 5: Keeping the Wind—Purpose, Faith, and the Growth of Others	Sustaining purpose, mentoring, service, developing teachers and emerging leaders, knowledge transfer		Purpose, Mentoring, and People Development	Leaders sustain commitment while becoming more intentional in supporting the growth of others
Theme 6: Shaped by the Storm—Leadership as Becoming	Reflection, resilience, adaptation, learning from mistakes and challenges		Reflective, Adaptive, and Resilient Leadership	Leaders become more reflective and adaptive and use difficult experiences as opportunities for continuing development

The matrix makes explicit that WIND was not developed independently from the qualitative findings. Each learning area corresponds to a leadership experience or developmental need identified through the six themes. The program therefore serves as the practical translation of the study's conceptual understanding of leadership into a set of developmental opportunities for current and emerging middle leaders.

WIND Program Implementation Matrix

Table 3. Proposed Implementation Matrix of the WIND Program

Key Learning Area	Objectives	Activities / Strategies	Time Frame	Persons Involved	Performance Indicators	Means of Verification	Proposed Success Indicators	Indicative Budget	Sustainability Mechanism	Remarks
Leadership Potential and Mentoring	1. Identify personnel with emerging leadership potential. 2. Prepare	Leadership Potential Mapping; Mentor–Emerging Leader Pairing; Leadership Shadowing	1st Term; mentoring throughout the school year	School Heads, Experienced Department Heads, Master Teachers,	Percentage of identified emerging leaders paired with mentors; number of	Leadership profiles; mentoring logs; shadowing reflections; attendance records; activity	At least 80% of identified emerging leaders are paired with mentors; each	₱8,000–₱12,000 annually for materials, printing, documentation, refreshments, and mentoring/sh	Institutionalize annual leadership-potential mapping; maintain a pool of trained mentors;	Identification should consider readiness, commitment, and demonstr

	potential leaders through mentoring and practical exposure.			Coordinators, Emerging Leaders	mentoring sessions completed by each mentor-mentee pair; number of leadership shadowing activities completed; percentage of participants completing mentoring reflections; number of leadership profiles developed	documentation	mentee completes at least three mentoring sessions and one leadership shadowing activity; at least 80% of mentees complete a mentoring reflection	allowing activities; may be reduced through use of existing school resources	include mentoring in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and Annual Implementation Plan (AIP); continue mentor-mentee pairing each school year	ated capacity rather than seniority alone.
Navigating Middle Leadership and Transition	1. Prepare leaders to deal with competing expectations and organizational change. 2. Strengthen relational and professional decision-making.	Leading Through Change Conversations; Difficult Conversations Workshop; Leadership Transition and Knowledge-Sharing Sessions	1st–2nd Term	School Heads, Experienced Leaders, Master Teachers, Teacher Leaders, Guidance Personnel	Participation rate in leadership transition activities; number of completed case-based outputs; number of knowledge-transfer or transition notes produced; demonstrated application of decision-making and conflict-management strategies; change in perceived confidence	Attendance records; case reflections; transition notes; knowledge-sharing records; post-session feedback forms; activity documentation	At least 80% participation in scheduled activities; each participant completes at least two case-based outputs; at least one knowledge-transfer or transition output is completed by each participating experienced leader; post-session feedback indicates increased perceived confidence	₱10,000–₱15,000 annually for workshop materials, facilitator expenses, case materials, documentation, and refreshments	Integrate case discussions into regular leadership or departmental meetings; maintain a confidential repository of anonymized leadership cases and transition notes; conduct annual knowledge-sharing sessions for current and emerging leaders	Actual cases should be anonymized and treated confidentially.

					ce in handling leadershi p tensions and organizat ional transition s		handling leadershi p tensions			
Human- Centered and Compassi onate Leadershi p	1. Strengthe n empathy, fairness, respect, and listening. 2. Develop the capacity to balance care with accounta bility.	Leadership with a Heart Session; Empathetic Listening Exercises; Care-and- Accountabi lity Case Discussion	2nd Term	Current and Emergin g Leaders, Guidanc e Personnel, School Heads	Percenta ge of participa nts completi ng required learning activities ; number of human- centered leadershi p practices identified ; demonstr ated applicati on of empathet ic listening and care- with- accounta bility strategies ; participa nt understa nding of the relations hip between compassi on and profession al responsib ility; perceive d relevance of activities	Reflections; case outputs; participant feedback; observation/c hecklist records; activity documentatio n	At least 80% of participa nts complete the required outputs; every participa nt identifies at least one applicabl e human- centered leadershi p practice; at least 80% demonstr ate improved understa nding of balancin g care and accounta bility based on post- session response s	₱8,000– ₱12,000 annually for session materials, facilitator or guidance support, printing, documentatio n, and refreshments	Incorpora te human- centered leadership topics into continuin g leadership - developm ent activities; use guidance personnel or trained internal facilitator s; include periodic case reflection during middle- leader meetings	Compass ion should support people without weakeni ng profession al standards .
Credible and Exemplar y Leadershi p	1. Strengthe n leadershi p credibilit y. 2. Encourag e leaders to model expected	Walking the Talk Leadership Commitme nt; Leadership Practice Self- Assessment ; Exemplary Practice Sharing	2nd– 3rd Term	Experie nced and Emergin g Leaders, School Heads	Percenta ge completi ng leadershi p self- assessme nt; percenta ge completi ng	Commitment plans; leadership self- assessments; reflective narratives; exemplary- practice documentatio n; peer or supervisor	At least 80% of participa nts complete a leadershi p self- assessme nt and commitm ent plan;	₱5,000– ₱8,000 annually for assessment materials, documentatio n, recognition materials, and sharing sessions	Conduct annual leadership self- assessme nt; incorporat e exemplar y-practice sharing into	Emphasi s should be placed on visible leadershi p practices rather than abstract

	professional practices.				leadership commitment plans; number of documented exemplary leadership practices applied in the workplace; completion of reflective accounts on leadership modeling; evidence of consistency between identified leadership commitments and actual practice	feedback, where appropriate	each participant documents at least one application of an exemplary leadership practice; at least 80% submit a reflection describing how the practice was applied		regular leadership meetings; maintain leadership commitment plans as part of continuing professional growth documentation	traits alone.
Purpose, Mentoring, and People Development	1. Strengthen mentoring and people-development capacity. 2. Sustain leadership purpose and promote knowledge transfer.	Teacher/Emerging Leader Mentoring; Keeping the Wind Reflection Session; Individual Growth and Development Planning	Throughout the school year	Experienced Department Heads, Master Teachers, Teacher Leaders, Emerging Leaders	Number of completed mentoring activities; number of documented knowledge-transfer activities; percentage of mentees completing individual development plans; mentee participation and completion rates; percentage of mentees	Mentoring records; individual growth and development plans; reflective narratives; accomplishment records; knowledge-transfer outputs; mentee feedback forms	Every mentor completes at least one documented knowledge-transfer activity; 100% of participating mentees complete an individual development plan; at least 80% of mentees report that mentoring was meaningful and useful; each participant	₱10,000–₱15,000 annually for mentoring resources, reflection sessions, documentation, development-plan materials, and knowledge-sharing activities	Maintain an annual mentoring cycle; develop a school-based leadership knowledge repository; update individual growth plans annually; recognize experienced leaders who contribute to mentoring and knowledge transfer	Practical leadership knowledge developed through experience should be deliberately documented and shared with emerging leaders.

					reporting usefulness of mentoring; number of experiential leadership practices documented and shared		ing experienced leader contributes at least one documented leadership practice or lesson			
Reflective, Adaptive, and Resilient Leadership	1. Develop reflective and adaptive leadership practice. 2. Help leaders learn from challenges and organizational change.	Critical Leadership Incident Reflection; Shaped by the Storm Reflection Circle; Personal Leadership Growth Plan	3rd Term	Current and Emerging Leaders, School Heads, Guidance Personnel, Facilitator	Percentage completing reflective activities; number of leadership lessons identified from critical incidents; number of adaptive actions proposed or applied; percentage completing Personal Leadership Growth Plans; change between baseline and post-program developmental self-assessments; participant perception of growth in reflective and adaptive leadership	Reflective journals; critical-incident narratives; Personal Leadership Growth Plans; baseline and post-program assessment records; participant feedback forms	At least 80% of participants complete all required reflective outputs; each participant identifies at least two leadership lessons or adaptive actions; 100% of program completers prepare a Personal Leadership Growth Plan; baseline and post-program assessments show positive developmental movement among participating leaders	₱8,000–₱12,000 annually for reflection materials, facilitator support, assessment tools, documentation, and session expenses	Conduct annual or semester-based reflective leadership sessions; update Personal Leadership Growth Plans regularly; maintain confidential reflective-learning mechanisms; integrate adaptive leadership reflection into continuing professional-development activities	Reflection activities should provide a confidential, supportive, and respectful professional space.

It is to be noted that the proposed budget figures are indicative estimates and may be adjusted according to available school resources, approved plans and funding, prevailing DepEd policies, and actual implementation requirements. The WIND Program may maximize existing personnel, facilities, digital platforms, and scheduled professional-development activities to reduce implementation costs. Sustainability may be supported through

integration into the School Improvement Plan (SIP), Annual Implementation Plan (AIP), regular leadership-development activities, mentoring arrangements, and periodic program evaluation.

Pilot Implementation and Evaluation

Before full institutional adoption, the WIND Program should undergo a pilot implementation within the school in focus. Piloting is particularly appropriate because the program was developed from the lived experiences of participants from one school context. The pilot will allow the school to determine whether the proposed activities are relevant, feasible, manageable, and useful when translated into actual leadership-development practice.

Phase 1. Preparation and Baseline Assessment

The school administration will identify a manageable group of mentors and emerging leaders for the initial implementation. Experienced department heads and other qualified leaders may serve as mentors, while master teachers, coordinators, subject group leaders, teacher leaders, and other personnel with emerging leadership responsibilities may participate as mentees or developing leaders.

An orientation will clarify the objectives of WIND, program activities, mentoring expectations, confidentiality requirements, documentation procedures, and evaluation process. Participants will also complete a simple baseline leadership-needs and competency self-assessment covering areas such as mentoring, relational leadership, accountability, communication, modeling, reflection, adaptation, and people development. The baseline assessment will be used for developmental comparison and should not be treated as a formal performance evaluation.

Phase 2. Implementation

The six WIND learning areas will be carried out through mentoring, leadership shadowing, case discussions, reflective conversations, peer-sharing activities, practical leadership exposure, critical-incident analysis, and individual development planning. Activities should emphasize authentic leadership situations rather than lecture-centered delivery.

Emerging leaders should be given manageable opportunities to practice leadership, while experienced leaders should be encouraged to share both successful practices and lessons gained from difficult situations. Confidential information concerning teachers, learners, and school personnel must remain protected during case discussions and mentoring conversations.

Phase 3. Monitoring

Program monitoring will include the collection of:

- attendance and participation records;
- mentoring logs;
- leadership-shadowing reflections;
- case-analysis outputs;
- reflective journals;
- growth and development plans;
- documented knowledge-transfer activities;
- facilitator or mentor observations; and

- participant feedback forms.

Monitoring should remain simple and purposeful so that documentation does not become an unnecessary additional workload.

Phase 4. Evaluation

At the end of the pilot, the school may examine both quantitative and qualitative evidence. Evaluation may consider:

- participation and completion rates;
- baseline and post-program leadership self-assessment results;
- completion and quality of reflection outputs;
- documented mentoring participation;
- knowledge-transfer activities;
- evidence of application of leadership practices;
- mentor and emerging-leader feedback;
- perceived usefulness of the six learning areas; and
- implementation difficulties or resource concerns.

Short interviews or focus-group discussions with mentors and emerging leaders may complement rating-scale feedback. This allows the school to examine not only whether activities were completed but also how participants experienced the program and which components appeared most useful.

Phase 5. Program Refinement and Wider Adoption

Evaluation results should be reviewed by school administrators, mentors, facilitators, and participant representatives. Learning activities, timelines, success indicators, mentor arrangements, and documentation procedures may then be retained, revised, reduced, or strengthened according to the findings of the pilot.

The WIND Program should therefore not be considered automatically ready for permanent institutional adoption simply because it was proposed by the study. Wider adoption is recommended only after the pilot has provided sufficient evidence of feasibility, relevance, and developmental value. This allows WIND itself to follow the central insight of the research: leadership development requires experience, reflection, adaptation, and continuing improvement.

Proposed Evaluation Framework

Table 4. Evaluation Framework for the Pilot Implementation of the WIND Program

Evaluation Area	Indicator	Suggested Evidence	Evaluation Point
Participation	Attendance and completion of activities	Attendance sheets; completion records	Every activity and end of pilot
Mentoring Participation	Frequency and completion of mentor–mentee interactions	Mentoring logs; mentoring reflections	Quarterly and end of pilot
Leadership Development	Development in targeted leadership competencies	Baseline/post-program self-assessment; leadership growth plans	Before and after pilot

Reflective Practice	Completion and quality of reflection outputs	Journals; critical-incident reflections	Throughout and end of pilot
Knowledge Transfer	Practical leadership knowledge shared by experienced leaders	Knowledge-sharing records; mentoring resources; practice notes	Throughout pilot
Application of Learning	Evidence of leadership practices applied in actual contexts	Action plans; case reports; mentor observations	Midpoint and end of pilot
Emerging-Leader Feedback	Relevance, usefulness, confidence, and perceived growth	Feedback forms; short interviews; focus-group discussion	After major sessions and end of pilot
Mentor Feedback	Feasibility and perceived value of mentoring arrangements	Mentor feedback forms; reflective reports	Midpoint and end of pilot
Program Feasibility	Workability of activities, schedule, resources, and documentation	Facilitator records; implementation review	End of pilot
Program Improvement	Revisions required before wider implementation	Pilot evaluation report; stakeholder consultation	After pilot

Expected Program Outcomes

If implemented as intended, WIND is expected to contribute to the following developmental outcomes:

1. a stronger process for identifying and mentoring emerging school leaders;
2. increased preparedness among emerging leaders to manage relational and organizational demands;
3. stronger human-centered, accountable, and exemplary leadership practices;
4. greater use of mentoring and knowledge transfer between experienced and emerging leaders;
5. improved reflective and adaptive leadership capacity;
6. better preservation of practical middle-leadership knowledge during organizational transition; and
7. an evidence-informed basis for determining whether WIND should be modified, expanded, or institutionalized.

These are anticipated program outcomes, not findings already established by the dissertation. Their achievement will have to be determined through pilot implementation and evaluation.

REFERENCES

Books

1. American Psychological Association. (2020). Publication manual of the American Psychological Association (7th ed.). APA.
2. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). Thematic analysis: A practical guide. Sage Publications.
3. Bush, T. (2022). Theories of educational leadership and management (6th ed.). Sage Publications.
4. Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2024). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
5. De Nobile, J. (2023). Middle leadership in schools: Navigating complexity and influence. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 26(5), 785–801.

On-line Sources

1. Department of Education. (2020). National adoption and implementation of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2020). Department of Education Philippines
2. Department of Education. (2022). Adoption of the Basic Education Development Plan 2030 (DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2022). Department of Education, Republic of the Philippines.

Journals / Magazines / Publications / Research Studies

1. Aldrup, K., Carstensen, B., & Klusmann, U. (2022). Is empathy the key to effective teaching? A systematic review of its association with teacher-student interactions and student outcomes. *Educational Psychology Review*, 34, 1177–1216. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-021-09649-y>
2. Braun, V., Clarke, V., Boulton, E., Davey, L., & McEvoy, C. (2021). The online survey as a qualitative research tool. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 24(6), 641–654. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1805550>
3. Chatzipanagiotou, P., & Katsarou, E. (2023). Crisis management, school leadership in disruptive times and the recovery of schools in the post-COVID-19 era: A systematic literature review. *Education Sciences*, 13(2), 118. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13020118>
4. Collie, R. J. (2021). A multilevel examination of teachers' occupational commitment: The roles of job resources and disruptive student behavior. *Social Psychology of Education*, 24, 387–411. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-021-09617-y>
5. Daniëls, E., Hondeghem, A., & Dochy, F. (2021). A review on leadership and leadership development in educational settings. *Educational Research Review*, 33, 100395. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2021.100395>
6. Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2022). COVID-19, school leadership and educational change. *School Leadership & Management*, 42(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2021.2014979>
7. Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2022). Distributed leadership and school improvement in challenging times. *School Leadership & Management*, 42(5), 431–437. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2022.2141478>
8. Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2022). Leading during a pandemic: What the evidence tells us. *School Leadership & Management*, 42(2), 105–109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2022.2064626>
9. Harris, A., Jones, M., & Ismail, S. N. (2022). Distributed leadership: Taking a retrospective and contemporary view of the evidence base. *School Leadership & Management*, 42(5), 438–456.
10. Knott, E., Rao, A. H., Summers, K., & Teeger, C. (2022). Interviews in the social sciences. *Nature Reviews Methods Primers*, 2, Article 73. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43586-022-00150-6>
11. Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2021). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School Leadership & Management*, 41(1–2), 5–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1596077>
12. Li, Y., & Singh, C. (2023). The impact of perceived recognition by physics instructors on women's self-efficacy and interest. *Physical Review Physics Education Research*, 19(1), 010125. <https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevPhysEducRes.19.010125>
13. Lipscombe, K., Tindall-Ford, S., & Lamanna, J. (2021). School middle leadership: A systematic review of research. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 49(6), 923–940. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220933901>
14. Mullen, C. A., & Fallen, M. T. (2022). “Navigating uncharted waters”: New teacher mentoring and induction. *Research in Educational Administration and Leadership*, 7(4), 751–785. <https://doi.org/10.30828/real.1165667>
15. Neubauer, B. E., Witkop, C. T., & Varpio, L. (2023). How phenomenology can help us learn from the experiences of others. *Perspectives on Medical Education*, 12(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.5334/pme.742>
16. Ramachandran, S., Balasubramanian, S., James, W. F., & Al Maaeid, T. (2023). Whither compassionate leadership? A systematic review. *Management Review Quarterly*.
17. Scandura, T. A., & Meuser, J. D. (2022). Relational dynamics of leadership: Problems and prospects. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 9, 309–337. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-012420-091249>