



## Integrating School Heads' Performance Level and Leadership Experiences: A Convergent Mixed Methods Analysis on their Strategic Functions

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### ABSTRACT

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This study employed a convergent mixed methods research design to determine the strategic leadership performance and experiences of school heads in integrated schools. The respondents included 188 teaching and non-teaching personnel from 15 integrated schools. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, and weighted mean, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. Career Stage 1 school heads demonstrated “very satisfactory” performance, while Career Stages 2 and 3 achieved “outstanding” performance. Their leadership practices include alignment of school vision, mission, and goals with DepEd priorities; data-driven decision-making; transparent resource management; shared leadership and governance; and collaborative school improvement culture. Challenges are overload in dual-level leadership, resource and infrastructure constraints, complexity of balancing diverse needs, administrative workload and overlapping activities, and balancing decisions with DepEd directives. The integration of the findings revealed that leadership performance increased with career stages, and strategic leadership competence develops with professional experience and leadership roles grounded on values to stronger strategic planning and implementation. These findings serve as the basis in the development of a leadership handbook. This study recommends strengthening policies, professional development, and institutional support for school heads in integrated schools.

### KEYWORDS:

integrated school, leadership experiences, leading strategically, convergent mixed methods, performance level

### I. INTRODUCTION

In an integrated school setting, school administrators must balance governance, instruction, and adaptability while dealing with a variety of tasks and responsibilities. They make sure that they carry out efficient strategic structures to maintain the quality of leadership and deal with operational difficulties. Since integrated schools combine elementary and secondary education on a single campus under a single leadership, these school heads are expected to oversee educational landscapes across diverse settings and learners' needs. Additionally, they carry out duties to satisfy the requirements of various grade levels in integrated schools.

Integrated schools in the Philippines face increasing leadership and governance challenges as school administrators oversee both elementary and secondary levels

on a single campus. Their duties have grown increasingly demanding because of managing several grade levels under one institution. Integrated schools are created as a strategic response to long-standing gaps in the access to basic education in the country. As it has been a universal goal in education, the establishment of integrated schools in certain communities answers the call for Education for All advocacy. This empowers every community child to experience and receive their right to quality basic education. In consonance with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), it ensures excellence plus all-encompassing instruction to promote lifelong learning opportunities (Ferguson & Rofee, 2020). Therefore, maintaining the standard of education and strong leadership abilities are necessary.

Effective leadership becomes evident when all educational factors are actively involved in shaping policies and programs towards the betterment of the school (Supriadi et al., 2021). According to Leechman et al. (2019), leaders must uphold the following principles: vision, integrity, liability, confidence, ability, and developing stakeholder engagements. Shared governance among schools provides an environment where employees are being considered and their

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concerns undergo due process, which minimizes conflicts and ambiguities in school plans. It is also noted that stakeholders depict a vital function in creating clear and responsive guidelines that build trust and accountability in school governance. Encouraging decision-making by everyone involved and developing organized school policies are crucial for promoting fairness and keeping harmony in the school.

According to Puruwita et al. (2022), school administrators must possess critical abilities in goal setting, program leadership, and creating a supportive school environment. Nguyễn et al. (2018) and Fraser et al. (2018) also emphasized ensuring effectiveness in complying with their duties in overseeing staff, schedules, budgets, and facilities, all of which are essential for effective and seamless school operations. Additionally, Merenkov et al. (2019) pointed out that forming groups that assist in fulfilling institutional requirements and creating professional teaching associations promote school programs. Considering all these things, school leaders are essential to maintaining efficient administration and fostering a positive learning environment for both learners and teachers in a wider school community.

An effective leadership style is grounded on mentorship, emotional resilience, and strong interpersonal skills. School heads' mentorship helps teachers achieve their professional development and career fulfillment (Cooke, 2023). Barola and Digo (2022a) recommended creating mentoring and coaching programs for school heads to achieve full realization of their personal and professional development as school leaders. This is essential to enhance their skills in leading integrated schools. They are also given the task to strategically lead the workforce by developing coping mechanisms for teachers to manage stress and prevent burnout, which will allow them to function effectively. Likewise, Webster and Litchka (2020) shared that the ethical behavior of school heads is greatly influenced by the perception of teachers towards them. So-Oabeb and du Plessis (2023) identified accountability, communication, social skills, subject-material expertise, managerial and digital competencies, and active listening as essential qualities that enable leaders to nurture professional growth among teachers. Their roles and functions must be resolved and efficiently carried out to sustain effective school operations. They are also responsible for managing resources, fostering teacher development, ensuring student success, and building strong community partnerships. Leading strategically incorporates competence, communication skills, and adaptability in addressing challenges.

School heads of integrated schools continue to face limitations like overcrowding, shortage of facilities, limited resources, and the demand for more efficient leadership (Capulso et al., 2024). Some leaders also face challenges in operation, making it crucial for school leaders to ensure quality education (Baker-Doyle, 2021; Lino, 2018). The conversion of elementary schools into integrated schools also

brings significant challenges and stress, as administrators are tasked with managing an elementary and secondary in a single campus (Lino & Lolinco, 2018; Nguyen, 2022). The wide scope of responsibilities makes it difficult for school heads to efficiently implement their tasks, particularly because of time constraints (Dayagbil et al., 2021). Moreover, the complexity of administrative work adds to the challenge, making leaders struggle in delivering educational programs amidst being burdened with time-consuming requirements, especially financial reports (Elnar & Tiongzon, 2023).

Leading integrated schools require administrative expertise and instructional leadership amidst the present complex and critical set of functions and tasks to handle leadership demands. Studies have focused on critical aspects of strategic leadership in shaping quality and sustainability in managing integrated schools which entail that leaders who possess strong decision-making, resource management, and participatory governance are better positioned to promote inclusive and high-performing learning environments.

Even with the present ideas from previous research, there still lies a gap in studies concerning specifically the lived realities of integrated school administrators in the Philippines. Much literature highlights general school leadership but seldom captures the unique challenges of handling dual responsibilities across elementary and secondary education of integrated schools situated in one setting. It bridges the gap by analyzing how competencies and governance principles converge in shaping administrators' performance and strategies. Its novelty lies in its specific focus on integrated schools in the Philippines and its effort to connect both theoretical and practical dimensions of leadership with policy-driven expectations.

The scope of this research encompasses all 15 public integrated schools within the Schools Division of Sorsogon. Focusing on strategic leadership of administrators, with particular emphasis on their experiences in leading strategically along their leadership practices and challenges. The respondents are school administrators currently serving in integrated schools and teachers and staff at the integrated schools. Excluded from the study are private integrated schools and administrators of non-integrated institutions, since their structure and systems are not comparable.

This research aims to examine the performance levels and leadership experiences of school heads in integrated schools in their strategic functions as the basis for the development of a leadership guidebook. Specifically, it aims to (1) determine the school heads' performance levels on their strategic functions; (2) describe the leadership experiences of school heads on their strategic functions; and (3) integrate the school heads' performance levels and leadership experiences as the basis for the development of a handbook on leading strategically.

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## II. METHODOLOGY

Mixed-methods research collects quantitative and qualitative data, combines the two gathered data sets, and draws interpretations from sets of data to understand research studies (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Specifically, this study utilized convergent mixed methods to gather and examine the information from the quantitative and qualitative analysis. It was used to integrate data across quantitative and qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2021). This research design was utilized to integrate the performance level and leadership experiences of school heads, which were essential as the basis in the development handbook.

### The Respondents

The study involved 188 respondents. The respondents for the survey in this study were the teaching staff, non-teaching staff, and school heads, while all 15 school heads from all the integrated schools in the School Division of Sorsogon were included in the interview. Among the 188 respondents, it involved the following: 164 (87%) teachers, eight (4%) principals, six (3%) master teachers, three (2%) administrative officers, three (2%) teachers-in-charge, two (1%) assistant school principals, and two (1%) head teachers. The inclusion of the teaching and non-teaching personnel in the quantitative method provided rich and evidence-based data to capture the performance level of school heads from the perspective of those who experience it. There are 52 respondents for Career Stage 1, 101 respondents for Career Stage 2, and 35 respondents for Career Stage 3.

### The Instrument

The data were gathered through an adopted survey questionnaire and a validated interview guide. An adopted survey questionnaire from Barola and Digo (2022b) was used to determine their performance level along with their strategic functions in leading strategically. Their performance level was measured and identified from the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) Domain 1 indicators along with their strategic functions. To ensure reliability of the questionnaire, a dry run of the research instrument was performed to 17 school heads, with a computed reliability level of 0.93. A validated interview guide was utilized by the researchers. This interview guide followed validations from experts and revisions to ensure that the questions adhered to the standards and desired measures in the conduct of the interview. This instrument for school heads included the purpose, preliminaries on setting the mood, ethical considerations, and guide questions focused on open-ended questions to capture school heads' experiences.

### Data Collection

Following the standards and protocols in the conduct of the study, approval was secured from the Schools Division Superintendent and all the school heads of integrated schools in Schools Division of Sorsogon. The gathering of data happened from November 2025 to January 2026. After their

approval, the researchers ensured that the respondents agreed to provide their consent in the study to gather the ratings and school heads' leadership experiences. With the agreed schedule from the school heads, the researchers personally visited the schools on the schedule preferred by the respondents' convenience and conducted data gathering, achieving 100% completed responses.

Also, interviews and follow-up communications were conducted through online platforms in the gathering of data subject to the availability and the distance of the respondents and were performed also using online mechanisms. It was also agreed to conduct follow-up and consultations with respondents in the conduct of this study.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to define a variable on the level of measurement (Kaur et al., 2018). Frequency, percentage, and weighted mean were used to describe the performance level of school heads. Their ratings were interpreted using a 5-point scale of DepEd Order No. 2, s. 2015 such as (5) outstanding, (4) very satisfactory, (3) satisfactory, (2) unsatisfactory, and (1) poor. Thematic analysis was also used in examining the collected information using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The collected data was thematically analyzed to discover their leadership experiences, providing valuable insights for improving their work practices and strengthening their professional ethics as school administrators in integrated schools. The quantitative and qualitative data were integrated with each other to explain the strategic performance levels and leadership experiences of school heads. It was explained in terms of observable patterns and trends derived from both quantitative and qualitative findings. Furthermore, the findings in relation to the integration and meta-inferences will serve as the basis in the development of a handbook.

## III. RESULTS

This section presents data on the performance levels of school heads across their career stages based on the PPSSH Domain 1 on leading strategically. It also presents the findings derived from interviews highlighting key leadership experiences of school heads in managing integrated schools and the integration of the findings and interpretation for the school heads' performance level and leadership experiences.

### Performance Level of School Heads on their Strategic Functions

The identification of the career stages of school heads was guided by PPSSH, DepEd frameworks and policies. These frameworks outline progressive stages corresponding to school heads' positions. Career Stage 1 includes aspiring principals like teacher-in-charge and head teacher; Career Stage 2 includes assistant school principal and principal I and II; Career Stage 3 includes principal III, while Career Stage 4 includes principal IV positions (DepEd

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Order No. 24 s. 2020; DepEd Order No. 24 s. 2025). Among the 15 school heads from the 188 respondents, three teachers-in-charge and two head teachers were categorized as Career

Stage 1, while two assistant school principals and five principal I were classified under Career Stage 2, and three principal III were categorized under Career Stage 3

**Table 1. Performance Level of School Heads under Career Stage 1 on Leading Strategically**

Strands	Career Stage 1	Weighted Mean	Description
Vision, Mission, and Core Values	Demonstrate knowledge of the DepEd vision, mission and core values to foster shared understanding and alignment of school policies, programs, projects and activities.	4.54	Outstanding
School Planning and Implementation	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the phases of development and implementation of school plans aligned with institutional goals and policies.	4.37	Very Satisfactory
Policy Implementation and Review	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of policy implementation and review to ensure that school operations are consistent with national and local laws, regulations and issuances.	4.46	Very Satisfactory
Research and Innovation	Identify relevant research findings from reliable sources in facilitating data-driven and evidence-based innovations to improve school performance.	4.15	Very Satisfactory
Program Design and Implementation	Display understanding of the implementation of programs in the school that support the development of learners.	4.44	Very Satisfactory
Learner Voice	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of utilizing learner voice to inform policy development and decision-making towards school improvement.	4.46	Very Satisfactory
Monitoring and Evaluation Processes and Tools	Display knowledge and understanding of monitoring and evaluation processes and tools to promote learner achievement.	4.44	Very Satisfactory
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>		<b>4.41</b>	<b>Very Satisfactory</b>

Table 1 shows that Career Stage 1 school heads showed a “very satisfactory” dominant rating across the different strands based on the ratings of the 52 respondents. For Strand A (Vision, Mission, and Core Values), they obtained the highest rating with a weighted average of 4.54, interpreted as “outstanding”. The other six strands obtained a “very satisfactory” rating as well. Strand C (Policy Implementation and Review) and Strand F (Learner Voice) both obtained "very satisfactory" with a weighted mean of 4.46. Meanwhile, Strand E (Program Design and

Implementation) had a 4.44 “very satisfactory” rating, and Strand G (Monitoring and Evaluation Processes and Tools) also had a weighted mean of 4.44, “very satisfactory.” For Strand B (School Planning and Implementation), Career Stage 1 had a “very satisfactory” rating with a weighted mean of 4.37. The lowest performance was recorded in Strand D (Research and Innovation), with a weighted mean of 4.15 as “very satisfactory.” It also reflected that school heads under Career Stage 1 had an overall weighted mean of 4.41, described as "very satisfactory."

**Table 2. Performance Level of School Heads under Career Stage 2 on Leading Strategically**

Strands	Career Stage 2	Weighted Mean	Description
Vision, Mission, and Core Values	Demonstrate knowledge of the DepEd vision, mission, and core values to foster shared understanding and alignment of school policies, programs, projects, and activities.	4.59	Outstanding
School Planning and Implementation	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the phases of development and implementation of school plans aligned with institutional goals and policies.	4.58	Outstanding
Policy Implementation and Review	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of policy implementation and review to ensure that school operations are consistent with national and local laws, regulations, and issuances.	4.59	Outstanding

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Research and Innovation	Identify relevant research findings from reliable sources in facilitating data-driven and evidence-based innovations to improve school performance.	4.36	Very Satisfactory
Program Design and Implementation	Display understanding of the implementation of programs in the school that support the development of learners.	4.61	Outstanding
Learner Voice	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of utilizing learner voice to inform policy development and decision-making towards school improvement.	4.49	Very Satisfactory
Monitoring and Evaluation Processes and Tools	Display knowledge and understanding of monitoring and evaluation processes and tools to promote learner achievement.	4.53	Outstanding
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>		<b>4.54</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>

Table 2 shows that school heads under Career Stage 2 for Domain 1 of the PPSSH Standards, namely on Leading Strategically, generally showed high performance across the seven strands, with five strands obtaining “outstanding” and two strands with a “very satisfactory” rating. The ratings of the 101 respondents showed a remarkable performance level of school heads under this Career Stage 2 who were assistant school principals and principal I. Strand E (Program Design and Implementation) had the highest outstanding performance level with a weighted mean of 4.61, followed by Strand A (Vision, Mission, and Core Values) and Strand C (Policy Implementation and Review), which also had the same high performance level of 4.59 with a weighted mean

described as "outstanding." Strand B (School Planning and Implementation) had a performance level with a weighted average of 4.58, and Strand G (Monitoring and Evaluation Processes and Tools) also had a performance level with a weighted average of 4.53, also achieving an “outstanding” level. Strand F (Learner Voice) had a performance level with a weighted mean of 4.49 described as "very satisfactory." Among the seven strands, Strand D (Research and Innovation) obtained the lowest performance level with a weighted mean of 4.36, which also falls under "very satisfactory." Lastly, the school heads under Career Stage 2 had an overall weighted mean of 4.54 described as "outstanding."

**Table 3. Performance Level of School Heads under Career Stage 3 on Leading Strategically**

Strands	Career Stage 2	Weighted Mean	Description
Vision, Mission, and Core Values	Demonstrate knowledge of the DepEd vision, mission and core values to foster shared understanding and alignment of school policies, programs, projects and activities.	4.94	Outstanding
School Planning and Implementation	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the phases of development and implementation of school plans aligned with institutional goals and policies.	4.97	Outstanding
Policy Implementation and Review	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of policy implementation and review to ensure that school operations are consistent with national and local laws, regulations and issuances.	4.89	Outstanding
Research and Innovation	Identify relevant research findings from reliable sources in facilitating data-driven and evidence-based innovations to improve school performance.	4.91	Outstanding
Program Design and Implementation	Display understanding of the implementation of programs in the school that support the development of learners.	4.91	Outstanding
Learner Voice	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of utilizing learner voice to inform policy development and decision-making towards school improvement.	4.83	Outstanding
Monitoring and Evaluation Processes and Tools	Display knowledge and understanding of monitoring and evaluation processes and tools to promote learner achievement.	4.94	Outstanding
<b>Overall Weighted Mean</b>		<b>4.91</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>

Table 3 shows that Career Stage 3 school heads reflected an outstanding performance level. Strand B (School

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Planning and Implementation) obtained the highest “outstanding” rating for obtaining the rating of 4.97. Strand A (Vision, Mission, and Core Values) and Strand G (Monitoring and Evaluation Processes and Tools) had the second highest rating with the same rating of 4.94 Outstanding. Strand D (Research and Innovation) and Strand E (Program Design and Implementation) also posted an “outstanding” rating of 4.91. Strand C (Policy Implementation and Review) got the second lowest rating of

4.89, described also as “outstanding”. While Strand F (Learner Voice) recorded the lowest rating, it still had an “outstanding” rating of 4.83. The school heads under Career Stage 3 had an overall rating of 4.91 as “outstanding”.

**Leadership Experiences of School Heads in Integrated Schools**

Table 4 shows the main themes found from the interview analysis. It includes sample responses of each theme related to the work management practices of school heads of integrated schools. From the analysis of the interview data, it revealed the following themes.

**Table 4. Leadership Experiences of School Heads in Integrated Schools**

Major Themes	Subthemes	Evidence
<b>Leadership Practices Employed by School Heads of Integrated Schools</b>	Strategic Alignment of School Vision, Mission, and Goals with DepEd Priorities	“I align our school’s vision, mission, and goals with DepEd priorities by anchoring them on the DepEd MATATAG Agenda and Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP2030), then translating these into clearly defined targets and strategies in the SIP and annual, budget-supported” (SH 6).
	Data-Driven Decision Making	“I use data and evidence by regularly analyzing learner performance results and school reports and monitoring findings to identify strengths and gaps. These data guide my decisions in curriculum planning providing remediation, and prioritizing teacher development, to improve learning outcomes” (SH 13).
	Transparent Resource Management	“I manage human, financial, and physical resources efficiently by aligning plans with the SIP, AIP, and DepEd guidelines through clear role assignment, transparent budgeting, proper procurement, regular monitoring, and compliant innovations that support improved teaching and learning outcomes” (SH 13).
	Shared Leadership and Governance	“I engage teachers, learners, parents, and stakeholders through regular consultations, shared decision-making bodies, and feedback mechanisms, ensuring their inputs are documented, reflected in school plans and policies, and monitored for impact on sustainable school improvement” (SH 15).
	Collaborative School Improvement Culture	“To ensure sustainable school improvement and innovation and to genuinely shape school policies, I initiate a holistic partnership between the school and the community. I actively involve community members in school activities and consistently emphasize their vital role in achieving the school’s success” (SH 7).
<b>Leadership Challenges in Managing Integrated Schools</b>	Role Overload in Dual-Level Leadership	“I often made sleepless nights to accomplish reports, and yet there were still late needed reports to be submitted both in elementary and secondary while having limited resources as I juggle dual responsibilities” (SH 1).
	Resource and Infrastructure Constraints	“Since the school is newly converted to integrated school, we are offering Grades 7 and 8 now; we are short of staff to handle JHS subjects. Our MOOE allocation is computed for Elem only; thus, budgeting the fund is a challenge” (SH 13).
	Complexity of Balancing Diverse Needs	“The key challenges include balancing the different curricular and developmental needs of elementary and secondary learners, ensuring consistent instructional quality, and providing continuous leadership support across both levels while managing limited time, resources, and personnel” (SH 14)

Administrative Workload and Overlapping Activities	“Overlapping activities having two different schedules to attend indeed constraints my ability to implement and meet equitable learning opportunity” (SH 1).
Balancing Decisions with DepEd Directives	“Policy constraints to implement local decisions are some gaps to implement strategic plans in the school” (SH 14).

**Integration of School Heads' Performance Level and Leadership Experiences**

This study explained the integration of the performance level and leadership experiences of school heads of integrated schools. It highlights the inferences based on the incorporation of the school heads' performance levels and

their key leadership experiences in leading strategically. revealed that Career Stage 1 shows developing competence, Career Stage 2 reveals established leadership, and Career Stage 3 exhibits mature and advanced leadership competence.

**Table 5. Integration of Performance Level and their Leadership Experiences**

Career Stages	Quantitative Inference	Qualitative Inference	Integration
1	School heads are showing developing strategic leadership competence, showing a strong rating on vision and values-driven leadership foundations, but are showing weaker performances on research and innovation which connotes a strong potential on the early stage of strategic competence.	School heads demonstrate adaptive and collaborative strategic leadership practices grounded on vision and DepEd directive compliance. Yet, they continue to be shaped by structural and contextual constraints, evidently on their early stage as school leaders to face workload, resources, and system demands. They were forced to navigate and adapt to the complexity and to sustain performance under challenging conditions.	As entry-level leaders, these leaders are in a developmental phase where their dependence on foundational leadership is evident; however, they continue to face weak research and innovation engagement, which hinder their full strategic leadership. This foundational and transitional career stage reveals increasing involvement on strategic functions but are still limited to role boundaries and demands.
2	School heads at this level exhibit an established leadership competence with outstanding ratings in most of the strands, yet they still face consistent gaps in research and innovation. With their high strategic leadership competence in most domains, it reflects an effective execution of their strategic functions yet calls for training on research and innovation.	Their leadership experiences reflect strengthened data-driven practices and shared governance, yet they continue to face pressures and limitations from administrative workload and diverse school demands. Their established strategic leadership style ensures effective alignment with national frameworks, but still, their performance is still shaped by the complexity in leading an integrated school, which calls for more flexible and adaptive leadership.	They reached an established level of effective strategic leadership, which is evident in their outstanding performance and strong implementation of their strategic functions. As these school heads can perform at a high level, their strategic ability to fully maximize all strategic functions is still influenced by systemic and operational limitations, which reveals that their research and innovation skills remain less optimized.
3	School heads are showing advanced and highly consistent strategic leadership competence with excellent and outstanding ratings across all strands, indicating their mastery of strategic functions in school leadership. Their advanced and consistent mastery of strategic leadership supports their in-depth	It reflects their adaptive, highly collaborative, and strategically aligned practices in navigating complex school environments while managing diverse needs and structural challenges. They continue to address challenges through their highly professional behaviors and sincere commitment to continuous school improvement, which are evident on how they treat their	School heads at this stage embody mature and highly adaptive strategic leadership; even if there are contextual barriers, they persist to effectively manage these limitations through their high-level leadership competence and strategic responsiveness. They sustained outstanding excellence across all levels, which is equally evident on their leadership experiences in

knowledge and reflects their highest degree of work ethics in schools. Yet, among the strands, they the lowest rating on learners' voice.

personnel and how they spark transformations in their respective schools grounded on their rich experiences as school heads.

effectively and efficiently managing an integrated school, especially focusing much on their personnel and staff needs.

#### **IV. DISCUSSION**

##### **Performance Level of School Heads**

###### **a. Performance Level of School Heads under Career Stage 1.**

The school heads of integrated schools show a remarkable performance level for Career Stage 1. They possessed an overall "very satisfactory" performance level. These school heads are aspiring school principals as they handle such preparatory stages in leadership and management. In this career stage, these school heads show basic knowledge and understanding of DepEd's policies and standards. Tekir (2021) shared that leaders at this level have gained knowledge on the components on leading strategically in carrying out their roles as school heads as they are expected to create a positive learning environment for teachers. Having the knowledge and ideas on the vision, mission, and goals of the institution and the different phases of policy implementations and evaluation gives the schools the prerequisite qualifications to perform wider and more complex roles as they delve into their professional careers. This is evident for having a lone outstanding rating on vision, mission, and core values and having the rest of the strategic strands as very satisfactory. They were able to show that as aspiring school heads, they have the knowledge and understanding of the PPSSH domains on leading strategically and possess qualities of accountability and responsibility. Oplatka and Lapidot (2018) stated that these novice school heads are given professional and practical assistance by their mentors in handling technical and administrative issues. This is also very important to note that school heads in this early career stage acquire support from experienced leaders to better equip themselves with skills in leadership.

###### **b. Performance Level of School Heads under Career Stage 2.**

School heads under Career Stage 2 have an "outstanding" overall rating. These school heads can communicate the DepEd's vision, mission, and core values to a wider community. They are already expected to implement and utilize their knowledge and skills to execute their policies and plans with understanding. School heads can ensure that their implementation of their innovations is in accordance with standards and policies of the institution. It is this Career Stage of school heads where they are expected to execute and apply their knowledge and skills anchored on the DepEd's policies and frameworks. Having a multidimensional role in leadership, principals are tasked to structure and design achievable plans and supervise the implementation of the curriculum (Ullah et al., 2021). Principals are expected to meet the standards in the implementation of the programs and policies. They are also expected to utilize relevant data from

the schools in the designing and implantation of the programs, projects, and activities to ensure these are data-driven and evidence-based. Their capacity to utilize their ideas and concepts allowed them to be capacitated in performing their administrative functions on operations and leadership. Their essential roles in planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating their plans are relevant in leading their schools to provide quality education across the different levels of learners in an integrated school setting. This means that they can apply their knowledge and understanding of leading strategically as independent professionals in performing their functions as leaders and managers. They possess excellent skills on the application of their knowledge on the seven strands of leading strategically, enabling the school community to be aware and part of the policy planning and implementation for learners' growth. These school leaders are aware that their knowledge is expected to be translated into actions and implementations.

###### **c. Performance Level of School Heads under Career Stage 3.**

Career Stage 3 school heads achieve the highest "outstanding" overall rating. They possess the quality and desirable traits of outstanding leaders for integrated schools by leading strategically. They all achieve high outstanding ratings in all the domains, which means that these school heads show extraordinary skills in achieving and committing to their job and tasks. Granted, with their experience and positions as leaders, they consistently show an in-depth level of knowledge and understanding of the DepEd's policies and frameworks. They establish advanced skills in delivering their functions as school leaders and ensure that their programs and policies, which are designed and implemented, are carried out to a wider school community through the engagements of stakeholders and communities. They collaboratively engage their school community and stakeholders in improving their school performance. These experienced principals ensured that they created networks and interactions with professional peers to maintain their professional learning (Sahlin, 2025). They can show that as school leaders, they can exhibit advanced skills as leaders and managers. It entails that these school heads are capable of excellently and comprehensively delivering their roles and functions in leading integrated schools. They can create a responsive school community where policies, programs, and initiatives are reflective and anchored on the institutional goals; thus, internal and external stakeholders are empowered as well. It implies that school heads must continue engaging themselves with professional and

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academic discussions to sustain their professional learning and improve their linkages and partnerships as well.

### Leadership Experiences of School Heads in Leading an Integrated School

**a. Strategic Alignment of School Vision, Mission, and Goals with DepEd Priorities.** Effective school management is an approach where leaders align the school's path with DepEd priorities in accordance with the national mandates to school-level demands. Aligning the school's programs along with national frameworks provides a foundation and guidance in the establishment of a School Improvement Plan (SIP) and Annual Implementation Plan (AIP). A school head shared, "We align the school's vision, mission, and goals with DepEd priorities by anchoring them on the DepEd Vision, Mission, and Goals. Creating data-driven SIP and AIP is one important thing to ensure that school operations support DepEd mandates" (SH 2). Also, it was mentioned, "I align our school's vision, mission, and goals with DepEd priorities by anchoring them on the DepEd MATATAG Agenda and Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP2030), then translating these into clearly defined targets and strategies in the SIP and annual, budget-supported," (SH 6). As leaders of integrated schools, they align vision, mission, and goals with DepEd priorities to ensure coherence across elementary and secondary levels. This alignment enables integrated school leaders to harmonize programs and operations while responding to diverse learner needs. Their function to lead the school is practically grounded on the DepEd mandates. It will ensure that the school is being run smoothly and effectively. This resonates with the findings of Kipasika (2024), stating the very important functions of leadership in showcasing and promoting the essentials in running an institution are mission, vision, values, and strategic objectives of the academic institutions. There is a need to expose our leaders to develop their skills in communicating and integrating value-driven principles in leading their schools towards success and excellence. Through incorporating these DepEd core principles into school head's daily operations and transactions, it establishes a common goal that supports collaboration and sustained school development.

**b. Data-Driven Decision Making.** School leaders in integrated schools use learner performance data and school records to inform instructional planning and interventions across elementary and secondary grade levels. Data-driven decision-making supports targeted strategies that address varied learning gaps within an integrated school setting. A school head mentioned, "I use data and evidence by regularly analyzing learner performance results and school reports and monitoring findings to identify strengths and gaps. These data guide my decisions in curriculum planning providing remediation, and prioritizing teacher development, to improve learning outcomes" (SH 13). This kind of action

ensures responsible decision-making along compliance with PPSSH standards which are being considered in crafting school policies, reforms, programs, and activities. Through this practice, the school can identify the needs of the school, and it serves as a guide in resource allocation through the utilization of school records, learners' performances, and different assessment results. Schildkamp (2019) suggested that results-based education can be similarly tagged as the utilization of the current best evidence in making innovations and programs about the quality of education and the learning of students. Therefore, to fully realize the purpose of improving the quality of education, school heads should ground themselves on reasonable thinking based on facts and evidence. Moreover, it also improves the relationship between the school leader and the entire school workforce in relying on data in making decisions and alterations. This also empowers other different staff members to utilize their expertise in exercising their decision-making authority in giving data relevance. Evidence-based decision making promotes transparency, alignment, and proper utilization and optimization of resources.

**c. Transparent Resource Management.** Proper utilization of human, financial, and physical resources and ensuring their reasonable alignment with the school priorities and DepEd standards shows effective leadership and transparent resource management. School heads noted that careful planning, proper budgeting, and adherence to established financial standards such as the Annual Procurement Plan (APP) and Work Financial Plan (WFP) are essential to support school needs and initiatives. To address limitations, they maximize limited resources while maintaining adherence to policies and regulations, which reflects a leadership practice that balances operational efficiency with accountability. They maintain and support safe and conducive learning environments through the employment of proper fiscal planning, and the financial transactions undergo review and approval to ensure transparency and compliance. Even with a very limited fund from the MOOE, they opt to think of other ways to generate funds, like income-generating programs, to augment their financial incapacities to support the programs, projects, and activities of the school. A school leader stated that "I manage human, financial, and physical resources efficiently by aligning plans with the SIP, AIP, and DepEd guidelines through clear role assignment, transparent budgeting, proper procurement, regular monitoring, and compliant innovations that support improved teaching and learning outcomes" (SH 13). Integrated school leaders manage human, financial, and physical resources efficiently to support the diverse needs of both elementary and secondary learners. Transparent and strategic resource management ensures equitable distribution and optimal utilization of funds. With a very strategic approach and thinking towards the improvement of the school, they can effectively manage and lead the school in

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terms of financial, human, and physical resources. To manage human resources, they consider the background knowledge, skills, and attitudes of their staff to effectively assign them to their appropriate level which is based on their performance and level of commitment. For their financial and physical resources, school heads practice transparent budgeting, proper procurement, and regular monitoring of the utilization of the resources. Likewise, they ensure that they abide with the civil service rules and DepEd policies while encouraging their teachers to perform best and by giving technical assistance. They also prioritize the students' most pressing and urgent needs while complying with the procurement policies anchored in the school-based management principles. Kalokora and Lekule (2019) mentioned that transparency is the means to build and strengthen positive relationships which organizations need for productivity and that the members of the institution should be informed and connected to the entire organizational system. By institutionalizing clear financial procedures, role clarity, and regular monitoring, school leaders create systems that support innovation and improvement.

**d. Shared Leadership and Governance.** A strong commitment to participatory governance and shared leadership highlights the adoption of a deep commitment to building shared governance mechanisms. Grounded in RA 9155 and school-based management, they empower the structuring of the School Governance Council (SGC), Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), and other regular consultations for meaningful and active stakeholder engagement. This collaborative engagement among internal and external stakeholders is complemented by instructional and professional competencies that are needed to manage the workforce effectively, enabling leaders to guide teachers in planning, administering lessons, and preparing teaching documents (Yasin & Mustafa, 2020). With the support from the community, school leaders are given the opportunity and assistance in the implementation of the school programs, and with the consultations from various sectors, they will have an overview of the different perspectives and angles, which enables them to investigate various levels of each support. A school head pointed out that "I engage teachers, learners, parents, and stakeholders through regular consultations, shared decision-making bodies, and feedback mechanisms, ensuring their inputs are documented, reflected in school plans and policies, and monitored for impact on sustainable school improvement" (SH 15). School leaders emphasize shared governance by engaging internal and external stakeholders in shared and collaborative decision-making. This practice promotes and values collaboration, transparency, and shared accountability, fostering a sense of ownership among stakeholders. Torres (2025) argued that this leadership emphasizes shared responsibilities, collective decision-making, and the active participation of various stakeholders like teachers, administrators, students, and

parents alike. It motivates school leaders to take initiative, speak their opinions and ideas, and make contributions to the development of schools. It also reflects a leadership practice that values collaboration, transparency, and shared accountability, fostering a sense of ownership among stakeholders. With strong promotion and emphasis on participatory structures, they strengthen collaborative relationships and ensure that reforms are inclusive, responsive, and widely supported.

**e. Collaborative School Improvement Culture.** This practice is evident through building a collaborative and sustainable environment by encouraging shared responsibility, continuous learning, and active involvement from teachers, learners, parents, and community partners. They promote open communication, regular consultations, and opportunities for training and professional growth to strengthen teamwork and share ownership of school goals. Strong collaboration and consistent communication among stakeholders help sustain school programs and reforms over time. These school leaders promote continuous improvement across all grade levels by working closely with teachers, staff, and community members. A school head noted, "To ensure sustainable school improvement and innovation and to genuinely shape school policies, I initiate a holistic partnership between the school and the community. I actively involve community members in school activities and consistently emphasize their vital role in achieving the school's success" (SH 7). This collaborative culture supports long-term reforms and strengthens the school's capacity to deliver inclusive and quality education. This offers open communication while acknowledging everyone and having them as an essential component and member of a team while prioritizing the academic achievement and well-being of students. Knowing the diverse background of the community allows leaders to position themselves effectively in blending and getting aware of the entire workplace. Provinzano et al. (2020) proposed the establishment of a contextually responsive community school model to enhance learners' academic performance and improve school-level decision-making amidst the races and ethnicities of the school. With the provision and establishment of responsive school systems, there is an improvement in the teacher's practice and student outcomes, as it includes the promotion of a participative environment, utilization of standardized professional development to help improve teachers, and excellent leadership. It indicates that collaborative professionalism enhances organizational capacity, supports instructional improvement, and sustains long-term change with improvement efforts into everyday practices. Promotion and support to collaboration and continuous improvement processes will intensify innovations and reforms that are learner-centered, context-responsive, and sustainable.

These findings reveal that school heads practice strategic leadership by aligning their schools' mission, vision,

and core values with DepEd priorities; making decisions anchored on data; managing resources transparently; and embodying shared governance and collaboration among internal stakeholders and the whole school community. They also ensure accountability and responsiveness across elementary and secondary levels in their practice of building a well-structured school strategic system. These practices strengthen sustainable school improvement and institutional resilience through their effective leadership in integrated schools, which are strategic, inclusive, and learner centered.

**f. Role Overload in Dual-Level Leadership.** School heads of integrated schools handle dual-level responsibilities such as instructional supervision, administrative reporting, curriculum alignment, and teacher support across different grade levels for both elementary and secondary levels. This dual-level management poses demands for school leaders to juggle responsibilities and deadlines for both elementary and secondary levels. They mentioned sleepless nights, overlapping schedules, and limited time to focus on long-term planning and innovation as their common challenges. Balancing these dual-level responsibilities creates stress and role conflict, which can compromise instructional quality and hinder strategic decision-making. A school head mentioned, "I often made sleepless nights to accomplish reports, and yet there were still late needed reports to be submitted both in elementary and secondary while having limited resources as I juggle dual responsibilities" (SH 1). Since both curricula have separated needed requirements to be submitted, they oftentimes face urgency to meet both deadlines. In comparison to other school leaders, as others focus only on one curriculum, leaders of integrated schools must be equipped with the necessary mechanisms to meet the demands of the department. Barola and Digo (2022b) assert the significance of empowering our school leaders on their roles in handling and leading schools which are entrusted to their care and guidance especially in coping with workloads, pressures, and expectations. In the study of Butt and Warraich (2022), they revealed that multitasking affects the overall work performance. Task duplication and multitasking lead to increased stress levels and inefficiencies, especially when systems are not properly organized. Leaders need to adapt and cope with these demands to meet the unique developmental and curricular needs of both levels. It needs strong organizational structures, distributed leadership, and clear prioritization of tasks to sustain effective leadership across all grade levels to mitigate these challenges. School leaders must be trained and exposed to handling numerous and diverse tasks to allow them to be familiar in meeting multiple demands in an integrated school setting.

**g. Resource and Infrastructure Constraints.** School heads of integrated schools are faced with limited financial resources, shortages in teaching personnel, and inadequate physical facilities. It is observed that some of the integrated schools have a smaller number of classrooms, insufficient

instructional materials, and inadequate permanent teachers, which need to be prioritized as urgent needs over long-term development initiatives. A school affirms this saying, "Since the school is newly converted to integrated school, we are offering Grades 7 and 8 now; we are short of staff to handle JHS subjects. Our MOOE allocation is computed for Elem only; thus, budgeting the fund is a challenge" (SH 13). Constraints that are being experienced include limited resources, a shortage of teachers and facilities, varied learner needs across grade levels, and external factors such as funding delays and stakeholder support, which affect the full implementation of strategic plans, achievement of performance targets, and equitable learning opportunities. Some school leaders also face challenges attending different demands and specific needs for elementary or secondary affairs. With this challenge, school leaders are forced to think of necessary adjustments to comply with the minimum requirements or applicable arrangements in delivering quality education. Zulfiqar (2025) said that inadequate facilities and resources make it severely challenging to cater the large numbers of learners with diverse needs. It is true that ample facilities and resources will provide an avenue where children's needs are catered and attended to. Agravante et al. (2023) recommended that the conduct of training on upskilling competencies of school heads will help them enhance their managerial skills along with the management of educational projects. Mncube et al. (2023) even asserted that constrained resources and scarcity pose challenges for stakeholders and effective delivery. This challenge is also evident among other schools, which makes the function of school leaders demanding and tasks them with being resourceful and strategic in terms of fund utilization, generation of resources, and strategically managing available resources. It shows that resource scarcity directly limits a school's capacity to respond to diverse and complex learner needs. Agravante et al. (2023) recommended that the conduct of training on upskilling competencies of school heads will help them enhance their managerial skills along with the management of educational projects. These limitations and challenges reveal the need for strategic prioritization, strong stakeholder collaboration, and innovative management practices in the utilization of available resources while ensuring equitable access and provision of quality learning opportunities aligned with DepEd standards.

**h. Complexity of Balancing Diverse Needs.** There are significant challenges in an integrated school setting which urge school heads to balance and meet the diverse needs of learners for both elementary and secondary levels. Elementary learners require nurturing approaches that focus on foundational skills and holistic development, while secondary learners demand subject specialization, academic rigor and increased learner independence. A school head asserted, "I must navigate the nurturing, foundational focus of elementary education alongside the subject-specialized,

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high-stakes academic environment of secondary level. Leadership quality is often strained by role fragmentation, where administrators struggle to provide expert instructional supervision across all grades" (SH 6). Also, as narrated by a school head, "the key challenges include balancing the different curricular and developmental needs of elementary and secondary learners, ensuring consistent instructional quality, and providing continuous leadership support across both levels while managing limited time, resources, and personnel" (SH 14). It is also noted that integrated schools face lack of teachers who will handle secondary learners. Since integrated schools are created from elementary schools, most of the integrated schools opt to hire volunteer teachers or request locally funded teachers from the municipality or province to augment and suffice the need for teachers. Due to the hiring of volunteer teachers, some are not aligned with the required subject specializations in the curriculum; however, they still manage to teach and deliver the subjects effectively. In addition to this, Buban and Digo (2021) shared the need to capacitate school leaders in making the curriculum relevant, responsive, and accommodating to the diverse needs of learners. Yet this still poses challenges in the delivery of the curriculum, as it adds up to the need to capacitate teachers to be equipped with the subject specialization and in handling complex and diverse need of learners. Setia et al. (2021) revealed the position of school heads to be to change their regular schools to an inclusive school through the promotion of inclusive practices across the programs. It calls for school heads to be sensitive and reasonably responsive to the very diverse needs of learners between elementary and secondary levels. Principals do play a great role in facilitating the development of support systems. To promote an inclusive and responsive schools, schools are urged to promote understanding in vision, planning, and decision-making processes; develop responsive strategies and approaches; use data to make decisions about curriculum and instruction; and understand and utilize policy to create comprehensive school and districtwide systems. These principles are big tasks for school heads of integrated schools to meet and to comply with. School heads are tasked to provide support to learners and meet their diverse and developmental needs. Addressing this complexity calls for adaptive leadership, instructional coherence, and sustained support systems that respond to the varied learning needs while promoting equitable educational outcomes for all learners in an integrated school setting.

**i. Administrative Workload and Overlapping Activities.** School heads revealed that they are often tasked with attending frequent meetings, preparing multiple reports, and complying with various DepEd issuances for both elementary and secondary levels, which significantly consume time and energy that could otherwise be devoted to teaching and learning support. A school head said, sharing this as a challenge, "No allocation of non-teaching personnel (AO) and insufficient time in terms instructional support to

teachers due to administrative functions such as meetings, conferences, seminars, and paperwork" (SH 4). Likewise, another school head mentioned, "Overlapping activities having two different schedules to attend indeed constraints my ability to implement and meet equitable learning opportunity," (SH 1). This is very evident since due to the class suspension brought by natural causes; the department opted to merge and adjust schedules resulting in other suspensions and overlapping to some activities. Balona and Digo (2024) also shared that school heads face issues in balancing their time and professional responsibilities which affect their personal lives as well. It poses great challenge on how the school should meet both activities intended for elementary, junior high school, senior high school and even as one school. Abdullah and Arifin (2024) stated that school heads in integrated schools are required to manage overlapping responsibilities that demand both precision and adaptability. It shares the need for streamlined administrative systems and supportive governance structures that allow school heads to balance accountability requirements while sustaining meaningful instructional leadership in integrated schools. Naparan and Tulod (2021) also emphasize that effective role multitasking and time management are critical to organizational success. In this context, integrated schools may benefit from clear operational guidelines and streamlined workflows to help school heads manage competing activities, reduce role overload, and sustain effective instructional and administrative leadership amidst their workload and overlapping activities.

**j. Balancing Decisions with DepEd Directives.** School heads of integrated schools revealed that they experience challenges, tension, and pressure in balancing school-level context while ensuring strict compliance with centralized DepEd directives. They are required to implement standardized policies, programs, and performance targets issued by higher offices, often with limited flexibility to adjust timelines, resource allocation, or strategies based on local school contexts and learner needs. As schools do want to contribute to innovation, creativity, and success of the organization, they find it hard to create plans to support improving the quality of education due to centralized policies. The decision-making of the school is greatly influenced by the leadership style of the school head. In the school-based management, Lazwardi (2018) argued that the higher level of school autonomy improves the goal of education through independence and flexibility in the management of the available resources. A school head mentioned, "I balance school-level autonomy by strictly following DepEd policies and governance standards while contextualizing programs and decisions based on the specific needs, resources, and realities of the local school community" (SH 13). Additionally, mentioned by a school head, "Policy constraints to implement local decisions are some gaps to implement strategic plans in the school," (SH 14). There are instances

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where the national office enacted a law or an order with unavailable fundings yet, therefore it is the strategy of the school to implement such order while at the same time looking for alternatives to suffice the agenda and to deliver the program. With this, school heads who handle integrated schools are challenged to think of adaptive ways to augment those needs. Nonetheless, it is in the bottom level of an organization to follow and implement such rules from the national offices, however, it will always call for a wise decision-making process in exercising the autonomy of the school head. Centralized directives create a standard movement along schools, but it also poses leadership challenge for school heads to apply these frameworks while responding to unique challenges such as community conditions, resource limitations, and diverse learner profiles in integrated schools. As they conform with the institutional mandates and policies, they are also challenged with imposing such orders and guidelines responding to the unique context of the situation of integrated school. The difficulty lies in maintaining innovation and responsiveness at the school level without overstepping centralized governance standards while still being compliant and adherent to the provisions. Strategic leadership in integrated schools also depends on the ability of school heads to strategically align DepEd mandates with localized planning and participatory decision-making to ensure compliance without compromising relevance and responsiveness to the school community.

### Integration of Performance and Leadership Experiences of School Heads

**a. Performance Level and Leadership Experiences of Career Stage 1 School Heads.** School heads under Career Stage 1 demonstrate a very high level of performance on values-based leadership but very limited on research-driven strategic practices, revealing a developmental phase in leadership experience. This implies that these school heads prioritize aligning the school's principles on the key values of DepEd. They are primarily focused on compliance-oriented behavior by strategically following the DepEd directives and mandates and performing basic data-informed decision-making. A school head mentioned, "We align the school's vision, mission, and goals with DepEd priorities by anchoring them on the DepEd vision, mission, and goals" (SH 1). They align school goals through their integration in SIP and AIP crafting along DepEd priorities. However, as aspiring leaders and being new to the position, they experience role overload and leadership strain from dual-level responsibilities, limited resources, infrastructure constraints, and heavy administrative workload. Having the lowest standard on research and innovation implies that they encounter challenges utilizing and implementing innovative strategies to mitigate school concerns. As a school head narrated, "I find it hard to create innovations since I am more focused on

meeting daily operations for both elementary and secondary needs" (SH 2). Aspiring school heads who are newly in charge of the schools face complex roles, as they are ill equipped to take the roles without formal mentorship. They need good mentors to help them be equipped with the skills needed to become mentors also for their teachers (Parfitt & Rose, 2020). Alsalamah and Callinan (2021) suggested that head teachers need to receive professional training and engagements to help them develop their leadership skills to function effectively and efficiently. It is recommended to engage them in developmental trainings to carry out diverse roles in terms of innovation and be effective in their numerous and changing roles (Adangabe & Boateng, 2022). Having strong operational leadership, there is a need to enhance their skills in responding and adapting to the challenges. They need to be provided with support systems and guidance along with management and basic research skills.

**b. Performance Level and Leadership Experiences of Career Stage 2 School Heads.** These school heads show strong established capabilities in program design and implementation but have limited evident practices on research and innovation. They ensure effective measures for organizing and executing plans that are aligned with institutional goals. As stated by a school head, "I employ strategic planning, prioritization, and regular monitoring, ensuring compliance with DepEd standards along its implementation and periodic evaluation" (SH 6). They employ strategic alignment of school programs through regular monitoring and compliance with DepEd standards. However, with their lowest rating on research and innovation, it suggests that they are also facing limitations on applying data-driven strategies and making sound and evidence-based decisions. It was mentioned, "As school head handling different levels, I find it challenging to conduct a comprehensive data study and propose intervention programs across each level," (SH 7). They also face leadership strain and role fragmentation as they manage diverse needs of the school. It is likewise recommended to set continuing-education programs and courses designed for assistant principals to provide them with skills on managing resources and coping with system demands (Cohen & Schechter, 2019). Principals must have the capacity to innovate and meet the constant changing and updating demands on society and technology (Riveras-León & Tomàs-Folch, 2020). Moreover, as these assistant principals embody operational leadership skills, it is also needed to help them advance their skills on enhancing innovation. As these school heads excel in strategic planning and implementation, they need support along with evidence-based improvements and responsive leadership. They must be equipped with data-driven decision-making skills in formulating responsive strategies and innovations while supporting management of complex.

c. **Performance Level and Leadership Experiences of Career Stage 3 School Heads.** Lastly, school heads under Career Stage 3 demonstrate advanced competence in their strategic leadership. This indicates that these school heads are highly capable of setting institutional directions to align resources and ensure effective execution of school improvement plans. As mentioned by the school head, "I manage resources efficiently by prioritizing needs based on school data and aligning all plans and expenditures with the SIP, AIP, and DepEd guidelines" (SH 13). However, they have the lowest emphasis on actively and directly engaging with students in terms of instructions and contact with them. Mentioned by a school head, "I face the challenge of learning both the curriculum in the Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. It challenges me along provision of technical assistance along pedagogy and curriculum review," (SH 14). Additionally, they also mitigate challenges on administrative workload due to institutional and local activities and contextual or geographical challenges. As expectations and norms are carried naturally, school heads nowadays scarcely applied their roles as instructional leaders with specific focus on improving teaching and learning for students (Shaked, 2018). Their roles are more on managing operations and leading the school strategically in both supervision and administration. Therefore, as these school heads exhibit macro-level strategic leadership, it also calls to empower their department heads or academic chairpersons to be responsive to the needs of learners. Emphasis on instructional and distributed leadership will help in sustaining learner-centered approaches.

Based on the findings of the integration across the three stages, it highlights the need to develop and create a practical and comprehensive handbook that will support and guide school heads of integrated schools in leading strategically. Key sections along with the needs of the career stages must be present in the handbook. For Career Stage 1, it must contain foundational and fundamental modules on role clarification, workload management, mentorship systems, and a practical guide on upskilling research and innovation competency. Reflecting on the need for Career Stage 2 school heads, the handbook should contain sections along with more advanced guidelines to shift to a more strategic behavior in balancing the complex demands in integrated schools. For Career Stage 3, there is a need for an emphasis on advanced leadership practices along with instructional approaches while sustaining innovation and shared leadership in schools. Lastly, the handbook must contain real-life examples on each strategic domain of leading strategically and practical tools grounded on policy and legal bases, which will ensure that the handbook as a leadership resource is responsive in promoting leadership growth and professional development.

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study identified the performance level of school heads of integrated schools in the Schools Division of Sorsogon, demonstrating very satisfactory to outstanding performance, which revealed an improving performance level as career stage increases. It identified that Career Stage 1 exhibited a very satisfactory performance, Career Stage 2 yielded an outstanding performance, and Career Stage 3 showed a consistent outstanding performance in leading strategically. School heads demonstrated adaptive and strategic leadership practices, but they continue to face complex challenges due to the demands of managing integrated schools. It also revealed strong performance in core strategic functions, showing growth from foundational leadership to more strategic and results-oriented leadership while consistently showing weaker performance in research and innovation and learner voice in some cases. Their performance and experiences progress from values-based leadership to stronger strategic planning and implementation. Lastly, the findings from the study, along with the integration of the findings, serve as a foundation and basis in the development of a handbook in integrated schools, which will serve as a comprehensive guide for school leaders in their strategic leadership skills in an integrated school.

Based on the findings of the study, it recommends that DepEd may offer continuous professional development for career stages 1 and 2, focusing on research, innovation, workload management, and evidence-based decision-making. It recommends strengthening and intensifying policies and support systems to enhance strategic leadership practices. Additionally, future engagements and professional development may be provided through targeted capability building to enhance skills in research and innovation and intensify learner voice. Lastly, further studies may be conducted to expand the scope and explore other variables related to this study among integrated schools.

## VI. DISCLOSURE

We declare that we have no financial or material interests related to the research in this paper that could create a conflict of interest.

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