



Navigating the Leadership Challenges and Support System for Assistant School Principals in Senior High School

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ABSTRACT

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Purpose: The role of assistant school principals (ASPs) is becoming vital in educational leadership, particularly in the context of senior high school education in the Philippines. This study was conducted to uncover insights from the ASPs' shared experiences and propose support strategies to enhance their school leadership practices for better learning outcomes in senior high school.

Methodology: This research utilized a descriptive case study using an unstructured interview as the primary procedure for data gathering. Separate face-to-face interviews with the informants were conducted to gather data for this investigation. The informants in this study were five assistant principals in the Division of Sorsogon purposefully selected as to the length of service, place of assignment, and willingness to participate until the completion of this study.

Results: Findings revealed that the ASPs had varied educational backgrounds and professional experiences, suggesting no universal path to becoming an administrator. Nevertheless, the skills and insights gained from previous roles can be beneficial in assuming the new administrative roles. This study also revealed that ASPs in senior high school had a broad set of responsibilities. However, the primary focus was on instructional leadership. It also reflected that ASPs encountered various challenges related to a lack of training and continuous professional development programs; establishing authority and cultivating principal support; conducting classroom observation due to the enormous number and diversity of teachers; organizing immersion programs for TVL students due to financial constraints and availability of industry partners; and disruption in their professional and personal lives. The findings highlight the support that ASPs need to enhance their school leadership.

Conclusion: ASPs are the school leaders' partners in attaining the school's mission and vision. However, comprehensive support and professional development opportunities are needed to empower assistant principals to fulfill their roles and enhance school leadership effectively.

KEYWORDS:

assistant school principal, leadership challenges, senior high school, support strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

The significance of middle leadership, which includes vice principals, co-principals, deputy principals, or assistant principals (Pont et al., 2008), is very complex yet crucial in managing school operations (Lipscombe et al., 2023). They serve as one of the crucial links between national education policy, which is reflected in strategic planning at the school level, and the teaching staff, who are directly responsible for employing practical methods to execute these

strategies.

Assistant school principals (ASPs) perform many of the tasks that school principals (SPs) do (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Hutton, 2020). They spent most of their time dealing with school management issues, were in charge of student activities and services, worked with teachers to improve curriculum and instruction, collaborated with colleagues, and communicated with parents and other stakeholders for the betterment of the school. They were acknowledged as pivotal contributors to ensuring the delivery of quality education to the students for the attainment of academic success at the school (Vail, 2018). However, the position is said to be underutilized, underresearched, and underrepresented in the literature (Oleszewski et al., 2012; Goldring et al., 2021). There had been flourishing research, scholarship, and publications on educational leadership, but most were

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centered on the important work of principals (Grootenboer et al., 2019). While middle leaders were recognized as crucial individuals in driving educational changes and development within schools, their effectiveness was constrained due to inadequate support from senior leaders and the limitations imposed by the school's structure in which they operate, resulting in limited impact.

The implementation of the K–12 programs in the Philippines, under RA 100533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, has paved the way for the opening of senior high schools (SHS) in the country, which led to the establishment of stand-alone SHS and integrated SHS. Stand-alone SHS shall have their own organizational and staffing structure consisting of SP and ASP depending on their categorical size as small, medium, large, or very large school as determined by the number of enrolments. Large and very large schools could have two ASPs who may be assigned for academics or for operations and learner support (DepEd, 2016). However, of the almost 6,000 public high schools that started offering Grade 11 in 2016, DepEd was only able to build about 200 new, stand-alone public senior high schools, mostly located in catchment areas (Banal-Formoso, 2016; DepEd, 2018). Other secondary schools gradually extended their offerings from Grades 7–10, adding Grades 11 and Grade 12 levels, creating integrated SHS with the existing SPs, head teachers, or teachers-in-charge continuing to serve as heads of these integrated SHS.

With the presence of the SP and ASP in one school, distributed leadership is expected. They are expected to lead the institution together, with the SP capitalizing on the skills and expertise of the ASP, helping them grow in every aspect of leadership (Bayfield, 2020). The concept of shared governance, as well as efficient and effective school-based administration, is expected to be implemented in order to ensure the delivery of quality education (DepEd, 2016). Both the SP and ASP are expected to perform specific duties and responsibilities while collaborating to achieve the educational goals set at the school level. Democratic consultation shall be observed during the decision-making process for shared goals. It was said that if experienced school heads find their jobs to be exhausting and stressful (Desabayla & Digo, 2024; Desabayla & Digo, 2023), how much more would it be for ASPs (Jackman, 2009), who aside from being new to the position and faced with new unfamiliar tasks to perform, are also confronted with other concerns, such as the apprehensions of meeting the expectations of both the principal as their immediate superior and the teachers who will be right under their lead. They will really have a hard time coping with the new tasks and responsibilities assigned to them (Klingaman, 2012; Hoffert, 2015). However, even in other countries where the assistant principal positions had been long established, the actual duties of the ASPs were largely defined by SPs being their immediate supervisors (Goldring et al., 2021). Specific roles that ASPs may

undertake are most likely the tasks distributed to them by the SPs, which means they may be doing only the work that the school heads assigned or allowed them to take part in, or they may have a wide array of tasks, resulting in a variation of work among the assistant principals among different schools, districts, or divisions. This lack of a definite, specific, or well-defined job description for the ASPs often leads to frustration when beginning ASPs assume office (Vail, 2018). They become confused and lost in their work as they emerge into leadership roles that are new to them, performing many other tasks that are far different from what they had expected.

ASPs cannot be adequately ready to fulfill the role of the principals in the 21st century unless they completely understand the conditions and demands related to the roles (Lattuca, 2012; Tamayo, 2020). They will never be able to function to the fullest without knowing what it takes to become one, without knowing the real scenario in the field, or without knowing the technical know-how of the tasks and responsibilities ahead of them. Moreover, they can never be successful in their undertakings without the support of concerned authorities - from the school where they work, from the district or division, and from the whole department itself. These circumstances inspired the researcher to conduct this case study to examine the experiences of the assistant principals in senior high school to provide policymakers and persons in authority with the information and insights learned from the ASPs shared observations to improve support mechanisms that would enhance the ASPs school leadership. Hence, this study delved into the experiences of the ASPs in senior high schools at DepEd Sorsogon, Philippines. This paper, in particular, describes the experiences and challenges of ASPs as school administrators and the support strategies they needed to enhance their school leadership.

II. RELATED LITERATURE

Assistant principals play a vital role in every school, directly taking charge of the development of teachers, students, and the entire school. They are considered by many to be the glue that holds many of the schools together (Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021, p. 44). They were more visible in schools and were in close contact with teachers, students, and parents, creating a balanced atmosphere that motivated them (Balicki, 2020). ASPs show excellent practices that have great potential to effect positive gains on the academic achievement of students (Mercer, 2016). Yet, despite their significant role in school leadership, the position is underrepresented in professional literature such as journals or books. They are often referred to in the literature as the forgotten man, forgotten leader, or overlooked actor (Oleszewski et al., 2012; Goldring et al., 2021). They were described as a rare and often unclear middle management practice (OECD, 2008). Moreover, finding a standard, universal job description with well-defined roles for the ASPs is hard to achieve (Goldring et al., 2021; Vail, 2018; Norton,

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2014; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Descriptions vary from school to school and district to district. Policymakers, ASP's immediate supervisors, and practitioners have not agreed on the position's specific roles (Goldring et al., 2021). It is very hard to determine what they specifically do in the fields. The assistant principalship is a unique position because it involves many tasks to ensure the success of a school but lacks a precise job description (Oleszewski et al., 2012).

There is no particular but rather a broad set of duties and responsibilities for the ASPs in schools (Morgan, 2018). They were delegated many tasks, roles, and jobs, although these may be complementary or interrelated (Balicki, 2020). Most of the roles they enjoy performing are those related to academics, connecting with stakeholders, social activities, and individual and professional development. Their time, however, is mainly consumed by all aspects of students' behavior and discipline (Mendelsohn, 2017). It was said that they were indeed educational leaders who ensured that discipline was observed and maintained in school and took it as a means to effect students' learning and achieve academic success. Traditionally, the ASP position was initially created as a managerial or administrative function. Glanz (1994), and these functions continue until now (Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021). ASP exists to help school principals with administrative work involved in school operations, which may include planning, coordinating services, maintaining order in school, and contributing to the overall management of the school. However, as time passes, this managerial function has been reduced to a liaison's role, with ASPs responsible to their supervisors and held accountable for getting things done, taking care of school crises that may arise unexpectedly, such as troubleshooting for teachers' absences, facility or transportation problems, and student discipline problems (Hartzell, 1993, cited in Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021).

The ASP's role is multi-dimensional in nature. Hutton (2016). However, the three most basic roles they spent their time with were classroom evaluation, student discipline management, and faculty and staff professional development. Specifically, this includes class monitoring, observations, and assessments of teachers' work and performance. They generally lead by coaching and providing resources for the teachers. They could even act out and take charge of classes without teachers; they could sometimes be guidance counselors and discipline officers. In the literature review conducted by Shoho & Barnett (2012), which presents a comparison of the roles of assistant principals in the past three decades both in the US and other countries, it is clear that three primary tasks frequently occurred in the literature: student management and discipline, instructional leadership, and personnel management. These duties and responsibilities of the ASPs have remained the same. However, over time, as they gain experience, ASPs are said to be more focused on instructional leadership (Petrides & Karaglani, 2014; Searby

et al., 2017; Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017; Williams, 2019; Thomas, 2020; Moyer & Goldring, 2023). Their roles become more complex in their endeavor to be integral parts of the instructional program to transform 21st-century schools. The roles are evolving quickly, becoming more dynamic, taxing, and challenging than ever. Across K-12 schools, the three significant duties of ASPs continue to be students' discipline, attendance, and students' activities (Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021). Monitoring students' behavior and discipline is also among the ASPs' concerns. On top of it all, the most critical role of the ASPs is to serve as a bridge between the SHS students and their prospective future employers, should they choose to be employed rather than pursue higher education (Relano, 2018). He also added that ASP roles include assessment and evaluation, which not only focus on students' achievement but also assessment of teachers' performance and how other things, such as school projects and programs, are executed for schools to perform better. Moreover, he said that ASPs could assist the principal in decision-making that would benefit the school, particularly the senior high school.

In the Philippines, ASPs assigned to stand-alone senior high schools may be designated as ASP for SHS Academics, ASP for JHS Academics, and ASP for Operation and Learner Support. Their responsibilities encompass assisting the school head in the overall instructional supervision and implementation of all academic programs, as well as administrative supervision and implementation of all learner support programs. They report directly to the principal/school head (DepEd, 2016). SPs and ASPs are prepared and certified under the same qualifications and standards (Fields, 2015; DepEd, 2007; DepEd, 2016), and in public schools in the Philippines, they have the same entry-level salary grades. In Section 7, Paragraph E of RA 9155, it was stated that the school head, with the help of an assistant school head, would serve as both an administrative manager (Barola & Digo, 2022a; Barola & Digo, 2022b) and an instructional leader (Buban & Digo, 2021; Montales & Digo, 2024) at the school level, implying an almost equal line of authority and functions for the SPs and ASPs. Accordingly, ASPs work alongside their lead principals to fulfill the vision and mission of their schools (Hutton, 2020). However, according to Norton (2014), as the assistant principals' immediate supervisors, the principals are the prime determinants of what the ASPs are and should be in the field. They assign their duties and then oversee and rate their performance. They decide which tasks and responsibilities the ASPs must accomplish. As a result, ASPs, aside from their instructional leadership roles, are delegated a wide range of duties unrelated to instruction, including undesirable tasks that the principals do not want to complete (Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021).

According to Cohen & Schechter (2019), school principals are the primary socializing agents for ASPs due to

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their capacity to determine the ASPs' responsibilities, assess their performance, and influence the ASPs' willingness to advance to higher management roles. They serve as the central figures in the assistant principals' socialization and functions and in building ASPs' confidence and self-efficacy in exercising their roles as the second-rank authority in school. This shows that the ASPs get professional authority from the principals or the school heads. However, there were times when the ASPs were not allowed to share in the SP's decision-making, authority, and power resources (Cohen & Schechter, 2019). Moreover, since ASPs derive their authority from that of the principal, when the SP becomes reluctant to allow the ASP such share of authority, it would be difficult for ASPs to establish authority over the managerial and professional staff, for they would know at once to what extent the coordination between the SP and ASP was present, and whether they could override the ASP's authority. Thus, the relationship between AP and ASP can play an integral part in the success of ASP (Fields, 2015). The effect of the relationship is even more substantial during the ASP's entry phase into the role (Cohen & Schechter, 2019), as they are yet to grasp the roles they must take and are struggling over the extent and limit of powers they have as ASPs.

According to Schleicher (2012), since school leaders are assigned increasing degrees of responsibility and accountability, it is ideal that school leadership be effectively distributed among other leaders in the school. School heads must build a network and delegate part of their leadership tasks to the assistant principals as their partner leaders. As leaders, they must be able to take charge, direct, lead, encourage, and convince others to willingly do their part in attaining the goals that they set for the organization. They must be selfless enough to share power, employing shared decision-making to build the leadership capacity of all their colleagues and staff, especially the ASPs, who by themselves are credentialed principals (Ortega & Palarisan, 2021). With shared leadership, newly appointed ASPs benefit from interpersonal relationships that help them quickly adapt to their work (Finkel, 2021). Moreover, although assistant principals are responsible for their professional growth, they need professional guidance to acquire the skills necessary to become principals. According to Kaplan and Owings (2015), ASPs' leadership performance can be enhanced and refined when competent colleagues and mentors guide them. Weller & Weller (2002) also stated that for ASPs, observing the practices of effective leaders is an excellent way to develop their leadership skills, enabling them to witness how these leaders apply their leadership competence in dealing with different school crises and undertakings. These leaders serve as their guide and model for performing better as future school administrators. Principals must then be willing to give ASPs the opportunity to see all aspects of running a school. They must provide experiences, give constructive feedback,

and identify professional development opportunities while ASPs perform their duties. Most importantly, principals must model how to lead people. A solid mentoring relationship enhances the assistant principal's maturation and professional development, making him better prepared for the job (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991).

The work of beginning ASPs is stressful during the transition years (Armstrong, 2015), which deters the attainment of their leadership goals. ASPs had to manage many conflicts underlying their mid-level leadership positions (Craft et al., 2016). Stressors include difficulty managing their time because of the many tasks at hand. They also face problems building positive relationships with teachers; they must observe, evaluate, and rate according to their performance, particularly when the teachers are their previous colleagues. It further added that assistant principals sometimes feel isolated because they find it hard to see who they can totally trust. The demands of the new position cause the assistant principal's mental stress, which also affects their relationship with their family (Hoffert, 2015). Aside from this, they also struggled to deal with parents who disagreed with decisions made in school and to redirect teachers who were already rooted in culture, fixed perceptions, and established practices. Other challenges that the new ASP encountered were dealing with the unpredictability of their daily tasks, evaluating teachers' performance, and managing their time. Buff (2017) also highlighted that ASPs perceive the following to contribute to their job dissatisfaction: Since the position is in middle management, they are not involved in making decisions. They were not given a proper opportunity to partake in decision-making; instead, they were tasked with delivering the message from the school principal—SP decides, and ASPs must follow. They did not have the voice to decide things.

ASPs were considered marginalized leaders who, with the ambiguity of their roles, were not given enough leadership power in their rights; instead, they primarily served the roles of facilitators, discipline officers, and relationship builders (Garrard, 2013). Morgan (2018) also stated that most of the duties they perform are controlled by the principals, which means that ASPs do not have the choice of selecting their duties or the voice to exercise their authority. This sense of powerlessness caused them to suffer great frustration and job dissatisfaction. In effect, no matter how confident and enthusiastic a person is about becoming an assistant principal, their perceptions abruptly change upon experiencing challenges and dilemmas that are beyond what they have anticipated (Hoffert, 2015). Most ASPs doubted their self-efficacy in acting as one. They struggled with the latest work requirement of being part of the school administration.

These challenges call for professional socialization, which is required for every new administrator upon assuming their role to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and

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behavioral orientation needed to perform the roles of administration (Shoho, 2011). This aligns with the organizational socialization of VanMaanen & Schein (1977), which stipulated that every new member in an organization must be taught and trained to allow him to see and know the organizational world the way their more experienced colleagues see it. They must be taught to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to assume their roles in the organization successfully. The more experienced member must allow the new member to learn all aspects of the organizational framework. The socialization process will significantly affect the work performance of the beginning administrators (Heck, 1995), which took place when they started their work. They learn what they must do through direct experience, the experiences of other ASPs, and the examples shown by their principals (Mertz, 2006).

The socialization process for ASPs could be challenging, especially when they do not receive any support from their colleagues, superiors, or the department itself. They would be lost in the process and feel high levels of dissatisfaction without guidance and support from others. Hohner & Rivero (2017) reflected on the importance of new ASPs building positive relationships with colleagues, staff, and the whole school community to enable them to transition into their new administrative roles successfully. They need full support from their senior leaders and colleagues to transition into their new roles efficiently, which would eventually help them prepare for principalship (Hodges, 2018).

Despite the adversity of being in the middle-level leadership position, it cannot be denied that being an assistant principal is just a step away from principalship. However, many factors affected their decisions to remain in their position or aspire for more career advancement, such as pursuing to become principals or other higher administrative positions. Most ASPs considered the position to be a terminal career that they described as challenging yet free from the tension of having absolute responsibility and accountability for overseeing the school's operation (Shore & Walshaw, 2018). Some ASPs who were primarily satisfied with their career and showed positive levels of self-efficacy were those greatly motivated by the senior leaders who served as their educational role models to dream of becoming principals, which showed that among the primary motivators for ASPs to dream of more career advancement was the experience they had in school through the leadership style of the principals they worked with (Buff, 2017; Oliver, 2013). It was from these mentors that they learned how to improve their decision-making skills and how to communicate and deal with parents and other stakeholders effectively. Moreover, these mentors motivated APs to reflect on and capitalize on their attributes and capabilities to become influential leaders. In such an environment, ASPs felt

personal satisfaction from being trusted by the school heads to work collaboratively with them (Barnett et al., 2017).

The leadership efficacy and effectiveness of ASPs are also dependent on the professional development programs they receive (Lewis, 2019). Peters et al. (2016) stated that the preparation ASPs gained from the university leadership program is not enough for them to exercise their administrative roles effectively. They still encountered challenges in fulfilling the responsibilities that are outside of the traditional leadership program, which requires acquiring real-life application skills and improving leadership programs and training. Additionally, Phipps (2021) emphasized that the ASPs need access to professional development, build networks with colleagues, receive formal mentoring from their immediate heads, gain more instructional leadership experiences, gain exposure to organizational management, and receive training on student management and behavior. Said training would greatly help ASPs be prepared and more confident in assuming their varied roles in the field. Rushing (2022) highlights the importance of authentic learning opportunities for principals (Ps) and ASPs, given their critical positions within the school hierarchy. Sufficient education and programs for professional development are necessary for ASPs to be competent and excel in their roles. Alshery et al. (2015) emphasized that training significantly predicts employee performance. This underscores the need for targeted professional development initiatives for ASPs to enhance their leadership capacity and effectiveness. Gurley et al. (2013) reported that leadership training programs helped develop APs to assume instructional and managerial roles. It improved their instructional leadership, collaboration, and networking skills and developed greater confidence and pride in their roles as assistant principals. Providing meaningful professional development programs for mid-career assistant principals increases self-esteem and leadership skills (Hayes & Burkett, 2021), helping them to perform their duties and responsibilities efficiently and effectively in achieving the schools' educational goals. However, ASPs often face challenges accessing adequate induction programs and continuing professional development opportunities tailored to their specific roles and responsibilities within the school management structure. There is a lack of specialized training that directly addresses the complexities of their roles (Williams, 2019). Instead, many training programs for administrative positions focus on the principal role, neglecting the assistant principal position (Wastler, 2021). This dearth in professional development may lead to frustrations and difficulties for ASPs in fulfilling their duties effectively and adapting to the rapidly changing legal and policy landscape of education (Hutton, 2020; Mendelson, 2017), negatively impacting their confidence and abilities (Mendelson, 2017; Weller & Weller, 2002). These findings demonstrate the urgent need for targeted and comprehensive training programs to equip assistant principals with the

knowledge and skills they need to succeed. According to Vaillant (2015), when provided with professional development opportunities, assistant principals can become better educational and administrative managers, exhibiting improved leadership effectiveness and increased job satisfaction, ultimately benefiting students and the school community. According to Seidle et al. (2016), a combined coaching and training strategy considerably improves leader performance, which in turn increases total organizational effectiveness. Furthermore, Hasson et al. (2016) provided empirical evidence stressing the effectiveness of leadership training in boosting organizational learning. These findings combined demonstrated the transformative power of focused interventions delivered through leadership training in cultivating effective leadership and promoting organizational growth.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This conceptual framework provides a structured lens through which to examine the multifaceted experiences of assistant principals. The outermost circle represents the shared experiences of ASPs, emphasizing the collective nature of their professional journey. Within this framework, the Venn diagram identifies three intersecting areas: work experiences and transition, challenges faced, and the support needed in their roles. Work experiences often influence the challenges encountered and the types of support required to navigate their responsibilities effectively, interconnecting these themes. The relationships depicted critical intersections with policy recommendations at the center, intersecting with work experiences, challenges, and support needed. This shows the primary aim of this study, which was to enhance the leadership practices of ASPs by designing support strategies based on the identified support needed to address the challenges they met, as reflected in their shared experiences.

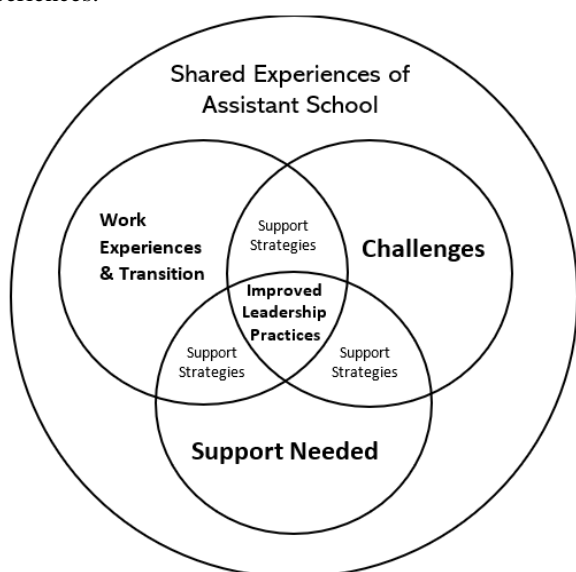


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

IV. METHODOLOGY

This research utilized a descriptive case study approach, employing an unstructured interview for data gathering. The informants in this study were five assistant school principals (ASPs) in integrated senior high schools in the Division of Sorsogon, Philippines. They were purposefully selected depending on the duration of service, the place of school assignment, and their willingness to participate until the completion of this study. Additionally, they were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality of their personal information, and they duly signed the informed consent form. Each of the informants was interviewed face-to-face on separate dates and venues, ensuring comprehensive data collection. These interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated, maintaining the integrity of the informants' responses. The written texts were then categorized and coded using descriptive coding, which summarized the primary topic of the qualitative data in a word or short phrase (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022). They were organized until themes were identified and well-established (Chang, 2008). Organized data were further analyzed to formulate story themes in thick descriptions, rich narratives, and reflections. The informants were informed of the results and affirmed the accuracy of the findings.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The experiences of the assistant principals as secondary school administrators

The key themes that emerged from the experiences that the ASPs encountered at work are presented and discussed in this section.

1.1. Work experience and transition

Assistant principals were promoted through the ranks, transitioning from lower positions such as Teacher III, Head Teacher (HT), or Master Teacher (MT) to higher administrative roles. Those who previously served as HT or MT found it easier to adapt to ASP roles due to their prior administrative experience. According to one informant: *“Di man ako masyado nanibago san responsibility kasi yun nga parang continuation lang san dati ko na inhihimo as department coordinator. Wider lang an scope kay daghan na an maestra.”* [The responsibility was no longer new to me since it was just a continuation of what I was doing as department coordinator. It was almost the same, although it’s wider in scope because there were more teachers to supervise, unlike before, that I was only supervising 13 teachers.]

While teaching experience and educational background equipped someone with essential skills and perspectives, the insights gained from the individual journeys of the ASPs emphasized the importance of relevant work experience to easily adapt to a new role with almost the same line of responsibilities. This reflected the profound impact that prior experience can have on shaping effective

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leadership. These varied experiences, as stressed in the study of Kotur & Anbazhagan (2014), indicate that education and relevant work experience independently impact an individual's leadership competence, yet both are significant factors in developing leadership skills.

Looking at the journey of the ASPs who had quickly and successfully transitioned into their new roles, it's clear that the experiences gained in their prior roles served as cornerstones for their success. Their varied backgrounds—from teaching to departmental leadership or other administrative capacities—endowed them with a deep understanding of the intricacies of the educational system. These seasoned leaders attributed their ability to effectively manage the diverse facets of school administration to the insights gleaned from their previous experiences.

Scharpf (2019) discussed the pivotal role of professional experiences in shaping an individual's journey toward professional development and accomplishment. These involve applying the acquired knowledge in practical situations, absorbing insights from colleagues, and adapting to different work atmospheres. They enable individuals to refine their skills, enhance their self-assurance, and establish a network of professional connections. Engaging in work experiences aids individuals in recognizing their competencies and areas that need development while profoundly engaging in their professional roles.

Dragoni et al. (2014) discussed the impact of specific experiences directly tied to administrative roles. His study highlights the positive correlation between work experience and the ability to think strategically. Having gained such professional experience, they developed expertise that earned them great control over their responsibilities. According to Krauss & Orth (2022), this contributes to the development of their self-esteem, which can influence their work performance.

1.2. Exercise of duties and responsibilities

ASPs in senior high school had a broad set of responsibilities, although their primary focus was more on instructional leadership. These included managing curriculum implementations, preparing teachers' schedules and workloads, observing and mentoring teachers, monitoring classes, administering student support and discipline, and building resourceful partnerships with stakeholders.

The experiences shared by the informants also highlighted the ASPs' willingness to take on additional roles when necessary. They were very open to doing other tasks that the principals would request them to do, such as attending programs in school when they were not available, doing impromptu talks in the absence of the principal, connecting with people in line with school activities and projects, or

talking with parents and students with concerns, and doing any other things as the teachers would come to and ask for their assistance. One informant said: *“Being an ASP, mas damo an concern, pagdating sa estudyante, teachers, pati an non-teaching. Pero, most of the time monitoring classes, mentoring teachers, and supporting them in their proposed projects.”* [An ASP has so many concerns related to the students, teachers, and even non-teaching personnel. However, I spent most of my time monitoring classes, mentoring teachers, and supporting them in their proposed projects.]

The ASPs' experiences reflect a distinct uniformity in the duties that they exercised in the field, mainly being designated as assistant principals for academics. However, in many cases, just like in other countries, they may be tasked with performing other duties given to them by their immediate supervisors (Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021). Furthermore, it can be gleaned from these observations that ASPs for academics in senior high school were mainly considered instructional leaders with functions comparable to the department heads or department coordinators in junior high school rather than being the school head's partner or assistant in the overall management of running the entire school. They were performing as instructional leaders, supporting the principal in supervising and implementing all academic programs in the senior high school. This conforms to Hutton's (2020) statement that the ASP's role is multi-dimensional. However, the three most basic roles they spent their time with were classroom evaluation, student discipline management, and faculty and staff professional development. In the literature review conducted by Barnett et al. (2012), which presents a comparison of the roles of assistant principals in the US and other countries in the past three decades, it is evident that there are three primary job responsibilities—student management, instructional leadership, and personnel management. These duties and responsibilities of the ASPs have remained the same. However, in 2020, across K-12 schools, ASPs are said to be more focused on instructional leadership (Somoza-Norton & Neumann, 2021). Their roles become more complex in their endeavor to be integral parts of the instructional program to transform 21st century schools (Barnett et al., 2012). These studies confirmed the experiences of the ASPs, reflecting their pivotal role in shaping the quality of education imparted to learners. With such a focus on instructional leadership, teacher mentorship, and classroom supervision, ASPs directly and indirectly influence teacher practice, team development, school reform, and professional learning, thereby enhancing the learning experience of students and improving the learning outcomes (Lipscombe et al., 2023). It showed that the instructional leadership of the assistant principals has a direct and positive relationship with school effectiveness (Ismail, Khatibi, & Azam, 2021). This readiness to take varied roles beyond their duties to address various

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needs within the school community implies that leaders in educational settings must exhibit flexibility and adaptability. ASPs' flexibility in handling diverse responsibilities reflects the adaptability required in today's rapidly changing world. When conveyed through educational practices, this adaptability prepares future leaders to navigate societal uncertainties and challenges by instilling resilience and problem-solving skills.

2. Challenges encountered at work

The key themes that emerged from the challenges that the ASPs encountered at work are presented and discussed in this section.

2.1. Lack of induction program and continuing professional development training

Induction programs are designed to prepare a newly hired or newly promoted DepEd teacher or school leader to become effective and efficient in performing his or her functions as full-fledged DepEd personnel. Moreover, induction programs consolidate and harness entry-level competencies in preparation for career progression. The program runs for three years for teachers and one year for school leaders. An assessment is administered at the end of the program to gauge the level of readiness of the DepEd personnel for their new role (NEAP).

However, aside from the general orientation on the guidelines for the implementation of SHS, given a year before its actual operation, there were no other trainings given for assistant principals to prepare them for the position. The absence of continuing professional development for ASPs brought problems to them, especially when they were not able to attend the previous training and orientations about the implementation of SHS programs in their first years of operation. *For example, an informant mentioned that "May mga gray areas pa sa ako pag-abot sa senior high school. Kay di pa man бага kita nagmimmeeting. Once pa lang batog san makasulod kita. Wara pa man ako naattendan na leadership training na para sa ASP talaga. An dati pa yadto san sa HT pa ako."* [There are still gray areas for me when it comes to SHS. We do not have meetings intended for ASPs yet (actually referring to training). I have not quite attended one that is really intended for assistant principals. All the leadership training that I have attended was when I was still a head teacher.]

To cope with these challenges, ASPs resorted to various strategies for knowledge acquisition. This included poring over memoranda and old files in school, consulting colleagues, and relying on the guidance and mentorship of more experienced principals with whom they expected to share the knowledge they gained from leadership training and experience. According to Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd (1991), this form of mentorship would greatly help the assistant principals' maturation and professional development, making them better prepared for the job. Being new to the

administrative position, they need professional guidance to acquire leadership skills. However, although these approaches may alleviate some challenges, they will not replace the significance of structured and comprehensive training explicitly designed for these roles. Such a program will enhance the ASPs' preparedness and confidence and ensure a more effective and harmonious educational leadership structure within the senior high school.

As reported in the studies of Hayes and Burkett (2021), Gurley et al. (2013), and Bloom and Bella (2005), assistant principals who underwent training reflected improved instructional leadership skills, collaboration, and networking skills. They developed higher levels of confidence and pride in their roles as assistant principals. Seidle et al. (2016) revealed that a combined coaching and training approach significantly enhances leader performance, subsequently elevating overall organizational effectiveness. Moreover, Hasson et al. (2016) contributed empirical evidence emphasizing the potency of leadership training in augmenting organizational learning. These findings collectively underscored the transformative potential of targeted interventions through leadership training in nurturing effective leadership and fostering organizational growth. Nonetheless, the absence of tailored professional development programs for ASPs, particularly in senior high school management, poses significant organizational challenges. This shortfall might result in assistant principals feeling ill-prepared for their roles, potentially leading to inefficiencies, errors in decision-making, and a limited understanding of crucial policies and procedures.

The lack of ongoing training inhibits growth and innovation within the organization, restricting the development of leadership skills and preventing the implementation of best practices. Additionally, this gap may contribute to inconsistent leadership approaches, impacting staff morale and cohesion among leadership teams, and potentially exposing the organization to legal and compliance risks. Moreover, this implication extends beyond the organizational level, affecting societal aspects so that this shortfall can affect educational quality, impacting students' outcomes and future workforce capabilities. Addressing this issue necessitates a coordinated approach to investing in comprehensive professional development, recognizing the pivotal role of assistant principals in shaping schools and the broader organizational and societal landscape.

2.2. Establishing authority and cultivating principal support

The experiences shared by assistant principals reflected a prevailing sentiment among most ASPs, feeling undervalued and marginalized in their roles. Despite holding positions of authority, they often felt sidelined, their voices unheard and disregarded, and their responsibilities overlooked or assigned to others. This lack of recognition led

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to a sense of unfulfillment, hindering their ability to make meaningful contributions to the school's management and overall success. As an informant mentioned: "*Kita pano nasa recommending man lang kita. Pirme ma-recommend. Pirme an sa decision from the principal. So parang bagan man lang kita san kuan-tawutawohay (laughing). Bagan, pirme ka talaga ma-follow sa school head. Minsan an intitiwalan pa lugod san principal an wara man position. Samantalang kita lugod na kita an may appointment, kita lugod an nadi-deprive.*" [We, as ASPs, are only there to recommend, always recommend. The decisions are always from the principal. So, it is like we are... puppets (laughing). It is like we always have to follow the school head. Sometimes those who were not in position were trusted more by the principal. While we, who have the appointment, are the ones deprived of it.]

Findings reflected that while some ASPs experienced empowering and collaborative leadership with the principal treating them as partners in education, others felt their autonomy was restricted, leading to feelings of insecurity and inadequacy. This discrepancy in treatment impacted their job satisfaction. According to Cline (2019), self-efficacy and work satisfaction are correlated with the working relationships of the principal and vice principal. Those who felt supported and recognized reported higher levels of contentment compared to those who felt neglected or underutilized. This underscored the critical importance of supportive and empowering leadership within educational institutions. The sentiments of the assistant principals emphasized the need for leaders who recognize and value their expertise, trust their capabilities, and actively involve them in decision-making processes. Collaborative and empowering leadership creates a more harmonious work environment. It nurtures a culture of growth and development, benefiting the entire school community.

According to Hallinger and Heck (2011), collaborative leadership, as contrasted with sole leadership from the principal, provides a route to enhance school improvement. Recognizing and empowering assistant principals as crucial contributors to a school's success can significantly improve overall productivity and satisfaction within the educational institution. Furthermore, the experiences of assistant principals and varied degrees of empowerment and recognition within educational institutions bear substantial implications for the organizations they serve. When assistant principals feel undervalued, marginalized, or lacking in decision-making authority, it creates an organizational climate marked by dissatisfaction, reduced morale, and limited productivity among these crucial leaders. This dissatisfaction might lead to high turnover rates, affecting institutional stability and continuity. Likewise, Cohen and Schechter (2019b) and Buff (2017) mentioned that the school principal's influence is a significant factor in determining whether ASPs remain in their roles or seek other opportunities. How they were supported and recognized

directly influenced the organization's leadership succession. When assistant principals feel empowered and adequately trained for future leadership roles, it ensures a robust pipeline of capable future leaders within the organization. On the contrary, if their potential is not recognized or utilized, it might lead to talented individuals seeking leadership opportunities elsewhere, hampering the organization's long-term growth and sustainability.

Therefore, the experiences of assistant principals within an educational institution carry profound implications for organizational culture, leadership development, staff retention, and, ultimately, the overall success and effectiveness of the school. Prioritizing assistant principals' recognition, support, and empowerment is pivotal in shaping a positive, thriving, and sustainable organizational ecosystem within the educational landscape.

2.3. Conducting classroom observation

Class observation was among the primary responsibilities of an assistant principal. However, it had been identified as one of the challenging tasks that they had to do. Especially since assistant principals were primarily assigned to big schools. "*Actually an pag observe sin classes kasi minsan may gusto ka sabihon na bagan negative na possible na makadown pa lugod sa mestra. An comment, kapagal maghanap san tama na words. Tapos halimbawa pira yun na teachers mo 66... oh an kada saro soon magpaobserve, mauubusan ka soon sin unique na ano kay kun halos pararehas man lang an in-display na competency.*" [Observing classes was a challenge because sometimes, you want to say something negative, but it might discourage them. And in giving comments, it's very difficult to think of appropriate words... For example, if you have 66 teachers to observe, you will run out of unique, distinct words to use, especially when the competencies displayed are almost the same]

It's evident from the experiences shared that classroom observation is a challenging yet crucial aspect of an assistant principal's role. The sheer volume of teachers to observe, the necessity to provide varied and relevant feedback, and the pressure of aligning observations with performance ratings create a complex and demanding scenario as it bears a significant weight in teachers' performance ratings at the end of the school year (Haep et al., 2016).

The evaluative nature of classroom observations can also be regarded as a controlling measure, which can cause tension and worry in the people being observed (Martinez et al., 2016). This could lead to resistance against the observations made in the classroom and the resulting feedback from the observer. According to Hoffert (2015), problems arise in maintaining positive relationships with teachers whom they must observe, evaluate, and rate according to their performance, particularly when the

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teachers are their former colleagues. These experiences implied the critical need for Asp's professional development, focusing on refining observation skills and enhancing feedback strategies to handle diverse teacher responses effectively. Assistant principals also require support in managing evaluative tensions arising from observations, necessitating guidance on fostering positive relationships with teachers and creating a supportive environment for growth. It also highlighted the need for strategic investment in professional development programs not just for assistant principals but for all staff involved in observations. This investment would ensure a consistent and high-quality evaluation approach, fostering a continuous improvement culture among educators.

2.4. Organizing Industry Immersion Program for TVL students

The shared experiences reveal that the assistant principals shared a common problem when organizing the work immersion for TVL students, particularly in providing them with the resources needed and looking for the industry partners they should be immersed in. In effect, schools are experiencing a mismatch due to the lack of industry partners that can provide significant experiences in line with the students' skills in the strands taken (Gamurot, 2019; Mahaguay & Mahaguay, 2020).

According to one of the informants: "*An pinakaproblema an paghanap san partners na makadanon para sa mga estudyante, halimbawa sa TVL. Mahirap mghanap soon kasi bihira man an nagkocommit. May mga frustrations na mga ganon. Na akala mo mga potential partners na makadanon sa ato for improvement of the learners yun pala parang umasa lang kita.*" [The main problem was looking for partners who could help our students, like in TVL. It's difficult to look for partners who will commit. There will be frustrations like that. You think they are potential partners who could help, but it's a false hope.]

The study of Necio et al. (2022) corroborated this, stating that with the limited number of industry partners, the immersion venues they sometimes received were not aligned with the students' courses, some of them lacked the necessary facilities, and the tasks assigned to the immersion students did not correspond with what they should be doing during the immersion period. Although, these findings were contradicted in the study conducted by Budomo (2020), which stated that even when these industry partners do not need interns, most of them are willing and ready to accept immersion students from senior high. Still, these challenges have profound implications. Firstly, these challenges amplify the ASPs' workload and stress levels as they navigate the intricate process of ensuring quality practical experiences for students. Continually seeking industry partners and advocating for necessary resources may demand extra effort

and resilience. Secondly, the diverging perspectives within the leadership team can create a challenging work environment. Bridging the gap between their commitment to the student's well-being and the broader organizational priorities may necessitate diplomatic skills and persistence.

The difficulties in organizing immersion for TVL students have broader implications. If schools fail to provide students with practical skills and industry exposure, it may result in a workforce that is underprepared to meet the demands of diverse industries. This can perpetuate a cycle of unemployment or underemployment within the community, hindering economic growth. Furthermore, disparities in educational resources among schools may exacerbate existing social inequalities, limiting opportunities for certain groups of students. A workforce lacking comprehensive training may struggle to contribute effectively to societal development, impacting the community's overall progress. Therefore, addressing these challenges is vital not only for the success of individual students but also for the socio-economic well-being and development of a broader society.

2.5. Disruptions in assistant principals' professional and personal lives

Assistant principals' roles extend beyond their professional responsibilities and considerably affect their personal lives. Disruptions thread through their professional and personal domains, with the station transfer appearing as a significant obstacle. The frequency and abruptness of these transfers and the absence of decision-making authority comparable to that of principals, have led to shared sentiments of frustration and uncertainty among ASPs.

The strain on work-life balance unveiled the dual burden faced by assistant principals. Balancing the increased responsibilities of the role with familial obligations becomes a formidable task. The reflections on long-distance travel also resonated. The arduous daily commute consumes valuable time and incurs additional expenses. Moreover, there was the challenge of living up to the expectations set by teachers and colleagues, highlighting the social pressures that accompany this position.

One informant shared: "*San di pa ako ASP bagan more time, more time sa family. Niyan, bagan madouble time ka, na maski pag weekend dapat makadto ka sa school kasi may gigibuhon ka. Minsan may mga tendency na naisip ko maretire na lang kasi naisip ko kun papano ko ibabalance an oras.*" [When I was not yet an assistant, I had more time for my family. But now I have to double the time that, even on weekends, you have to go to school because there is something that you have to do. There are times that I think of retiring because I find it difficult to balance my time.]

These experiences demonstrate other complex challenges they face, which must be resolved to safeguard their well-being. Research shows that ASPs had difficulty adjusting to the challenging shift in their position, which

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could impact their emotional, social, and professional lives (Cohen & Schechter, 2019a). The issue of work-life balance was one of them. They might experience extreme stress while trying to balance their work and personal obligations, affecting their performance at work and at home. To help them overcome this struggle, they needed the support of their family and friends, their employer, and the organization where they belong (Gautam & Jain, 2018). Recognizing and assisting them in overcoming their obstacles will produce more contented and productive ASPs, leading to more decisive school leadership (Marshall & Davidson, 2016).

These experiences have profound implications for assistant principals. The constant transfer of stations disrupts their ability to establish continuity in ongoing projects, hindering the full realization of initiatives and improvements within each school. This instability challenges their adaptability, which affects job satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment. Also, balancing increased responsibilities with personal obligations creates significant stress on work-life balance. The extended hours and the strain of long-distance travel compound the challenges, impacting physical well-being and personal relationships. The financial expectations and societal assumptions associated with the role also add an extra layer of pressure, potentially affecting the assistant principal's mental and emotional well-being.

Furthermore, the strain on work-life balance for assistant principals may lead to burnout, affecting the overall productivity and effectiveness of the administrative team. Addressing these difficulties is critical to maintaining a positive organizational culture, retaining experienced personnel, and ensuring a sustained commitment to the school's mission and vision.

3. Support needed by the ASPs to enhance their school leadership

Assistant principals can enhance their effectiveness and function to the fullest when they get all the support that they need in the work environment.

3.1. The Need for continuous professional development programs

ASPs need continuous professional development programs such as workshops, training, and seminars focusing on leadership and management skills, conflict resolution, data analysis, and educational trends to enhance their competence and skills in school leadership. Additionally, although it's not their responsibility, they need to be trained in financial management to help them understand the school budget and ensure that resources are used efficiently.

According to an informant, when asked about what support assistant principals need: "*Siguro ko training na ma-enhance pa kita professionally. As ASP, kasi may mga gray areas pa sako kaya dapat ada may training man para didto sa mga baguhan pareho sako kay siyempre iba man an sa*

HT baga kesa sa pag-handle san senior high na curriculum. Nan dapat baga at least one step ahead man kita dapat sa mga teachers." [I believe that training is essential to further enhance us professionally. As an ASP, there are still gray areas for me, so there should be training, especially for a newbie like me. Dealing with the senior high curriculum is different from being an HT. And we should be at least one step ahead of the teachers.]

This illustrates the assistant principals' need for continuous training to prepare them to handle the complexities and challenges of educational leadership, especially from the viewpoint of being in the position and in light of handling senior high school curriculum. Such training will not only prepare them for their current roles as ASPs, but also prepare them to become effective school principals in the future, should they choose to be. This finds support in the studies conducted by VanTuyle (2018) and Jackman (2009), which stated that assistant principals lack the training for their actual roles in the field and that training is essential for them to grow more as instructional leaders. It was further suggested that the training should be on the ASPs' viewpoint and not on the school heads.

Such training would greatly help ASPs to be more prepared and more confident in assuming their seemingly ambiguous roles in the field. As shown in the study conducted by Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee (2013), which aimed to determine the effectiveness of a partnership academy program between district school personnel and educational leadership faculty members, they reported that the goals of the program to develop APs in assuming instructional and managerial roles were successfully achieved. The program's beneficiaries were said to have gained more confidence and pride in their roles as assistant principals. They improved their networking, collaboration, and instructional leadership skills.

It also found support in the results of the study conducted by Hayes & Burkett (2021), which illustrated the significant roles of university-district partnerships in providing meaningful professional development programs for mid-career assistant principals. It was also reported in this study that the participants also showed increased levels of confidence in their leadership skills following the program's conclusion. Barola and Digo (2022) also pointed out the urgent need to continuously develop professional development programs for school leaders through seminars or webinars that will equip and keep them up to date on the most current relevant, practical, and functional knowledge skills, values, and competencies required to lead strategically.

3.2. Mentorship and Support from Senior Leaders

Aside from the training, assistant principals also desire full support from the principal for them to be able to develop leadership confidence and establish their identity and authority as assistant principals. Gaining the support of the

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principal helps create a robust and collaborative leadership team, ensures consistency in decision-making and policy enforcement, and fosters a shared vision for the school. This support is essential for the ASPs to carry out their duties and contribute to the school's success.

Mentoring from colleagues and other educational leaders is another invaluable source of support for the ASPs. They can provide guidance, share their experiences, and provide other technical assistance for the personal and professional development of the ASPs. Building a network with these people allows the ASPs to learn more and even have a chance to collaborate with them on specific school projects and activities.

The need for mentoring was implied by one informant when she said, "*Sadto ini si (naming an education program supervisor) nakaka uru-istorya man ako soon sadto. Nan saro pa si sir (naming another education program supervisor). Siya an nararanihan ko nanggad. Until now, siya an nako-consult ko san mga decisions. Intutukduan niya ako. Technical assistance ngani an naihatag niya sa ako. Tapos napapaliwanagan niya ako san mga bagay bagay na kun hanggang diin lang an limitations mo. Kun nano an mga dapat mo himoon. Naga-guide ka niya.*" [Back then, there was (naming an education program supervisor), I used to talk to him. And there was also Sir (naming another education program supervisor). He was the one I really leaned on. Until now, he has been the one I consult with on decisions. He is my mentor. He provides me with technical advice. And he enlightens me on various things, reminds me of my limitations. He really will guide you.]

This shows that the assistant principals need mentorship and support from the school principals and other experienced leaders to enhance their leadership skills. Mentors were positive role models and educational leaders who helped participants advance in their careers by setting an example of leadership. Mentors' advocacy and development of ASPs as they advanced as educational leaders inspired participants to advance in their careers and develop as leaders.

Although assistant principals are responsible for their professional growth, they need professional guidance to acquire the skills necessary for school leadership. Principals then must be willing to give them the opportunity to see all aspects of running a school. They must provide experiences, give constructive feedback, and identify professional development opportunities while ASPs perform their duties. Most importantly, principals must model how to lead people. With a solid mentoring relationship, the assistant principal's maturation and professional development are enhanced, making him better prepared for the job (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991). It also finds support in the study of Barnett et al. (2017), which revealed that ASPs extensively learned from their trusted school administrators as their mentors. Through these mentors, they learned how to improve their decision-

making skills and how to communicate and deal with parents and stakeholders effectively. Moreover, these mentors motivated APs to reflect and capitalize on their attributes and capabilities to become influential leaders.

3.3. Recognition of assistant principals as school leaders

Another support that the ASPs need is for the position to be recognized, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and with rights to be protected and privileges to enjoy as the second rank authority in schools. As stated in the Governance of Basic Education Act (RA 9155), although the school head has authority, accountability, and responsibility, the school head may be assisted by an assistant school head. Both shall be responsible for the administrative and instructional supervision of a school, applying the principle of shared governance. Therefore, there shall not be a case in which an assistant principal is deprived of his rights as a credentialed school leader.

An informant shared: *Pag sinabi mo kaya na assistant bagan pirme ka talaga ma-follow sa school head. Pero sana masunod man an hierarchy sa position na dapat maski sino an principal ma-observe yoon. Maprotect man sana an rights san assistant, dire kay kun nano lang an gusto san school head. Kun nano lang an gusto saimo ihatag na responsibility mao lang yoon. Dapat clearly defined man an mga responsibilities na solely ikaw lang soon an mahimo, na dire yun puwede idelegate sa iba na wara man talaga san appointment as assistant principal. Kasi actually an intitiwalaan pa lugod san principal an wara man position. Samantalang kita lugod na kita an may appointment kita lugod an nadideprive.* [When you say assistant, it is like you always have to follow the school head. But I hope the hierarchy in positions should be observed, no matter who the principal is. The rights of the assistant should also be protected, not just given responsibilities based solely on what the school head wants. The responsibilities should be clearly defined - something that was only assigned to you and not something that can be delegated to others who don't even have the appointment as an assistant principal. Because, actually, the principal tends to trust more those who are not in position. While we, who have the appointment, are the ones being deprived.]

Moreover, when assistant principals' roles are recognized and afforded the privileges and respect due to them, it further amplifies the benefits of the training and professional development they undertake. Acknowledging their contributions not only motivates them, but in such an environment, ASP felt the personal satisfaction of being trusted by the school heads to work collaboratively with them for the institution's overall success. Marshall & Hooley (2006) stated that within a particular chain of command, there was a tendency to place ASPs in inferior roles. Such a viewpoint is inappropriate in an organization where employees are fellow experts. In addition, focusing too much

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on maintaining hierarchical control can harm collaborative efforts toward a common goal.

In a broader societal context, its implications revolve around school instruction and leadership quality. According to Marler (2020), ASPs may engage with every facet of the school community to promote excellent teaching and learning. Furthermore, Baskett (2020) and Hutton (2020) emphasized that ASPs may also involve individuals to understand and address their needs while encouraging teamwork and collaboration among all parties involved. They work with teachers, supervise pupils, and connect with parents to ensure a safe and supportive learning environment for everyone. Therefore, an organization of assistant principals that is both well-trained and well-supported makes the educational system more responsive and successful. A strong and unified school leadership positively impacts the whole learning environment, affecting students, parents, and the community. Therefore, investing in the development and support of assistant principals can improve the educational environment in the entire system.

VI. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the following conclusions are drawn: (1) Educational backgrounds and career experiences vary, which suggests that there is no one-size-fits-all path to becoming an administrator. Individuals with different educational experiences can succeed in this role. However, the experiences and skills gained in the previous roles, though they may not entirely prepare an individual for the new responsibility, can be very beneficial. (2) The role of ASPs in senior high school is multifaceted, although the primary focus is instructional leadership. They had a broad set of responsibilities ranging from curriculum management, preparing schedules and workloads for teachers, teacher mentoring, class monitoring duties, student support and discipline, resourceful partnership building, and various other duties connected to the position. This calls for the ASPs to be flexible and trusted educational leaders who can fulfill their responsibilities effectively. (3) Assistant principals shared common challenges, although the degree and specific circumstances vary based on school contexts. These challenges were related to a lack of induction programs and continuing professional development training, forging authority and cultivating principal support, classroom observations, organizing industry immersion programs for TVL students, and disruptions in professional and personal lives. (4) Assistant principals have difficulty meeting the demands of their administrative roles. They needed support such as continuing professional development and capacity-building training to enhance their skills and knowledge in educational management, especially in light of the senior high school curriculum; mentorship and support from senior leaders; recognition of their roles with equal leadership opportunities; and equal chances for career advancement.

Meeting the needs of ASPs has the potential to improve their leadership practices, resulting in better learning outcomes.

VII. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are hereby proposed: (1) Schools and districts shall value diverse educational and career backgrounds, emphasizing the importance of skills and experiences that school leaders gained in previous roles. (2) Induction programs and continuing professional development programs tailored to the specific needs of assistant principals shall be developed to address gaps in training and enhance the leadership skills and competence of assistant principals, especially in light of evolving curricula and educational management requirements. (3) Promote mentorship and guidance programs to assist assistant principals in their professional growth and leadership development. A culture of collaboration within schools shall be fostered to help assistant principals meet their administrative demands effectively, leading to improved school outcomes and career satisfaction. (4) A well-structured framework for assistant principal roles shall be established, aligning their responsibilities and authority with their qualifications and administrative positions. (5) Assistant principal positions shall be fully recognized as a distinct leadership entity, emphasizing the hierarchical positions within the school leadership structure, and providing them with equal leadership opportunities, including career advancement prospects. (6) Further studies related to the assistant principals employing other research methodologies and covering other variables may be conducted.

VIII. DISCLOSURE

The authors declare that no conflict of interest or financial interest could have influenced the conduct or outcome of this research.

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