

Lived Experiences of Education Graduates with Leadership Positions

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Abstract

School leaders play a critical role in shaping organizational culture and fostering a supportive environment for educators and students. The study delved into the lived experiences of education graduates with leadership positions during the second semester of the school year 2023-2024 in the public schools in one of the city divisions in Misamis Occidental. The study used a qualitative approach, and education graduates were chosen through purposive sampling. In-depth face-to-face interviews through a researcher-made interview guide were conducted. Data were analyzed using HyperResearch software following Moustakas's (1994) Data Analysis Framework. Results unveiled 12 themes: balancing personal, professional, and social responsibilities; implementing programs, policies, and activities; making effective decisions; personal, professional, and social motivations; dealing and adjusting with teachers, students, and school operations; witnessing teachers, students, and school activities succeed; exposure to diverse opportunities; deeper understanding of educational concepts; development of skills and abilities; development of effective leadership traits; personal fulfillment and gratification, and enhancement of teaching and learning process. School leaders navigate their experiences and foster development in education through strategic decision-making, adaptability, and a commitment to passion, driving transformative leadership that enhances personal, academic, and professional growth while fostering environments for success and recognition. Future researchers may consider exploring the strategies employed by school leaders to effectively manage the evolving demands, changes, and trends in 21st-century education.

Keywords: educational management, experiences, leadership, professional growth, school leaders.

1. Introduction

Over the past few years, education, as one of the primary institutions in our society, has received significant importance and emphasis from the government through continuous improvements in school facilities, student performance, teacher support, and community relations. These educational goals have been achieved with the assistance and leadership of school leaders. Education graduates who have become school leaders have faced both challenges and opportunities in their personal and professional lives. These experiences illustrate various perspectives on the interplay between their leadership roles and educational backgrounds. The educational background of school leaders has been applied to practical leadership strategies. Over the years, it has evolved to meet the changes, trends, and demands of their leadership roles and school environments.

School leaders illustrate their roles as influential people and change-makers as they have the responsibility of shaping schools through sharing information, strengthening supportive relationships, engaging in mentorship activities, and seeking improvement initiatives (Aquino et al., 2021). However, the type and kind of leadership reveal its effectiveness through the impact it shows, as it can influence the success or failure of the organization, and so, leaders are accountable for problem-solving and anticipating educational reforms (Boholano et al., 2023). The experiences of leaders reflect and influence organizational values and determine overall success. Thus, these experiences represent an important factor in understanding and assessing organizational achievements (bin Abdullah, 2021).

School leadership has been a subject of extensive debate over the last century as strategies and efforts are planned and put into action to identify effective practices that can ensure improved outcomes for schools (Acton, 2021). Educational leaders are expected to nurture their effectiveness by embracing a commitment to their policies, procedures, and practices within their schools (Óskarsdóttir et al., 2020). As school leaders, they are not only

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accountable for school purposes but also play a significant role in dealing with and handling diverse stakeholders, including parents, facilities personnel, superintendents, government officials, politicians, and others. They are expected to remain prepared to address different situations at any given time and possess an effective and proper leadership approach and style for each situation. (Gómez-Leal et. al., 2022).

In the 21st century, leadership focuses on the adaptation and practice of a contemporary mindset, which enables leaders or managers to effectively navigate the unique challenges of the century. The continuous change in human interaction, social demands, and environmental demands significantly influence the domain of leadership (Panibon, 2023). Embracing these challenges in the 21st century, leaders need to cope and possess management strategies. Leadership also transcends more innovations and enhancements over conventional management (Denning, 2020). In the Dubai research study, four primary themes emerged: collaboration, understanding, community, and adaptability. Participants discussed the influence of transformational leadership strategies on strengthening teamwork and cooperation among stakeholders, showing empathy towards workers, cultivating a sense of belongingness in school, and fostering adaptability for school leaders (Jbara, 2022).

Leaders' experiences across various contexts in education, emphasizing the important role of school leaders in community engagement and response to changing situations, is the focus of a New Zealand research study. The study revealed the need for leaders to adapt to address crises in different settings and situations and revealed common ways like prioritizing mental health and ensuring consistency and clarity in communication (Striepe et al., 2023). An Indian research study explored the challenges faced by school leaders as education shifted to an online modality, plus dealing with the diverse needs of students, management of financial problems, and crisis management issues. It also examined emotional experiences that made leaders navigate the crises, emphasizing the lack of crisis management strategies and training and leading to the negligence of mental health needs. The study suggests the implementation of tailored professional support systems to address such challenges (Neelakantan et al., 2022).

In a research study conducted in Toledo City, Cebu, four primary themes were identified as essential for school leaders: effective communication skills, emotional intelligence, vision and strategic planning, and a passion for education. This reveals the importance of having effective leadership characteristics and skills to succeed in their leadership roles and improve the learning outcomes of students (Kilag, 2024). In Pantukan, Davao de Oro, school administrators faced challenges in embracing educational dynamics driven by 21st-century advancements. The difficulties came from their struggle to deal with educational and social trends and utilize technology (Panibon, 2023).

The lived experiences of school heads in the new normal were the focus of a research study in Sultan Kudarat. The study revealed themes such as a commitment to education, transformative leadership, self-improvement and innovation, effective management skills, fostering collaboration between schools and communities, and upholding transparency and accountability. Despite these challenges, school heads showed remarkable resilience and adaptability, honing their character and dedication to their leadership roles (Dablo et al., 2023). In Bulacan-based research, instructional leaders identified challenges, support mechanisms, and opportunities within the new normal education system. Their perspective on the system and their emphasis on transformational leadership style led to school improvement. Their leadership characteristics, such as team orientation, self-awareness, charisma, and spirituality, helped both learners and teachers (Antonio, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic brought complexities in instructional and administrative management, which enabled leaders to enhance and strengthen their leadership roles. The global crisis affected the educational landscape and education system, resulting in 1.6 billion learners being out of school (UNESCO, 2020). Consequently, shifts in educational paradigms include teaching and learning being restructured worldwide, integrating and employing diverse modalities. School leaders need to act effectively and implement strategic planning and management to embrace and face global crises (Netolicky, 2020). The transition to online learning has led to stress among stakeholders and enabled them to handle changes in management strategies, styles, and attitudes (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020).

Educational leaders in Davao del Sur commonly experience constrained budgets, insufficient training, and orientation to adapt to the emerging trends in education. These problems stemmed from their lack of readiness and anticipation for the tasks they faced (Blasabas & Sumaljag, 2020). In Nabunturan, Davao de Oro, the positive experience of school leaders while navigating the contemporary landscape of education where acquisition of proficiency in technological use and digital application, personal and professional growth opportunities, and information transmission acceleration. The negative experiences in the 21st century included the management of a new generation of teachers, information shifts, work-life balance issues, management of skeptical stakeholders, and dealing with insufficient educational materials (Panibon, 2023).

Exploring the lived experiences of educational graduates with leadership positions can provide information on the types of leaders present in the locality and trace the graduates' professional growth and success. It can also help identify areas in education where additional support or resources are needed. This exploration highlights and emphasizes the role of the Department of Education in acknowledging and recognizing its crucial responsibility and contribution to shaping the quality of education in the country (Panibon, 2023).

The researchers identified an apparent knowledge gap in past research, which only focused on school leaders handling and dealing with learners, staff, stakeholders, and school funds (Panibon, 2023) & Boholano, 2023). An emphasis on school leaders' leadership styles and practices and a discussion on leadership theories were also emphasized by past researchers (Aquino, 2021) & (Balbuena, 2020). Past research did not thoroughly address the subject of how these experiences, both positive and negative, have a profound effect on their personal, academic, and professional competence, growth, and development, which also includes the opportunities and successes they have. To fully understand and explore their leadership experiences, an exploration of their motivations, challenges, successes, advancement, and satisfaction in their careers is essential. This encompasses several unexplored dimensions that lately have attracted research attention in other disciplines (Liebowitz, 2023) & (Bolat, 2023). The exploration of the specific knowledge gaps among school leaders should be further investigated to provide an understanding as to why such is not the case with the existing research on education graduates with leadership positions. (Miles, 2017).

Hence, this research study explored the lived experiences of education graduates with leadership positions in the public schools and educational offices in one of the divisions of Misamis Occidental. The study took place during the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024 and explored, identified, examined, and understood the experiences of education graduates with leadership positions.

1.1. Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study was anchored on Transformational Leadership Theory (Burns, 1978) and Distributed Leadership Theory by (Gronn et al., 2002).

The Transformational Leadership Theory introduced by Burns (1978) separates leaders who can strongly motivate their followers from leaders who focus on transactional leadership, which is based on exchange and results. This type of leadership is an ethical, intentional, and spiritual approach that develops equality in leader and follower relationships to attain a common goal or real change. Transformational leadership encourages followers to embrace their creativity and potential, aligning their interests with the group or organization. A transformational leader brings major changes to the organization, creating a vision that is compatible with managers and staff (Arabian et al., 2014).

Transformational leadership involves adjusting the current situation using internal resources, such as information and people, as well as external variables. This concept fits our goal to understand how education graduates with leadership positions face challenges and change in their schools (Saad, 2021). The role of transformational leaders is important in balancing their vision of the future and the needs of their teams. Our goal is to identify how education graduates adjust their leadership to the real conditions of their roles and how they prioritize the well-being of their teams. (Gunawan, 2020).

The Distributed Leadership Theory involves many leaders rather than just one person in school leadership. Others also use the concept of distributed leadership to indicate the school management approach (Gronn et al., 2002). Often, experts view leadership as a one-time activity, but this theory views leadership as emerging from the interactions of leaders, followers, and their environment. It is a new approach instead of just changing old ideas (Fiedler, 1973).

Distributed leadership refers to collaborative efforts and responsibilities made by formal and informal leaders in a leadership group. This perspective focuses on changing leadership roles and the role of support groups in a "distributed leadership" structure (Ashiq, 2023). Understanding distributed leadership is not only important in education but also in different organizations, as it affects the hierarchy and power of groups (Kallio, 2020). Therefore, in studying the experience of education graduates with leadership positions, attention should be paid to how distributed leadership shapes their roles and interactions in education.

1.2. Conceptual Framework

The concepts drawn from the study were rooted in the various themes discerned from the participants' diverse responses during the interviews conducted with the researchers. There were four (4) objectives, namely: exploring the

lived experiences of education graduates with leadership positions, identifying the motivations, challenges, and successes of education graduates with leadership positions, examining the impact of leadership on personal, academic, and professional development, and understanding the contribution of their success stories and accomplishments to the significance of engagement and leadership.

The challenges that school principals face in balancing the responsibilities of teachers with continuing and maintaining a positive school climate require the delicate balance required to fulfill personal, professional, and social responsibilities (Grismon et al., 2021). However, the problems and fatigue that they feel in their roles show the need for possible solutions that require work-life balance. Because of that, principals and heads can manage their work and non-work responsibilities in ways that help improve their overall well-being. The implementation of educational programs, policies, and activities reveals important insights into the challenges and opportunities encountered that can be used to shape effective management policies and practices (Goddard et al., 2020; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019). By understanding each approach, the experiences of school leaders, policymakers, and teachers can identify areas of need and develop targeted strategies to address them, thus improving the support provided to those school leaders in the management of teaching environments in Boholano (2023). Making a decision is a human process involved in individual and social events based on values and facts that end in choosing alternatives to achieve the desired results. As a primary responsibility, decision-making for school leaders involves thought processes that lead to choosing the best path from among many options. Each decision-making process ultimately results in a final choice that shapes the direction and success of the educational institution (Amalia et al., 2020).

The main purpose of being motivated is to prevail in a person's love for their work and to encourage them to apply all their abilities and knowledge to achieve the goals of an organization. The influence of our every goal, sense of fulfillment, and desire on a person moves their behavior (Arpiani & Mulyana, 2022). Indicators of motivation include recognition of achievements, a competitive salary, good colleagues who make us feel comfortable at work, and job security (Rivai, 2020). When it comes to managing teachers, students, and school operations, leaders prioritize fostering lasting collaborative relationships among teachers and providing support to teachers tailored to improve practices. In teaching and fostering an inclusive environment that promotes student participation and well-being. By also attending to the diverse needs of stakeholders and fostering a culture of continuous improvement, school leaders play an important role in driving positive results and facilitating holistic development. In their school communities (Grissom, 2021). Witnessing each teacher, student, and school activity being successful serves as a testament to the effectiveness of each leadership approach in promoting academic growth and the overall effectiveness of the school. By actively observing and participating in these successes, school leaders gain a positive impact from their leadership in various areas of the school environment, strengthening their commitment to continuous improvement. Development and success (Sellami et al., 2022).

The fluctuating and incomprehensible placement of principals in the Philippines, influenced by political pressures and administrative shifts, provides a unique view of the various opportunities for those school leaders. Being promoted to a larger school provides opportunities to take on greater responsibilities and apply them to more complex educational situations. Therefore, despite the complications of the educational environment in the Philippines, such exposure to different opportunities enhances the professional development of school leaders, making them more useful and effective in their roles (Culdaz, 2024). Serving as a school leader opens doors to opportunities that provide a deeper understanding of educational concepts. This understanding guides the creation of a culture that embraces diversity, fosters student engagement, and promotes collaboration. Through such pursuits, school leaders deepen their understanding of key educational concepts, enhancing their ability and knowledge to implement strategies that enhance meaningful learning experiences for all students (Eadens & Ceballos, 2023). School leaders need to know and master managerial competencies to effectively manage operations, distribute resources, and ensure optimal learning conditions. Finally, by developing leadership skills, principals have the authority to drive measurable improvements in student performance, teacher retention, and overall stakeholder satisfaction, thus improving the success and impact of their schools (Prastiawan, 2020).

Aspiring school leaders are charged with the responsibility of developing effective leadership behaviors to succeed in their roles (Whitaker, 2020). Actively developing these characteristics not only strengthens their leadership capabilities but also provides a positive environment and role model for the school community (Morrison, 2023). School leaders who demonstrate leadership qualities by example, such as building a sense of community, serving as role models, and assuming diverse roles, find deep personal fulfillment and satisfaction in their roles (Whang, 2021). By prioritizing the improvement of teachers' working conditions, accommodating suggestions, and accepting diverse perspectives, they foster a supportive and inclusive environment that enhances their sense of purpose and satisfaction. By effectively communicating the vision for educational improvement, school leaders create an environment

conducive to innovation, professional growth, and continuous improvement in teaching methods and learning (Gardner-McTaggart, 2022).

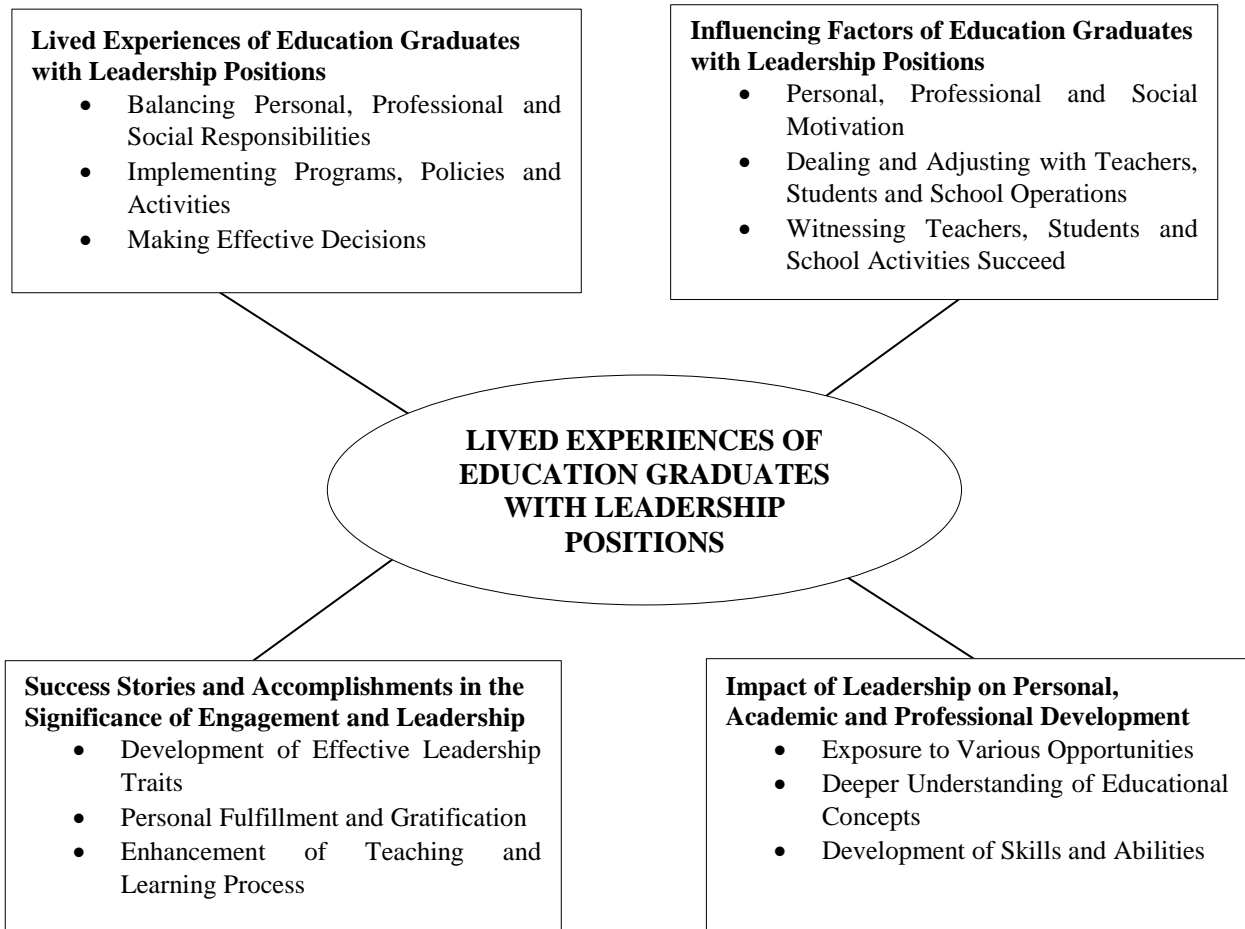


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

1.3. Objective of the Study

This study explored the lived experiences of education graduates with leadership positions in the public schools in one of the divisions of Misamis Occidental during the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024.

2. Research Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative approach using a transcendental phenomenological study. Defining a phenomenon is essential to capturing the collective understanding of people's lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenological design is well-suited to the study on education graduates in leadership roles because it delves into the essence and meaning of their experiences, fostering a deeper grasp of their subjective realities (Husserl, 1913; Moustakas, 1994).

2.2. Research Setting

The study was conducted in various public schools and educational offices within one of the divisions of Misamis Occidental. The researchers identified public schools and educational offices whose school heads and department

heads are graduates of the Education program from one Higher Education Institution. Participants in the study came from two elementary schools, five high schools, two integrated schools, and one from the city division office, ensuring a comprehensive representation of educational leadership across different levels.

2.3. Participants of the Study

Following data saturation, ten leaders were chosen through purposive sampling from public schools and other educational offices in one of the divisions of Misamis Occidental. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on specific characteristics or criteria deemed relevant to the research study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The selection criteria included (1) school principal, school head, or school supervisor of one of the divisions of Misamis Occidental, (2) alumni of the College of Education of a Higher Education Institution, and (3) leaders who are willing to participate with full consent voluntarily. Before commencing interviews, the researcher ensured that all necessary conditions were met to uphold ethical standards, respecting the participants' rights and privacy.

2.4. Research Instrument

The researchers utilized a structured interview guide question tailored to each research question. A structured interview guide questions helped gather rich qualitative data to analyze the lived experiences of education graduates with leadership positions. The interview guide questions consisted of opening, core, and exit questions. The interview guide questions underwent initial validation by selected experts to ensure the reliability of the instruments.

2.5. Data Collection

In gathering the data, the researchers obtained permission from the Dean of the College of Education to conduct the study. Once this permission was granted, the researchers sought approval from the DepEd City Schools Division Superintendent. After receiving the approval, the researchers provided the participants with a consent letter informing them about the study's importance.

Individual face-to-face interviews were conducted while strictly adhering to interview and health protocols. The researcher meticulously gathered and documented participants' responses during the interviews, ensuring the precise recording of details. The collected data was analyzed using the Hyper Research data analysis application, a tool specifically designed for qualitative and mixed-methods research. This software facilitated the organization and transformation of interview transcripts into thematic categories. The researcher utilized the application to scrutinize and pinpoint themes within the data.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

To uphold ethical standards, the researchers adhered to the guidelines outlined in the Helsinki Declaration (2001) for conducting research involving human participants. Before the interviews, comprehensive information regarding the study's objectives, procedures, and significance was provided to all participants, and informed consent was duly obtained.

To ensure confidentiality, the researcher strictly adhered to the concept of information anonymity. Participants were assured that their names would remain private and undisclosed. Additionally, the researcher followed the provisions of Republic Act No. 10173, commonly known as the "Data Privacy Act of 2012," to safeguard participants' privacy and data security.

All participant data were securely stored to protect privacy and data integrity. Participants were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the study without facing any consequences. Should a participant express fatigue or decline to continue with the interview, the researcher respected their decision and postponed the interview to a more suitable time. Participants were reassured that their involvement in the study would not have any adverse effects on their well-being, and they were explicitly informed that anything shared during the interviews would be treated with utmost confidentiality.

2.7. Data Analysis

The research utilized Hyper Research, a statistical software, to assist in qualitative analysis and data processing. Extensive text was organized horizontally to extract relevant statements and participant context. These extracted codes were then grouped into identifiable themes for each participant.

Moustakas' (1994) Transcendental Phenomenology data analysis method was employed to examine the data obtained from interviews. This method guided the recording and analysis of all information gathered. The process involves several steps: bracketing, horizontalization, clustering into themes, textural description, structural description, and textural-structural synthesis.

Bracketing is a technique aimed at mitigating the influence of participants' preexisting ideas and beliefs before the commencement of a study. This approach facilitates a thorough exploration, encompassing topic and demographic selection, interview protocol, data collection and analysis, and dissemination of research findings. Known as "epoche," this process involves temporarily setting aside prejudices and biases.

Horizontalization involves organizing all verbatim phrases relevant to the research. Initially, each statement is treated with equal importance. Statements that are deemed irrelevant, redundant, overlapping, or outside the scope of the investigation are disregarded. Horizons, which are the remaining portions after data refinement, are considered integral components of the phenomenon.

Clustering is a crucial step in deriving study outcomes. It involves condensing experiences into consistent horizons, developing essential themes, and validating these horizons with multiple data sources. To ensure the reliability of the study's findings, research studies' outcomes are evaluated using methods beyond those employed in data gathering, such as observation, field note-taking, and relevant literature review. This validation process enhances the authenticity and coherence of the representations.

Textural description entails narrating the phenomenon's experiences. Verbatim extracts from interviews, along with a narrative of the derived themes, are used to create a textual description. Structural description introduces creative variation, incorporating original perspectives and viewpoints into the narrative. An imagined variation involves analyzing the details and structures of participants' experiences in isolation from natural biases through epoche. Structural descriptions are attached to each paragraph of textual descriptions.

During *textural-structural synthesis*, relevant components of each participant are gathered, and a template of shared textural and structural representations is constructed. A narrative or synthesis presents all participants in the third person. The primary aim of this final stage in Moustakas' approach is to capture the essence of the phenomenon's experience.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Lived Experiences of Education Graduates with Leadership Positions

The first objective centers on the lived experiences of education graduates with leadership positions encompassing the vital themes of balancing personal, professional, and social responsibilities, implementing programs, policies, and activities, and making effective decisions.

Balancing Personal, Professional, and Social Responsibilities. The lived experiences of education graduates with leadership positions encompass an understanding of how they handle their diverse responsibilities. School leaders shared various experiences related to their personal, professional, and social responsibilities. Having the right balance between these responsibilities can be challenging to manage. P3 said that it is important to balance work and family. P5 shared that it is also hard to manage the work of being a leader and being a teacher. P2 mentioned that it is necessary to create good relationships and connections, and personal and work responsibilities should also be taken care of while managing people.

"So, we have some demands, like our family, so we must balance them. Sometimes, there will be a conflict between the demands of your family and as well as your profession. So, we must balance, especially if you have children. So, you must balance your work as well as your family because you have children to manage and take note that we are working for the benefit of our children." (P3)

“However, the challenge was that I still had to teach. When I was assigned as the Teacher-In-Charge (TIC), I was also teaching physics and advanced algebra for grade 10 in the old curriculum. These were difficult subjects, and I had to study the lessons I was teaching. At the same time, I had to handle school operations. That part was hard, but it was somewhat easier because I was familiar with the institution and knew who to approach for help.” (P5)

“So, I guess one of all those challenges, the most significant there, is how to manage people and how to manage a school because, in the school, you are not only going to manage the teachers, the learners, but you also must manage the people around the school, the community. So, you must also be involved with the community, and I consider this to be a significant challenge.” (P2)

P2, on the other hand, stressed that building trust inside the organization is crucial to efficiently handling all leadership duties. P1 highlighted how hard it is to interact and establish a connection with people from different backgrounds to have a beneficial influence on them.

“You really must trust the institution that what they are doing is really for the good of the learner. You must trust and obey these rules and policies and implement them in your school. So that the teachers and the school would also benefit from all these changes.” (P2)

“There are also struggles along the way and resistance from the people around, especially when you implement new programs. But then, as you are determined to implement the program, despite some resistance, we must persevere; we have to push because that is our mandate as a department head, to implement programs, projects, and activities of the Department of Education.” (P1)

Due to a lot of work and pressure, school leaders find it difficult to balance their personal, work, and social responsibilities. Understanding their experiences is important to see the problems and make plans to solve them. It is necessary to focus on methods that help school administrators to be effective in their work and to improve teaching for the benefit of teachers and students (Wong, 2021).

Finding the right balance of personal, professional, and social responsibilities among education graduates with leadership positions is essential for strengthening both individual well-being and institutional effectiveness. As school leaders embrace their roles, having equilibrium with their commitments, professional duties, and social obligations is a challenge they have to conquer. Their ability to balance their responsibilities not only emphasizes the health and fulfillment of school leaders but also enhances their ability to lead and manage schools effectively.

Implementing Programs, Policies, and Activities. An exploration of the experiences of school leaders also involves an understanding of their ability to implement programs, policies, and activities, as this is a primary responsibility of school leaders, which focuses on fostering the growth and development of schools, teachers, learners, and the community. The answers of the participants reflect their different experiences in planning, implementing, and identifying different programs, policies, and activities. The statements of P1 and P8 showed how important departments and school heads are in implementing school programs. P3 and P7 emphasized coordinating school activities with the needs of the community and the policies of the Department of Education.

“I am able to recall my experiences in implementing programs beneficial to the students and the school, and above all is honing students' potential and their leadership skills.” (P1)

“Leading a community outreach initiative, mentoring newly graduate students, and leading a tutoring program.” (P8)

“My experiences in leadership positions deepened my understanding of educational practices and policies by revealing the intricate connections between policy implementation and school outcomes. These roles also highlighted the importance of aligning policies with the needs of the school community to foster a supportive and effective educational environment.” (P3)

“You need to anchor in the DepEd orders and DepEd memorandums not on our own practices because our practices might be true to us, but not true to the mandate. So, all the things that we should do should be anchored on the different DepEd orders, mandates, and memorandums. So, again, our Bible is in DepEd.” (P7)

P6 highlighted the importance of school leaders in assigning or distributing work to carry out policies, programs, and activities successfully. P5 discussed the benefit and application of benchmarking initiatives to support other educational institutions. P3 highlighted the value of having excellent and efficient planning and preparation techniques and highlighting the influence and efficacy of successful school initiatives.

“So, by delegating the tasks, we must delegate properly. So that we will have to be successful in our duties and responsibilities.” (P6)

“I got to explore different institutions for benchmarking, which was different from our usual school activities. I had the opportunity to attend seminars to further develop my skills.” (P5)

“So, strategic planning is important, so you must strategize things on how you work and implement policy. Leadership experiences provide individuals with opportunities to gain practical insights and develop critical thinking skills and institutional effectiveness.” (P3)

Effective implementation of policies, programs, and activities enables administrators to strategically implement initiatives that enhance the educational experience and prepare students for the demands of the 21st century (Blasabas & Sumaljag, 2020). Educational systems around the world have been forced to undergo major changes due to the fourth industrial revolution, which has changed the curriculum to meet modern social, political, and economic needs (Panibon, 2023). Prioritizing important goals is recommended to ensure that resources and budgets are aligned with educational goals (Winston & Portman, 2021).

Implementing programs, policies, and activities is an important job of school leaders through their ability to organize, implement, and evaluate activities. These practices must follow educational guidelines and the needs of the community. Cooperation and sharing of information between schools, such as identifying different methods, helps to develop strategies and shows the importance of good planning for major school activities.

Making Effective Decisions. The experiences of school leaders also include making effective decisions that serve as the backbone for realizing various activities implemented in school and contribute to its success in enhancing and improving both the teaching and learning process. School leaders share a wealth of experience in effective decision-making. P3 focused on the experience of making difficult decisions for the benefit of the school and reaching positive results. On the other hand, P6 involved setting and prioritizing the right options to make good and effective decisions that benefit everyone.

“Making tough decisions. So, in decision making, you must, there is a need. Now, making decisions depends on the situation. So, we must make it, we should decide which it is for the better. No matter what will or who will get hurt along the way, we must manage our decision for the better.” (P3)

“One of the many experiences I have in a leadership position is to make decisions. There are a lot of things that can be done in school with the limited resources allocated to the school where I am assigned. The biggest decision I had to make was choosing what should be done first, to beautify a school or to make a pathway where everyone will benefit, but I must get a part of my salary to realize it.” (P6)

P2 pointed out the importance of showing open-mindedness in decision-making, where recognizing the suggestions and ideas of others means reaching a successful collaboration. Finally, P5 highlighted the role of the leader in taking risks and responsibility for decision-making, paying attention to the characteristics of a school leader in showing solid character.

“So, as a solid leader, be open to suggestions, criticisms, and the different changes that are hit-able and take place within the institution. You must be open to these kinds of changes. If you are not open to the changes, you will not be able to implement them.” (P2)

“I realized being a school head is though we are not born as a leader if our really take the risk and accept the challenge, you can do it.” (P5)

In the face of the growing need for educational responsibility, effective decision-making by school leadership requires negotiating the complex world of duties, from instructional leadership to financial management (Chitpin, 2021). It is crucial to establish a transparent culture to promote efficient decision-making. Openness, clarity, and accountability are the requirements of transparency in the communication and decision-making process (Ergun, 2020).

By accepting the interaction, communication, and participation of school leaders, they can achieve a rich exchange of information and perspectives. This will lead to a more effective decision-making process. The ability of school leaders to listen and hear the suggestions of their people, most especially teachers, will enable them to create and produce sound and clear decisions. This collaborative effort will pave the way for more comprehensive and successful school activities and events.

3.2. Influencing Factors of Education Graduates with Leadership Positions

The second objective delves into the influencing factors experienced by education graduates with leadership positions, such as their motivations, challenges, and successes. It examines their journey through the lens of personal drive, obstacles faced, and achievements attained within educational leadership roles. It includes vital themes of personal, professional, and social motivation, dealing and adjusting with teachers, students, and school operations, and witnessing teachers, students, and school activities succeed.

Personal, Professional, and Social Motivation. The motivation of education graduates to hold leadership positions looks at the complex balance of personal, professional, and social motivations that exist in school leadership roles. Understanding these dynamics can offer valuable insights into effective leadership practices within educational contexts. P4 and P7 emphasized how crucial family is in developing the drive to take on leadership jobs. On the other hand, P6 and P9 highlighted the significance of salary as a motivator for fulfilling the obligations and demands of school leadership. Furthermore, their answers emphasize how wage affects family economics and education-related spending more broadly.

"First is family." (P4)

"I want to help my family." (P7)

"You receive a higher salary when compared to those teachers in the field. The salary you will receive is just enough to support the needs and wants of my family. And in some cases, your salary will be used in some of the school's expenses." (P6)

"Well, who would not love a bigger salary?" (P9)

P3 and P4 emphasized the value of enthusiasm and dedication in creating strong motivation for leadership positions. P8 highlighted the value of enthusiasm and commitment in developing motivation for leadership responsibilities.

"Motivation effectively requires a combination of passion and commitment. Passion, love, and commitment- so if we are not committed to our course or education, then we better quit. (P3)

"Of course, my passion in my job now." (P4)

"My initial motivation to pursue leadership roles within the field of education was driven by a deep-seated passion for making a meaningful impact on student's lives and the educational system as a whole." (P8)

P3 shared motivation by providing a clear purpose for work, which seeks to leave a significant legacy and impact on the institution and its stakeholders. On the other hand, P5 draws inspiration and influence from people in higher positions, which helps to improve their leadership.

"Achievement of legacy is why I would like to make a difference in the leadership role. When you become a teacher, you will come across so many things and situations." (P3)

"I was motivated by our previous Schools Division Superintendent, now the Assistant Regional Director. He challenged me by saying, "You can become a leader." His challenge to us was, "Once you are hired in DepEd, please do not let yourself retire in the same position you entered with." Because of this, I keep going. Even though I am not planning to pursue higher positions, if an opportunity comes, I will take it." (P5)

P9 shared a journey as an advocate for improved school resources and policies, driven by their aspiration to nurture an environment conducive to learning and ensure policy alignment with school objectives. P8 showed their experiences as educational leaders, which means improving the conditions and policies of the school to create a good environment for students to learn and ensure that the goals of the school are achieved. P2 shared an experience, which means improving school conditions and policies, aiming to create a supportive learning environment, and ensuring that the school's goals are met.

"Now, I see leadership as a way to advocate for better resources, fostering a collaborative school culture, and ultimately, ensuring all students have the tools and support they need to reach their full potential. (P9)

"I became increasingly aware of the importance of advocating for policy changes, implementing innovative teaching practices, and creating inclusive curricula that cater to diverse learning needs." (P8)

"And now, my motivation as a school head is to be able to deliver the mandate. The mandate of basic education is to provide quality basic education to the learners. So, that is now my motivation." (P2)

On the other hand, P7 strived to provide social motivation by serving as inspiration and influence. Finally, P1 emphasized a different motivation, believing in the importance of the school leader's role in shaping future leaders.

"Many people need my help. So, I want them to pursue also their dreams to become like me. So, I want to become a motivation, also do their part." (P7)

"I want to influence people. I want to inflect in them positivity. What I mean is that I want to produce another leader from my department, a leader who has the heart for the children, a leader who has the heart for the school, a leader who has the heart for the community." (P1)

Motivational strategies play a pivotal role in ensuring quality assurance within the educational system. These strategies encompass various facets such as staff training, promotion, salary incentives, working conditions, and participatory decision-making. The goal of motivation is to increase a person's passion for their work and to encourage them to use all of their knowledge and abilities to accomplish organizational goals. A person's wants, aspirations, sense of fulfillment, and desires all influence and drive their conduct (Arpiani & Mulyana, 2022).

School leaders' personal, professional, and social motivation underscores the crucial role that motivation plays in effective educational leadership. Understanding and addressing the diverse motivations of school leaders—ranging from personal passions and career aspirations to social recognition and professional development—is essential for creating environments conducive to quality education and achieving educational objectives.

Dealing and Adjusting with Teachers, Students, and School Operations. This theme explores the challenge of school leaders in managing and adapting to the diverse needs of teachers, students, and school operations faced by educational leaders. It deals with the various problems faced by school leaders as they manage to maintain good relations and operational efficiency in the school. Taken from the ideas of P8 and P3, a big problem for school leaders is managing conflicts and fixing communication problems with teachers. In addition, P9 also showed this problem, saying it can cause stress, which is another difficult problem in managing stress. On the other hand, P7 talked about the difficulty school leaders have in adjusting their approach to interacting with different people, not only in the school but also in the wider community.

"One particularly challenging situation I encountered in a leadership position within the field of education was when we had a communication gap with my teachers. To address the challenge, I implemented a multi-faceted approach like open forums, feedback channels, and updates." (P8)

"So, leadership positions meet various challenges like managing conflict. Sometimes, in the department, there are some topics or matters that we argue about, and as a leader, you should manage the conflict by talking to them." (P3)

"When I started, it was a struggle as I shifted from dealing with learners to dealing with teachers." (P9)

My technique in my previous school was different, but when I transferred, it changed. So, I need to get along again. That is also a challenge on my part to deal with the community, people, and the barangay people." (P7)

P5 and P6 shared the problem of balancing teaching and leadership, showing the many roles they must manage well. Conversely, P5 and P7 highlighted the difficulty of transitioning between schools, emphasizing the need to adapt and comprehend new environments and individuals.

"The most difficult time was when I was at TIC, teaching while managing. It was tough and required time management and proper planning." (P5)

"In terms of the shortage of teachers, I asked for help from the division office. I was given a teacher four (4) months after the opening of classes. So, I acted as the School Head and a teacher at the same time." (P6)

"Another challenge was transferring to a new institution. Usually, this happens every 3-5 years, but sometimes it depends on the situation. I had just gotten comfortable there when I had to move to another school." (P5)

"The most challenging is when you transfer to another station and to start a new way, a new technique on how to capture the hearts of the parents, the community because parents are different." (P7)

P6 discussed the difficult challenges faced by school leaders, especially in managing school operations, including funding, equipment, and classroom materials. Conversely, P2 shared the challenge during the pandemic, particularly in a place with poor internet connectivity, requiring innovative solutions such as strengthening partnerships with local government officials to ensure educational materials reached students effectively.

"The school became an integrated school (IS) after being an elementary school. As the school transitioned from being an ES to an IS, there were room, teacher, table, board, and chair shortages. As a novice School Head, I went to other schools to ask for extra chairs, tables, and board and pay for the fare." (P6)

"Another challenge was when this pandemic came into our country. I was assigned to a place where internet connectivity was very challenging. We did not have the internet, and we relied much on communication through the internet. So, we connected with our barangay officials, our BNS, and our BHW so that we could ensure that all the modules would be delivered to the learners. This is the most important thing; we strengthened our partnership with the local government." (P2)

P9 looked back on unforgettable experiences during the pandemic, focusing on the important role of school leaders in ensuring that learning continues despite distance learning. Finally, P1 shared the most difficult challenge to face and accept responsibility for when a student died in a Boy Scout activity held outside the school.

"A big challenge was reaching all the parents. Many did not have reliable internet access, and some we could not find because we did not have their home addresses. To solve this, we teamed up with the barangay. They helped us deliver the learning modules to the parents directly. This made a big difference! We also realized that some students needed even more help." (P9)

"There was a very sad incident to one of our Boy Scouts. I would say that I was tested because of that incident. However, I followed protocols and procedures and helped the parents. I provided the needed support in my capacity as a department head and as a program implementer to the parents of one of our Boy Scouts, who happened that this boy scout lost his life during the Jamboree last January 2024. We do not have the option but to go, to push, because that is our responsibility." (P1)

School leaders face many challenges in managing teachers, students, and school activities. They need to be able to manage and adjust to situations well. A big challenge is teachers' resistance to new methods and professional development, which affects their ability to learn and develop their knowledge (Rahman et al., 2020). Effective communication is very important to overcome these challenges, as poor communication can cause misunderstandings and disputes among team members, stakeholders, and the school community (Trujillo, 2020). In addition, the lack of funds forces school officials to look for other ways to find funds, which can delay their attention to the main responsibilities of the administration and affect the general operation (Sipahioglu, 2023).

The challenges school leaders face in adjusting teachers, students, and school operations show the important role of educational leadership. Addressing these challenges allows leaders to create spaces that support student success and teacher development. This adjustment requires holistic care, clear communication, careful management, and strategic decision-making. Finally, by providing school leaders with the necessary skills and support, they can build strong and successful school communities.

Witnessing Teachers, Students, and School Activities Succeed. The success of a school leader is reflected in the success of teachers, students, and school activities. Because of this, their ability to create an environment where growth, excellence, and success flourish in all areas of education is demonstrated. P4 and P5 showed that the success of leaders can be seen in the promotion of teachers or their promotion. On the other hand, P9, P1, and P5 emphasized that recognizing the potential and abilities of teachers and students also contributes to the success of school leaders.

"From 2012 until 2019, there were a lot of teachers who were promoted. So, producing another leader." (P4)

"At work, I am very happy when my colleagues get promoted." (P5)

"Seeing the dedication of teachers and the potential of students ignited a desire to contribute to their success." (P9)

"We also have monitored our classes, and our learners also got good grades and passing grades. They also performed well in our assessment, the regional division and regional achievement tests. Our learners got good ratings, good scores; it is because we monitored our teachers in their teaching-learning process." (P1)

"As a school leader, having a high passing rate among students is a big success. It makes the school head happy when students pass, and even if it is not 100%, having few dropouts and failures is still a success that brings joy." (P5)

Both P8 and P1 stressed that effective implementation of school activities, programs, policies, and curricula can lead to success. Conversely, P3 and P6 highlighted that providing school resources and fostering a positive culture for teachers and students are significant achievements for school leaders..

"One of my greatest successes was leading the initiative to implement a more inclusive curriculum that reflected the diverse backgrounds and experiences of our student body. This involved collaborating with teachers, students, and community members to develop a curriculum that was culturally responsive and inclusive of various perspectives." (P8)

"I would consider that those programs that we have implemented went well. These programs are recognized both at the division level and up to the regional level. The school got regional recognition because we implemented it well." (P1)

"Success can also be reflected in the culture and climate of the organization. So, have a positive relationship with them because it also cultivates a culture of trust, collaboration, innovation, and inclusivity that can consider themselves successful in creating a positive work environment." (P3)

"As I reflect on my experiences, my biggest success or achievement was when I was able to produce a classroom, secured chairs, board, and other materials to cater to our growing school community. I was able to provide a good classroom for the Grade 8 learners, making their learning environment conducive." (P6)

P2 emphasized that overcoming the challenges of the pandemic and reopening schools despite health concerns constitutes a major success. Finally, P9 shared that through proficient school management, school leaders attain recognition and awards.

"So, for me, it was a success that our school was chosen to open because you can only open the school after a series of monitoring from the department, from the Department of Health, local government unit, and we were able to successfully pass all their requirements. Out of fifty-eight schools, fourteen were granted e-permits, and our school was one of the first. So, it was an achievement for us, not only for me but also for the whole school and the community." (P2)

"My proudest moment as a school principal came when I was chosen as a National Finalist for the Dangal ng Bayan Award! I was the Region 10 Winner, besting the nominees from the other government agencies. This prestigious award, given by the Civil Service Commission, recognizes outstanding government employees for their contributions to public service. Being nominated was not just about me – it reflected the hard work we did as a school team." (P9)

Success for school leaders is seeing clear results of their efforts, where students succeed in academic and personal aspects, and the climate and culture of the school improve (Salpeter, 2004; Shen, 2010). Investing in the professional development of teachers and school leaders is key to achieving this success (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012). Effective principal leadership not only ensures that the school runs smoothly but also reinforces the division of labor, creating an environment where roles are equally valued. A visionary principal with integrity and strong management abilities is essential for promoting this success (Krug, 2004).

Seeing the success of teachers, students, and school activities is important in educational leadership. School leaders are critical in creating an environment in which these elements thrive, emphasizing the importance of creating a supportive and empowering culture. Success for school leaders will include the achievements of their leaders, highlighting the need to invest in professional development to maintain a culture of achievement and growth.

3.3. Impact of Leadership on Personal, Academic, and Professional Development

The third objective focuses on the impact of leadership on personal, academic, and professional development, highlighting relevant themes such as exposure to various opportunities, a deeper understanding of educational concepts, and the development of skills and abilities.

Exposure to Various Opportunities. The impact of the experiences of educational graduates with leadership positions on their personal, academic, and professional development introduced a myriad of opportunities, enabling them to accomplish more in the field. P2 and P9 highlighted that school leaders can connect and reach many people, not only teachers, students, and staff, but also those in the community or stakeholders. P3 shared that discussing different perspectives helps leaders learn, inspire others, and improve their leadership abilities, creating a more inclusive and effective educational environment and encouraging continuous improvement and innovation in education for a better future for all.

"Your professional development perpetuates your training and the opportunities that you will be sent to other places. Then, as you connect with other people, your aspirations are also developed. As a school leader, you need to have a goal of what you want to do for it to happen." (P2)

"Being a leader in education has been amazing for my professional development and my future career goals. As a leader, I have learned all sorts of new skills, like how to talk to people effectively, work together as a team, and solve problems on the fly. Further, leading a school also gave me a big-picture view of education. It is not just about teachers and students anymore. Parents, administrators, and everyone else play a part." (P9)

"It widens your perspective. You will learn. You will learn more when you become a leader. The focus is only on teaching how to deliver the goods and how you are going to facilitate the learning process. Well, there is a difference because your perspective becomes different as a leader, and you are not going to work only on the classroom situation." (P3)

P7 and P2 shared how leadership influences the development of key characteristics of a school leader, such as maturity, accountability, and intelligence in managing the school and its people. These qualities empower school leaders to make sound decisions and sound choices in navigating school operations.

"My experiences have made me mature, facing many people. These leadership experiences helped me become wise today. So, I know how to lead people, I know how to lead a big group already. I know how to handle a lot of things, so that is how I got here. (P7)

"When I become a school head, the focus will become larger, so you will have your teachers with you, your learners, the community, your superintendent, and your supervisor. So, your work is not only confined to giving technical assistance, but you also must do some management of the resources of the school. You must see to it that your school is safe from any harm. You must ensure that all the facilities of the schools are functional. (P2)

P1 and P5 highlighted the opportunities for school leaders in their study and professional development, with the importance of continuing education and upskilling. Finally, P7 shared that school leaders often achieve and aspire to higher positions because of their leadership experiences.

"Every day that you lead people, every day that you interact with people, you are learning, and this learning contributes a lot so that you will grow both professionally and personally. I cannot afford to stagnate. I must continue to grow so that I can also continue to give significant learnings, significant theories, and educational principles needed by our constituents needed by our teachers." (P1)

"We are projecting what necessary actions might be required for potential opportunities. For instance, like taking exams, when I became a head teacher, I decided to take the principal's exam. This was not part of my initial plan, but upon becoming a school leader, I pursued the principal's exam and fortunately passed, leading to a promotion. Now, as a principal, I am considering opportunities for even higher positions, focusing on what is required to achieve them and pursuing those qualifications accordingly." (P5)

"We will not settle for less again. HT3 is good, but being on the higher rank is better, so I'm still pursuing and I'm still learning every day. I'm still reviewing every depth and order that I would encounter, and I am aiming for more." (P7)

When school leaders receive opportunities for advancement, such as promotion, it not only signifies their achievements but also shows how well they are aligned with the principles and goals of the school. Promotion can be a great motivation for school leaders to actively participate and seek opportunities for their personal and professional development (Hannan, 2023). School leaders are important in collaborating with stakeholders, which is important for student success. Therefore, prioritizing policies that support this participation is important. In addition, post-pandemic, school leaders and partners need special support in academic, technological, operational, and interpersonal aspects (Harris & Jones, 2020).

Providing different opportunities, such as job development, promotion, and collaboration with stakeholders, is very impactful for school leaders and organizations. It helps leaders improve their work, expand their skills, and advance in their careers. The involvement of stakeholders creates a good connection, ensures innovation, and strengthens adaptability, which is very important for the success of the school, especially today.

Deeper Understanding of Educational Concepts. The participation and engagement of school leaders in various school activities will help them gain a deeper understanding of education. Educational concepts include theories, methods, and principles that are used to help students learn and progress in school. P8 and P9 shared how their understanding of education changed through their active participation and leadership experience. P6 focused on the impact of leadership on the development of good leadership techniques and strategies.

“My experiences in leadership roles have significantly influenced my academic pursuits and deepened my understanding of educational concepts in some ways like practical application of educational theories, focus on educational equity, and improved research skills.” (P8)

“Being a leader in education was not just about telling people what to do; it changed how I see learning itself. Before, I might have just learned about educational theories and ideas in books. However, being a leader meant putting those ideas into action in real classrooms with real students. This showed me the challenges teachers face in making those theories work, and it made me curious about the “why” behind the practices.”(P9)

“Additionally, these roles have honed my skills in strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and data-driven decision-making, deepening my academic focus on evidence-based practices and inclusive education.” (P6)

P2 looked at how school leaders deepen their understanding of education by participating in various seminars and conferences. P3 focused on how school leaders share and give their knowledge and ideas to others, showing the impact of leadership on oneself and others. Finally, P5 illustrated the importance of a school leader being prepared for new trends and changes in education.

“When you are a school leader, you will be given the chance to be exposed to a lot of training. You will be given the chance to become a speaker. In a seminar, you will be given the chance to attend conferences. So, from those conferences and seminars, you will learn a lot.” (P2)

“These skills are transferable to academic pursuits and can help individuals excel in coursework research projects and academic challenges like what you did now, but on the story about being a leader, maybe I have given you some idea of what it is, so that's why it could be transferred like what we did.” (P3)

“It has motivated me to pursue further studies because, as a school leader, you cannot afford to be stagnant in your learning. There are always changes in our curriculum, in education, and leadership, so you must adapt. That is why you need to keep learning, enrolling in courses, and being open to things that can improve your performance.” (P5)

Educational leaders, such as principals and school administrators, play a large role in shaping educational environments. Through their good leadership, positive school spirit development, and teaching methods based on educational theory, these leaders create a system that supports learning, strengthens student success, and increases the quality of education (Johnson & Fournillier, 2023). Leaders who understand these concepts deeply can set clear goals, track progress well, and provide good support to teachers in providing good classroom instruction (Sellami et al., 2022). By embracing change, encouraging student involvement, and nurturing collaboration, these leaders improve the overall educational experience, ensuring student satisfaction and a well-rounded learning experience (Eadens & Ceballos, 2023).

Obtaining a deeper understanding of the educational concepts of school leaders is very important for creating effective educational environments. Understanding this allows leaders to provide good direction, create a positive school culture, and implement good teaching practices. Through clear goals and tracking progress, leaders can help teachers provide high-quality instruction, which enhances the learning experience.

Development of Skills and Abilities. School leaders have skills and abilities that change and shape their leadership. Through various leadership experiences, they can improve and increase their skills and abilities, which improves the efficiency and productivity of their work. These skills are important qualities that help in good school leadership and management. P8 and P10 shared that leadership’s impact on personal, academic, and professional development depends on good communication, collaboration, and empathy skills. P2 focused on the role of leadership in strengthening the self-confidence of the school leader and in promoting personal development.

“Enhanced communication skills, improved solving-problem abilities, greater empathy and emotional intelligence, leadership and team-building skills, and commitment.” (P8)

“It paves the way for me to who I am right now: one who knows the value of people, the importance of working together, and one who stays away from any form of corruption. Because I am a leader, I need to learn a lot, be involved with people, and be willing to be trained by experts.” (P10)

“And it is also growth for me. It is because I was exposed to many things. I was able to overcome some of my being an introvert. At first, I really was not a sociable person. But this time, I started to communicate with people. I started to communicate with different leaders in the community. So, somehow, the development looks like confidence, and it is enhanced. It is because of the different interactions that you had.” (P2)

P9 highlighted the importance of setting goals for the future of educational leadership. This shows that school leaders must have a clear plan and direction to deliver their schools to the desired results and progress. On the other hand, P2 and P7 looked at the important qualities of responsibility and finish that a school leader needs.

"Being a leader also means thinking about the future and setting goals to get there. I have learned how to plan strategically, motivate others, and make things happen. These are all skills I will need as I take on more responsibility in the future." (P9)

"Being a leader also meant caring about what everyone thinks. It made me more understanding of my peers and really instilled a sense of responsibility in me. We had goals as a group, and it was up to us to see them through." (P2)

"I think it has helped you a lot professionally because you are now more aware of your social responsibility as a school leader." (P7)

P6 focused on developing courage and initiating school improvements. Finally, P3 shared the importance of learning skills that help make good decisions and understand difficult situations.

"My stint as a school leader has taught me to be resilient. This also taught me that problems are just temporary and that problems have solutions. The chance given to me as a school leader has taught me to be more open-minded and to see bad situations as a motivation to do good." (P6)

"Skills like understanding of educational concepts and understanding of organizational dynamics developed communication, decision-making and, teamwork, and advocacy for educational initiatives." (P3)

The head of an educational institution is not just a position but a skill that requires continuous development and improvement, demonstrated through wisdom and emotional intelligence, encouraging dedication, integrity, and persistence with others (Askin, 2019). Effective school leaders who understand the meaning of their role are actively involved in caring not only for students' academic skills but also for their broader skills, habits, and personalities to ensure their competitiveness in the world after graduating (Al-Momani et al., 2012). This requires a multi-faceted approach, where the principals, as leaders and managers, must be wise to direct and coordinate all the activities of the institution, showing the ability of the necessary managerial tasks such as planning, organizing, mobilizing, and controlling (Bergeron, 2011).

Prioritizing the development of the skills and abilities of school leaders is important for fostering a culture of continuous improvement in educational institutions. By investing in developing and improving leadership skills, institutions can better deal with the challenges of modern education. Equipping school leaders with the necessary skills, such as good communication, future planning, and emotional intelligence, will empower them to inspire and motivate their teams toward collective goals.

3.4. Success Stories and Accomplishments in the Significance of Engagement and Leadership

The fourth objective entails the contribution of success stories and accomplishments to the significance of engagement and leadership. Its focus lies in highlighting how school leaders' successes and accomplishments deepen their understanding of the importance of their leadership roles. This theme encompasses three key aspects: the development of effective leadership traits, personal fulfillment and gratification, and the enhancement of the teaching and learning process.

Development of Effective Leadership Traits. In the changing world of education, it is important to develop good leadership qualities in school leaders. Through continuous improvement, leaders can manage problems, inspire others, and bring about positive change in their schools. P1 focused on the importance of skills and competence. P8 highlighted that commitment to education is also important for effective leadership. P3 shared the importance of flexibility by looking at different methods of implementing school programs and activities.

"We won even at the regional level, champion in the regional level, and I considered it as a success story. I would say that to win, you must prepare since we are in this competitive world. We must acquire all basic knowledge in order that we can also help and contribute to the school." (P1)

"One specific success story that stands out is the implementation of a school-wide literacy initiative aimed at improving reading proficiency among struggling readers/learners. The literacy initiative was a landmark success in

my leadership journey, not only for its immediate impact on student achievement but also for its long-term benefits to the school community.” (P8)

“Although the parents in the SPA are very supportive, the amount we are asking is not sufficient to have the budget, so we have to find ways, and with the collaboration of the teachers in MAPEH and the special program of the arts, we come up with a good product, we get good results of the recital. Our rating is excellent.” (P3)

P1 and P6 focused on the behavior of the leader to be influential, which means how school leaders can inspire and influence others. P8, on the other hand, talked about the characteristics of empowerment, which creates a good and supportive learning environment for teachers and students.

“Let us make ourselves an instrument that we can have a good influence on the people around us. What matters most is that you can influence them for good, you can influence them to carry out their tasks, for after all, we are in this academe that the business is about people.” (P1)

“By sharing these experiences, I can inspire and guide other educators and leaders in implementing successful initiatives and fostering a collaborative, inclusive educational environment.” (P6)

“The insights gained from my experiences in educational leadership highlight the critical importance of engagement and strong leadership in shaping positive educational practices and outcomes. These insights emphasize that leadership in education is not just about managing resources but about inspiring others to achieve collective goals, ultimately leading to a more equitable and high-performing educational system.” (P8)

While P3 highlights the importance of empathy as a crucial leadership trait, emphasizing a school leader's ability to connect and cultivate strong relationships with followers, P4 promotes the cultivation of humility in leadership, encouraging leaders to value input from others and foster collaboration, mutual respect, and cooperation. Finally, P5 highlighted the development of perseverance, emphasizing the transformative journey from student to school leader.

“With my experience as a leader, we will not just focus on how we manage them, but sometimes we must also be confident because teachers solve problems. I even did home visits with one of the teachers who was problematic, so I went to their house and talked to them. So, you must make yourself closer to them so that you will be able to understand the situation where they are part.” (P3)

“For me, if you want to be a good leader, first and foremost, you need first to be a good follower. If you do not have a good leader, you do not have a good follower. (P4)

“There were times when I could not pay the tuition on time, even though I was working, because the tuition assistance they provided was limited. Finishing college opened the door for me to continue, and now I am a school principal. Graduating itself was a success, and becoming a principal is a bonus.” (P5)

Effective school leadership requires readiness as it helps leaders face and manage various challenges while implementing plans that will bring about major changes. Studies show that readiness has a significant impact on educational outcomes and is important in bringing about positive changes in schools (Pinskaya et al., 2019; Shirley et al., 2020). In addition, school administrators who exhibit qualities such as fostering a sense of community, acting as inspirational role models, and experimenting with different roles and methods often have high levels of personal happiness in their work. These qualities not only improve their ability as leaders but also strengthen their sense of achievement and well-being in their learning environment (Whang, 2021).

Investing in the development of effective leadership skills in school leaders will have a significant impact on schools and communities. Improving leadership skills can lead to better student outcomes, create a positive learning environment, and introduce new teaching methods. In addition, developing good leadership can help strengthen schools' readiness and resilience. Good leadership also addresses challenges, promotes equality, and encourages community participation.

Personal Fulfillment and Gratification. The impact of the success stories and accomplishments of school leaders is significant in the definition of their participation and leadership. Receiving awards and achievements not only means professional recognition but also personal happiness and satisfaction for school leaders. The answers of P4 and P5 focused on the satisfaction that school leaders have when various aspects of school operations, activities, and performance of teachers and students are successful. On the other hand, P7 points to a sense of personal success from achieving excellence as a teacher and a good school environment.

"So, if I have an achievement in being a principal, I feel good. For example, improvement in school facilities is one of my achievements and accomplishments. So, if I have an achievement, I feel good." (P4)

"I have been the principal here for less than two years, and I am proud that during my tenure, several teachers have been promoted to higher positions or reassigned, which is a significant success for us. We have also initiated some infrastructure projects with the help of the GPTA, teachers, and everyone under my leadership. In terms of students, previously we had a 100% graduation rate." (P5)

"I have already achieved different kinds of outstanding awards from the division and the regional level. So, I am an outstanding teacher, and our school is an outstanding school." (P7)

P9 indicated the joy that can be derived from teachers' success and the opportunity to further develop their teaching skills. Meanwhile, P1 focused on how success can provide inspiration and motivation, which strengthens the pursuit of higher educational and academic goals.

"Seeing my students and teachers succeed together is the most rewarding feeling. By sharing these experiences, I hope to contribute to the discussion about effective leadership practices that can create a truly engaged and successful school community. Seeing teachers get promoted because of their hard work is incredibly rewarding, and it shows that this focus on growth really works." (P9)

"I would say to pursue more because all these efforts and all these success stories would mean that you have the potential to become what you would like to become in the future. Goals plus hard work, discipline, and commitment can take you further to another level, perhaps of leadership." (P1)

In schools, it often brings joy to school leaders to embrace principles such as independence, integrity, equality, agency, and justice. These principles are important in creating a supportive and conducive learning environment (Hackett & Wang, 2012). If leaders value these principles and see that they lead to success for teachers and students, they will be happier. Principles such as trust, dignity, honesty, and empathy help build good relationships and school culture, which gives leaders more joy when they see the good results of their colleagues (Sergiovanni, 2005). Therefore, when school leaders see the success of their efforts to promote intellectual development and positive values in their school community, they will be happier and more grateful (Cranston, 2013; Bon & Bigbee, 2011; Ciulla, 2005).

When school leaders are successful in their initiatives, such as improving student outcomes, effectively implementing policies, or promoting a positive school culture, it not only brings joy to their work but also gives meaning to their work effort. The joy often comes from seeing the obvious changes in education and student achievements, which reinforces their dedication to leadership. When leaders feel meaningful in their roles, it helps increase their motivation, enthusiasm, and ability to encourage others in the school.

Enhancement of Teaching and Learning Process. School leaders use a variety of methods to improve teaching and learning, recognizing the important role of success in creating a conducive environment for growth and innovation in education. P9 and P6 focused on the impact of achievements on student progress and educational improvement. On the other hand, P2 and P7 highlighted the encouragement and inspiration given by school leaders to stimulate students' interest in learning.

"The results of high engagement and strong leadership are clear: students learn more and do better in school. It is not just about test scores; it is about creating a love of learning that lasts a lifetime. A school that fosters engagement and empowers its leaders is a school that thrives. It is a place where everyone feels like they can contribute, and that is the kind of environment where students can truly reach their full potential. This is our vision in DepEd." (P9)

"As a school leader, my success stories and accomplishments provide valuable practices that contribute to the broader discourse on engagement and leadership, demonstrating effective strategies for improving student outcomes and school culture." (P6)

"I think one of the significant successes as an educational leader is when I was able to open an SHS in my school, and that to me is one of my success stories as an educational leader it's because opening an SHS in that certain place will provide opportunities for the learners. So they do not have to go to other places to enroll. That, to me, is an achievement as a leader because I was able to provide opportunities to the learners to finish SHS." (P2)

"Because you are, aside from a school leader, you are also a great influencer and great motivator. If you motivate your teachers to do well, the learners will also do well, which is our very reason, our learners. So, our main goal is to give quality education to our learners, to produce better learners." (P7)

P6 shared the importance of improving teaching methods so that students can better understand the lessons. P9 points to the important role of school leaders in motivating teachers by providing support and encouragement in their work. P2 focused on how the success of the school's programs and activities reflects the reputation and performance of the institution, which means the importance of good planning and strategies.

"One significant accomplishment was implementing a school-wide professional development program that improved teacher collaboration and instructional strategies, leading to a noticeable increase in student achievement scores." (P6)

"When everyone is engaged, and there is strong leadership, the whole school benefits. When teachers feel valued and supported and have a say in how things are run, they become more passionate about teaching. They find new ways to make learning interesting, and that makes students more excited to come to school and learn." (P9)

"If programs like sports, check-ups, reading, and numeracy will not result in effective learning outcomes, these will all go to waste. So, we always try for students to excel in NAT or meet the standards and pass. The results of the achievement test are a reflection of how the school will implement different projects and programs of the department." (P2)

Effective instructional leadership is very important in shaping the teaching and learning process in schools. Studies show that instructional leaders who place importance and support on high-quality instruction can yield many benefits, such as higher student achievement, increased graduation rates, and overall success. To go to school (Eadens & Ceballos, 2023). The quality of leadership has a significant impact on school outcomes, reflecting the important role of school leaders in organizational development. Good school leadership, especially the principal's leadership, is paramount (Earley & Weindling, 2004). School leaders, through their good leadership, can help improve the educational success of students (Waters et al., 2004).

Improving the teaching and learning process implies the important role of good school leadership in shaping educational outcomes, such as student achievement, graduation rates, and overall educational success. Investing in the development and empowerment of school leaders in leadership positions is important for improving school and organizational effectiveness. Good school leaders not only place importance on high-quality teaching but also foster a supportive environment that encourages staff and student engagement, critical thinking skills, and better learning experiences, which ensures positive educational outcomes for schools and students.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Summary

The study delved into the lived experiences of education graduates with leadership positions during the second semester of the school year 2023-2024. Specifically, the study explored the lived experiences of education graduates with leadership positions, identified the motivations, challenges, and successes, examined the impact of leadership on personal, academic, and professional development, and understood the contribution of their success stories and accomplishments on the significance of engagement and leadership. The study included ten school leaders, of which 4 are department heads, 3 are school principals, 2 are assistant school principals, and 1 is an education program supervisor. From the four research objectives, three themes emerged for each objective, totalling 12 themes. A researcher-made interview guide was utilized to elicit the necessary data from the participants. Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology was employed, and to support data analysis, a qualitative statistical software called HyperRESEARCH was utilized.

4.2. Findings

The following were the key findings of the study:

- a) The lived experiences of education graduates with leadership positions included a balance of personal, professional, and social responsibilities, effective implementation of programs, policies, and activities, and making well-informed and impactful decisions.
- b) The influencing factors of education graduates with leadership positions included personal, professional, and social motivations; challenges of dealing with and adjusting to teachers and witnessing teachers, students, and school activities succeed.

- c) The impacts of leadership, on personal, academic, and professional development helped school leaders gain exposure to various opportunities, develop a deeper understanding of educational concepts, and enhance their leadership skills and abilities.
- d) The success stories and accomplishments of education graduates with leadership positions have contributed to developing effective leadership traits, personal fulfillment and gratification, and enhancement of the teaching and learning process.

4.3. Conclusion

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

- a) Leadership requires a balance of personal, professional, and social responsibility, as well as the implementation of programs, policies, and activities that seek to bring about positive changes in education. Their ability to make good decisions shows the importance of strategic thinking and the adaptability of school leaders in navigating complex problems.
- b) Effective school leaders emphasize the important connection between passion and commitment to leadership. Their experiences show the power to overcome challenges and adapt to the various needs of stakeholders, which means the importance of resilience and empathy in leadership. School leaders' definition of success is witnessing the achievements of teachers, students, and school operations or activities.
- c) Engagement in leadership improves and enhances their personal, academic, and professional development. It also exposes them to various opportunities, which facilitates a deeper understanding of educational concepts and cultivates essential leadership skills and abilities. Leadership experiences not only expand the knowledge of school leaders but also provide them with the practical skills essential to effectively navigate the world of education.
- d) The achievements and accomplishments of school leaders play an important role in the development of effective leadership behaviors. Successes strengthen the leaders' happiness and improve their teaching and training abilities. Setting up environments where school leaders can succeed and be recognized is essential for their continued professional development and improvement in schools.

4.4. Recommendations

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

- a) Teacher Education Institutions may sustain their focus on real-world problems-solving and leadership skills within their curricula. Incorporating practical leadership scenarios and case studies into training programs will better prepare future educators for effective classroom management and school leadership.
- b) Teacher Education Institutions may enhance the development of robust support systems for new graduates entering leadership roles. Mentorship programs and ongoing professional development can support recent graduates and enhance their success in leadership roles.
- c) Teacher Education Institutions may strengthen regular assessments and feedback mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs. This approach will allow for continuous improvement based on the evolving needs of educational graduates, ensuring that training remains relevant and impactful in developing effective leaders.
- d) Teacher Education Institutions may strengthen partnerships with schools, educational organizations and community to create more immersive and collaborative training experiences. Partnerships offer hands-on experience and diverse exposure, boosting students' readiness for real-world challenges.
- e) Future researchers can look at the strategies used by school leaders to effectively manage the evolving needs, changes, and trends in education in the 21st century. This review can provide valuable insight and recommendations for improving leadership practices and supporting educational innovation in various school settings.

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