

Overcoming challenges in managing public schools of novice principals

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ABSTRACT

A qualitative phenomenological approach was utilized in this study to explore the challenges experienced by novice school principals and how they overcome these challenges in managing their schools in the Division of Mabalacat City during school year 2023-2024. Guided by in-depth one-on-one semi-structured interviews, data was gathered from nine public elementary school principals. With the transcribed data, coding was employed using thematic analysis. Results showed that novice principals' challenges are categorized into two: i) interpersonal challenges, including keeping the school safe and conducive and engaging with stakeholders, and ii) intrapersonal challenges, which include transitioning to higher roles and responsibilities and catching up with the new knowledge and skills needed to acquire. Moreover, novice principals experienced in overcoming these challenges were also examined. Findings revealed that growing interpersonal skills by establishing a good relationship with stakeholders and building rapport with teachers and growing intrapersonal skills by never stopping learning and having the right attitude would help them cope with their difficulties in managing the school. Finally, a proposed novice principals' challenges model framework was developed and recommended for use in the Division of Mabalacat City to improve the knowledge, skills, and qualities of beginning and aspiring principals with their new roles in managing their schools.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The status of education in the Philippines, particularly under the Department of Education (DepEd), presents a complex landscape characterized by various challenges that novice principals must navigate. Despite having an accreditation system since the 1950s, the Philippine education system still faces major issues like declining quality and limited access. Xu and Gulosino [1] note that high private school fees worsen inequality, especially for low-income families [2]. Zanten *et al.* [3] add that while accreditation efforts have grown, there is little evidence they have improved educational outcomes, showing that accreditation alone does not ensure better quality. The COVID-19 pandemic has added complexity to education by forcing a quick shift to online learning. Ancheta [4] explain that private schools struggled with the ban on in-person classes, prompting a rethink of teaching methods. This shift revealed both a

technological divide and differences in how prepared teachers were to adapt. Davis [5] points out that teachers, especially in special education, face big challenges with education 4.0 tools like robotics, showing the need for more training and support.

Novice principals play a critical role in implementing educational reforms and managing the complexities of their schools. Tindowen [6] notes that teachers in the Philippines are highly regarded, which adds pressure on school leaders to create an environment that promotes both teacher empowerment and student engagement. However, insufficient training and resources can hinder novice principals' effectiveness in meeting these challenges. David *et al.* [7] call for a thorough assessment of educational policies to ensure alignment with societal needs, which is essential for novice principals navigating these policies daily. Additionally, integrating technology into education is vital for enhancing learning environments amid the fourth industrial revolution, as discussed by Mulyadi *et al.* [8]. Novice principals must embrace technological advancements and ensure their staff is prepared to use them effectively. This necessitates a strategic approach to professional development and resource allocation, which can be daunting for those in new leadership roles.

The principalship is a complex and demanding role that requires a diverse skill set, including instructional leadership, management, and community engagement. Novice principals, defined as those in their first three years of principalship, often encounter a steep learning curve as they navigate their new responsibilities. The study of principalship in the Philippines reveals unique challenges and opportunities for novice principals, particularly through structured induction programs that support their transition into leadership roles. Susilowati [9] emphasizes the importance of these programs in enhancing the professionalism of new principals, who often lack adequate training for their responsibilities. Reflection on their experiences is also crucial for identifying challenges and developing tailored support for effective instructional leadership, as noted by O'Doherty and Ovando [10]. Additionally, the distinction between teaching and principal roles highlights the need for specific preparation, which is often lacking for those promoted based on teaching performance [11]. New principals face intense workloads and societal pressures for accountability, leading to potential burnout [12]. This underscores the need for comprehensive support systems. Furthermore, exploring transformational leadership styles can significantly improve student outcomes, which is vital in the Philippine context [13]. The COVID-19 pandemic has also introduced new challenges, as highlighted by Adams *et al.* [14], who noted that principals adapted their management practices to prioritize flexibility and innovation, prompting discussions on the essential skills for future educational leadership.

The novelty in studying principalship in the Philippines lies in its emphasis on several important aspects of educational leadership. These include induction programs, the reflective practices of novice principals, and the distinct preparation needs of school leaders. It also explores the realities of their roles under societal pressures, the search for effective leadership styles, and the necessary adaptations brought about by the pandemic. This novelty provides a deeper understanding of the complexities and dynamics of school leadership in the Philippine context. This study specifically focuses on the Division of Mabalacat City, a rapidly growing urban area in Pampanga, Philippines, which presents unique educational challenges due to its expanding student population, socio-economic diversity, and the increasing demands on school leadership. Mabalacat City has seen significant developments in infrastructure and industry, yet its education sector must continuously adapt to ensure quality learning amid these changes. By concentrating on this division, the study provides localized insights into how novice principals navigate leadership challenges in a dynamic urban setting, offering valuable implications for similar contexts across the country. Thus, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- i) What are the key challenges faced by novice principals in the Division of Mabalacat City?
- ii) What strategies do these novice principals employ to overcome these challenges?
- iii) Based on their experiences, what framework can be developed to enhance effective school management for novice principals?

By addressing these questions, this research aims to contribute to the development of targeted support systems for novice principals, ultimately improving school leadership and educational outcomes in Mabalacat City and beyond.

Novice principals often face a steep learning curve in school management, navigating tasks like budgeting, staff relations, and instructional leadership. Study by O'Doherty and Ovando [10] highlight that the transition period requires new leaders to quickly adapt to diverse environments and manage stakeholder expectations. In addition, establishing legitimacy can be challenging, especially for those promoted internally, as they must contend with existing school power structures [15]. Caruso [16] further notes that micropolitical dynamics complicate efforts to implement change. Another major issue is inadequate support; many new principals feel isolated due to insufficient mentorship, which Liljenberg and Wrethander [17] argue limits their leadership development and collaboration opportunities. The pressure to meet accountability standards while fostering a positive school culture also intensifies their stress [18].

In today's educational landscape, principals face numerous overlapping demands that affect their leadership effectiveness, including instructional leadership, community engagement, financial management, and fostering inclusive environments [19]. Effective instructional leadership is essential for school success, particularly in smaller contexts where principals must manage multiple responsibilities to ensure student achievement [20]. Additionally, there is a growing expectation for principals to cultivate a school culture that values diversity, especially in multicultural settings. This involves leading initiatives that promote cultural acceptance and inclusiveness, which is crucial for creating a conducive learning environment for all students [21], [22].

Financial management poses a major challenge for school leaders, with issues such as limited funding, poor oversight, and unclear regulations [23]. These constraints can restrict principals' ability to run essential programs and operations. The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified these challenges, adding health protocols, remote learning, and community engagement to their responsibilities [24]. This situation underscores the need for effective leadership practices that address immediate crises while focusing on long-term educational goals [25].

School principals face multifaceted demands, including instructional leadership, financial management, community engagement, and inclusivity promotion. In the Philippines, novice principals particularly struggle with these areas, along with increased workload, team building, and personnel issues. Successfully navigating these challenges is essential to fostering positive learning experiences for all students.

Novice principals often undergo a challenging transition characterized by heavy workloads. According to Dadaczynski *et al.* [26], primary school principals manage greater teaching loads and receive less organizational support than their secondary counterparts, leading to increased stress and poorer mental health outcomes. In addition to administrative tasks, they must engage in instructional leadership, balancing various responsibilities that can result in burnout if not managed effectively [27]. Their roles require supervising teaching, organizing events, and fostering relationships within the school—daunting tasks for those new to educational leadership [28]. Furthermore, they are expected to lead educational initiatives and enhance teaching quality, necessitating a deep understanding of pedagogical practices [29]. Building effective teams is crucial for fostering collaboration that enhances student learning; however, novice principals may lack the experience needed to inspire and manage their teams, potentially leading to conflicts and inefficiencies [30].

The challenges novice principals face is compounded by the lack of preparation to execute their varied tasks effectively. Naparan and Tulod [31] highlight that the absence of control over their time and demands can impede school development. Their leadership behaviors significantly impact teachers, students, and other staff, necessitating a strong sense of responsibility and commitment from school administrators. Without a robust framework for professional development and support, principals may feel ill-equipped to navigate the complexities of decentralized governance [32]. Additionally, they face pressure to improve educational quality, which can complicate decision-making and implementation processes regarding school issues. In the Philippine context, principals play a crucial role in the success of their school organization. They are considered vital leaders in the educational ladder to ensure that the DepEd vision and mission is adequately implemented. The attainment of quality education delivery among the learners depends on their quality management of the school programs and projects and their capacity to overcome challenges arising from the complex demand of their work.

One of the key tensions faced by school principals is the balance between accountability and autonomy. Principals are held accountable for student performance and school outcomes, often measured through standardized testing and performance metrics. Simultaneously, they must exercise autonomy in decision-making to tailor educational practices to the unique needs of their student populations. This requires principals to continuously reassess various inputs, processes, and products within the school environment. While seasoned principals may navigate these challenges effectively due to their experience and training, novice principals often struggle with a lack of experience and preparation, making it difficult for them to lead their schools successfully. The unprecedented challenges they face can become significant barriers to performing their duties. Based on the identified gaps in the literature regarding the unique challenges faced by novice principals, this study aimed to explore the specific obstacles encountered by new school leaders in the Division of Mabalacat City during the 2023-2024 school year and to understand the strategies they used to address these challenges. The findings provide a foundation for developing a model framework to support novice principals in school management by examining how they describe the difficulties they faced, the methods they employed to overcome these challenges, and based on these insights, proposing a framework to enhance effective school management practices.

2. METHOD

The study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, to describe the challenges that novice principals face and how they overcome these obstacles in managing their schools. A phenomenological approach was chosen because it seeks to understand and capture the essence of lived experiences, making it ideal for exploring the unique challenges and strategies of novice principals in their roles. This method provided an in-depth understanding of their experiences, offering valuable insights into school management practices.

2.1. Instruments

The study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, to describe the challenges that novice principals face and how they overcome these obstacles in managing their schools. A phenomenological approach was chosen because it is particularly suited for exploring and understanding the lived experiences of individuals in their unique contexts. This methodology allows researchers to delve deeply into the subjective realities of participants, uncovering the meanings they attach to their experiences and the strategies they develop in response to their challenges. By focusing on the perspectives of novice principals, the phenomenological approach facilitates a comprehensive examination of their specific challenges and coping mechanisms, thereby yielding rich, nuanced insights that can inform practical applications, such as the development of targeted leadership support frameworks. This depth of understanding is critical in addressing complex, human-centered issues like school leadership.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study—encompassing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability [33], [34], several measures were implemented. Credibility was established through expert validation of the interview protocol by three education specialists, with revisions made based on their recommendations. The researchers also practiced reflexivity by documenting their biases and preconceptions to mitigate their influence on data interpretation. Transferability was achieved by providing thick descriptions of codes and selecting participants through strict, predefined criteria to allow for contextual applicability. Dependability was ensured via audit trailing, where all steps in thematic coding and analytical decision-making were systematically recorded to enable transparency and reproducibility. For confirmability, three researchers independently conducted open coding to minimize individual bias, and two educational management experts independently reviewed the emergent themes to strengthen interpretive rigor. These methodological safeguards reinforce the study's validity and reliability, ensuring that findings are both robust and reflective of the participants lived experiences.

2.2. Research locale and participants

The study involved nine public elementary school principals identified as novice leaders from the Division of Mabalacat City, a public secondary division in Central Luzon, Philippines. The Division of Mabalacat City was chosen as the study site because it has the highest number of novice principals among the schools' divisions in Central Luzon. The participants were selected using total enumeration sampling.

2.3. Data gathering procedure

Data gathering for the qualitative method began with scheduling interviews through visits to the informants' schools. Prior to each interview, the researcher explained the study's purpose to ensure clear, unbiased responses. Permission was requested to record the conversations for accuracy. The interview guide, which comprised semi-structured questions, was evaluated by three experts in educational leadership and qualitative research. These experts were selected based on their extensive experience and advanced academic qualifications in the field, ensuring a robust evaluation process. Their feedback was used to refine the guide for clarity and relevance.

The sample size was determined using total enumeration sampling, as all nine novice principals in the Division of Mabalacat City were included due to their unique qualifications and the relevance of their context to the study. To ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted with two other school leaders from a nearby division, and the results confirmed that the interview guide effectively elicited detailed and meaningful responses aligned with the study's objectives. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes, allowing participants to share their experiences in depth. The recordings were then transcribed word-for-word and analyzed using a thematic coding method to identify patterns and key insights.

2.4. Data analysis

The recordings from the semi-structured interview were transcribed and analyzed using the thematic analysis. This analysis enabled data to be systematically identified, analyzed, synthesized, and interpreted through the use of themes [34]. The thematic analysis identified precisely the similarities and differences

between related concepts and data. With this kind of analysis, an association of various concepts and opinions of the informants was processed thru comparing with another gathered data in a different timeline [34].

To analyze the qualitative data, thematic analysis was conducted following the phases outlined by Jensen *et al.* [35] to ensure reliable results. The first phase involved getting familiar with the transcribed interview data by reading and rereading the responses, marking important ideas for future reference. In the second phase, initial codes were created to label specific data points that could answer the research questions. These “building blocks” were categorized based on their relevance to the research problem, requiring careful reading to ensure that each response was accurately coded. To streamline this process, qualitative data analysis miner lite software was used for systematic filing.

Phase three involved identifying themes by reviewing coded data to find similar patterns and ideas related to the research questions. In phase four, these potential themes were refined through quality checks to ensure that each theme accurately reflected the data, requiring some revisions and adjustments. Finally, in phases five and six, themes were defined, named, and used to produce a report. This report presented themes that were distinct, focused, and directly tied to the research question, capturing the core insights from the data analysis [35].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Describing novice principals' challenges

Principals have diverse roles and responsibilities that directly impact school performance. While experienced principals face various challenges in their daily duties, novice principals often struggle even more as they familiarize themselves with their roles. Research participants highlighted the difficulties they encountered at the start of their careers, which fell into two categories: i) interpersonal challenges, such as ensuring a safe and conducive school environment and engaging with stakeholders; and ii) intrapersonal challenges, which involve adjusting to increased responsibilities and acquiring new knowledge and skills.

3.1.1. Interpersonal challenges

The following are categorized as interpersonal, for they involved interaction between people when these challenges arise. In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, interpersonal is defined as being, relating to, or involving persons' relations. When novice school principals faced these challenges, they dealt with different people to cope with their situation.

a. Ensuring a safe and conducive school environment

Ensuring a safe and conducive school environment is a fundamental responsibility of school principals, yet challenges in maintaining safety persist globally [36]. In this study, novice principals identified various threats to safety and recounted specific incidents that underscored these challenges. Safety threats ranged from health issues, like the dengue outbreak reported by one participant (P3), to thefts, as illustrated by another participant (P7) whose school suffered multiple TV thefts despite increased security measures. Such incidents highlight the limitations of existing safety protocols and the unpredictability of external factors that can disrupt school safety, as also emphasized by Bradshaw *et al.* [36].

The study also revealed the challenges novice principals encounter in creating a conducive learning environment. Participants reported infrastructure issues such as inadequate facilities, poor drainage, and unsafe classrooms, with participants P3 and P4 implementing a class-shifting system due to the lack of usable classrooms. These findings support Susilowati study [9], which links the quality of physical facilities to student achievement. In addition to physical challenges, participants also highlighted the complexities of instructional leadership, particularly in mentoring teachers—an area that demands skills beyond their initial teaching expertise. For instance, participant P7 noted difficulties in providing constructive feedback, while P3 emphasized the importance of understanding teachers' varied skill levels.

“Then another challenge is our lack of classrooms, the school has many classrooms actually, but unfortunately, most of them are already for demolition they are not safe to be occupied by the pupils and teachers, so I had to implement shifting of classes.” (P3)

“At first, sir, when I arrived here, I saw that their classroom was lacking because the right side of the building was under construction. They didn't have a classroom, so we had to manage the situation by having shifts. That's the problem I encountered, sir.” (P4)

In summary, novice principals encountered significant obstacles in securing a safe environment, managing resource shortages, and guiding instructional practices, all of which are critical elements for fostering a supportive and effective learning atmosphere. These challenges often stemmed from limited infrastructure, insufficient funding, and a lack of administrative experience, which made it difficult for them

to respond promptly to pressing school needs. Moreover, the dual responsibility of ensuring student safety while also leading instructional improvements placed considerable pressure on these school leaders. These findings reflect a broader struggle among novice principals in balancing the complex demands of administration, safety, and pedagogy—underscoring the need for comprehensive training and sustained support systems to help them navigate the early stages of their leadership journey successfully.

b. Engaging with stakeholders

In educational leadership, stakeholder engagement is essential, encompassing both internal and external groups critical to a school's success. According to Lyytinen *et al.* [37], internal stakeholders include those directly involved in school operations, like staff and school boards, while external stakeholders, such as parents, taxpayers, and community members, contribute indirectly but significantly influence school outcomes. The interviews in this study emphasized challenges novice principals face, primarily with external stakeholders, highlighting engagement as a critical but complex component of their leadership.

Meaningful engagement with stakeholders, as outlined by Almanza *et al.* [38], requires principals to go beyond superficial interactions by actively connecting, communicating, and collaborating with various individuals and groups, including parents, local government units (LGUs), alumni, and community organizations. This kind of engagement fosters trust, shared responsibility, and a collective vision for school improvement. Participants in the study recognized the critical role that stakeholders play, particularly in addressing infrastructural needs and resource gaps that schools cannot meet on their own. One principal (P6) specifically acknowledged how external contributions—such as donations, volunteer work, or partnerships—helped enhance the physical environment of the school. Such partnerships not only improve the school's facilities but also strengthen the school-community relationship, creating a more inclusive and empowered educational environment. These findings emphasize that effective stakeholder engagement is not optional but essential for addressing challenges and driving positive change in schools.

“So, as the school head, you really need to get to know the stakeholders who are helping support the school for its improvement. After understanding this, you need to find a way to win their hearts so that, in some way, they become your partners in running the school.” (P6)

However, building these connections is particularly challenging for novice leaders, who often lack the established networks, experience, and credibility needed to secure meaningful support from the community. Unlike seasoned principals, novice school heads may struggle to gain the trust of stakeholders or effectively communicate their vision, which can hinder collaboration. P2 reflected on the difficulties of mobilizing community involvement, citing hesitations and a lack of initial interest from local partners. Similarly, P4 expressed challenges in fostering parental engagement in student education, pointing to low attendance in meetings and limited participation in school activities. These experiences highlight the uphill battle many new principals face in establishing strong stakeholder relationships, which are essential to sustaining school development initiatives and promoting a shared commitment to student success.

“Now, what I see as a challenge here is how parents can follow up on their children's studies. Based on the teachers I've interviewed, they said, ‘Ma'am, we're risking our health going there,’ something like that.” (P4)

These findings indicate that for novice principals, effective stakeholder engagement depends largely on their ability to establish trust, demonstrate accountability, and gradually gain the confidence of their community. New leaders often face the challenge of overcoming initial skepticism and skepticism from stakeholders who may be unfamiliar with their leadership style or vision. Building these relationships is crucial for long-term success, as it fosters collaboration, shared goals, and community support. However, this process takes time, particularly for novice principals who are still in the early stages of developing their professional networks and reputations. As they grow in their leadership roles, their ability to navigate these challenges will become a key factor in securing the resources and partnerships necessary to drive school improvement.

3.1.2. Intrapersonal challenges

Merriam-Webster defines intrapersonal as “occurring within the individual mind or self,” highlighting that the challenges faced by novice principals are largely centered around the internal struggles of the individual. The results of the study revealed two primary difficulties that these principals are grappling with. First, they are struggling with the transition to higher roles and responsibilities, which often brings feelings of uncertainty, self-doubt, and a need to adapt quickly to a new level of authority. Second, they are finding it challenging to catch up with the new knowledge and skills required for their leadership positions, as the demands of instructional leadership, administration, and stakeholder management necessitate ongoing learning

and personal development. These intrapersonal struggles underscore the complex emotional and cognitive adjustments that novice principals must make as they navigate the steep learning curve of their new roles.

a. Transitioning to higher roles and responsibilities

Transitioning from teaching roles to school principalship brings a significant expansion in responsibilities, as illustrated by Cohen and Schechter [39]. In a study comparing principals' roles across five countries, where duties span administrative tasks, professional ethics, and student achievement. In Cambodia, for example, primary school principals' roles encompass administrative management, pedagogical responsibilities, and effective communication with both internal and external stakeholders [40]. Compared to teachers, principals bear a higher level of accountability, with school decisions resting largely on their leadership, as agreed by participants (P2 and P8).

"When I started working as a principal, I saw myself carrying tons of responsibilities and accountabilities." (P2)

The transition to principalship presents distinct challenges, which Aggrey-Fynn [41] categorizes into personal, interpersonal, and administrative difficulties. The personal dimension includes adapting to a demanding workload, a concern echoed by participants who emphasized the diverse responsibilities associated with their new roles. Susilowati [9] highlights that novice principals face significant pressure from community, administrative, and political fronts, underscoring the need for effective time and workload management. Additionally, strong socialization and communication skills are crucial as principals navigate relationships with students, teachers, community members, and higher authorities.

The findings of this study reveal that novice principals face substantial challenges in fulfilling their multifaceted responsibilities, which include overseeing student learning, supporting teachers, and engaging with broader community and administrative structures. Participants, such as P9, expressed the difficulty of balancing these roles while also being expected to manage complex networks effectively. In sum, the transition to principalship is marked by a considerable increase in responsibility, requiring novice principals to develop adaptability, strong communication skills, and effective management strategies to navigate these demands.

"A significant adjustment in my line of duty, where I need to interact and adapt to new teachers, parents, and, most importantly, to a new community." (P9)

b. Catching up with the new knowledge and skills needed to acquire

The preparation of school principals for their multifaceted roles varies significantly across the globe. Leadership preparation programs, as detailed by Spooner [42], adopt distinct approaches in countries such as Canada, Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and New York City. However, despite these structured programs, novice principals around the world still face gaps in the essential knowledge and skills needed to navigate their responsibilities effectively.

According to Tahir *et al.* [43], novice principals face several challenges in the early years of their leadership journey, such as crafting a school improvement plan and understanding special education laws, challenges that resonate with the experiences shared by participant P4. Aravena [44] found that new principals often struggle with isolation, time management, financial management, and the integration of theoretical knowledge into practical school management. Participant P3 echoed this sentiment, expressing difficulty transitioning from a teaching role to managing a school due to limited prior experience in administration. These findings highlight the multifaceted struggles novice principals face as they adjust to the demands of leadership while still developing the necessary skills and experience.

"...Perhaps my biggest weakness is the paperwork, since I'm new to it. You know, sir, I've been a classroom teacher for a long time, and then suddenly I transitioned to an office role. So, it's really the paperwork that I'm struggling with, but when it comes to working with resources and collaborating with others, I'm fine. Paperwork is new to me—that's my weakness." (P4)

The study's findings indicate that novice principals face significant knowledge and skill deficits, particularly in areas such as financial management, office operations, instructional guidance, and human resources. These challenges are further complicated by both interpersonal and intrapersonal factors, as novice principals must quickly acquire practical skills while managing interactions with staff, students, and community members, often with minimal prior exposure to these administrative complexities. In conclusion, novice principals are tasked with bridging the gap between theoretical training and the realities of school management. Limited job exposure prior to assuming the principalship exacerbates this knowledge gap,

which in turn impacts their effectiveness in handling daily responsibilities. This underscores the need for continuous learning and a strong support network to help principals adapt and grow within their roles.

3.2. Overcoming novice principals' challenges

Aside from describing the challenges encountered by novice principals, the strategies and ways how they were able to overcome them are discussed by the respondents. Two emerging themes were formulated: growing interpersonal skills and growing intrapersonal skills. These two themes were positioned accordingly to the two themes developed in describing the challenges.

3.2.1. Growing interpersonal skills

This theme emerged in response to participants identified interpersonal challenges in ensuring a safe and conducive school environment and engaging with stakeholders.

a. Establishing good relationships with stakeholders

Building strong relationships with stakeholders is crucial for school principals, as these connections significantly impact the school's progress. Stakeholders range from teachers to local community members, and effective engagement with them can help principals navigate the challenges. Participants emphasized communication as a foundational aspect of building these relationships, with P8 and P6 highlighting the importance of consistently and clearly relaying information, particularly during policy implementation.

"Perhaps, sir, constant communication with stakeholders is essential to ensure they know what the school really needs. Stakeholders, especially the local government, the barangay captain, the councilor in charge of education, and most importantly, the parents, need to be informed. If they are aware of the school's and students' needs, their support will be strong." (P8)

The importance of solid stakeholder connections is emphasized by Etomes and Molua [45], who note that novice principals must actively establish strong communication channels. To build these connections, principals utilize various strategies, such as face-to-face meetings and written communications, as highlighted by P7. Engaging stakeholders personally and making them feel valued fosters positive relationships and encourages ongoing support. Effective communication skills, including maintaining eye contact, using clear language, and actively listening, are essential for these interactions. P4 further emphasized that charisma, approachability, and courteous engagement enhance stakeholder relationships, ensuring they feel respected and involved.

Clear expectations and transparency are vital in building trust among stakeholders. Participants stressed the significance of transparency in managing donations and resources, as mentioned by P3, to reassure stakeholders that their contributions directly benefit the school. Establishing clear goals and objectives helps align stakeholder contributions with the school's needs and ensures accountability. Overall, the findings indicate that successful relationships with stakeholders rely on open communication, mutual respect, clear expectations, and transparency. These interpersonal skills are crucial for novice principals, supporting the notion that communication and trust are fundamental to effective leadership in schools [45].

b. Building rapport with teachers

Teachers are pivotal in the educational system, directly influencing student learning and contributing to school development [46]. However, novice principals face challenges in establishing effective instructional leadership, largely due to the varied skillsets and professional needs of teachers. Participants in this study shared insights on how they approach building rapport with teachers and supporting their growth.

Understanding individual teachers' strengths and weaknesses is crucial. As P8 expressed, identifying each teacher's unique needs allows for targeted support, which is essential for providing effective technical assistance. Recognizing talents within the team also helps in aligning teachers' strengths with specific roles, as noted by P5. Participants acknowledged that providing feedback to teachers should be done with sensitivity, considering teachers' feelings, as P7 highlighted.

"When giving feedback, you should consider their feelings. Identifying their needs is important because we can assess them through their SAT, along with their current situations that need to come from the division. So, we have the INSET and SAT for their professional development. They are also allowed to attend seminars within the division. So, as for the teachers' professional development, it's not too challenging or difficult; it's still manageable, sir." (P7)

Supporting teachers' professional development is recognized as an ongoing process that plays a crucial role in fostering growth. For example, assessing teachers' needs through performance metrics and facilitating attendance at professional development seminars allows principals to support and enhance teacher capabilities (P7). As Ayanoğlu and Arastaman [47] suggests, principals also act as resource providers,

actively identifying and valuing each teacher's unique contributions. Good communication emerged as a key strategy for building rapport, with P3 and P6 emphasizing the importance of maintaining open lines of communication to ensure teachers feel heard and engaged in discussions. This approach fosters mutual trust and facilitates smoother interactions, especially in areas like classroom observations and the implementation of new policies. In alignment with Australia's National Professional Standard for principals [48], which emphasizes communication skills as essential for effective leadership, this study highlights that rapport-building with teachers is just as crucial as cultivating trust with other stakeholders. Strong principal-teacher relationships not only support instructional leadership but also help novice principals transition into their roles, promoting a positive school culture.

3.2.2. Growing intrapersonal skills

This emerging theme is in response to participants identified challenges when it comes to transitioning to higher roles and responsibilities and catching up with the new knowledge and skills needed to acquire in their new position.

a. Upskilling and reskilling

School principals are often faced with new policies, technological advancements, and societal changes that demand an adaptable, knowledgeable approach to leadership [49]. Upskilling and reskilling play a crucial role in meeting these challenges, especially for novice principals who are still building their skills and expertise. From the interviews conducted in this study, participants highlighted three main strategies for upskilling and reskilling: attending seminars or training, enrolling in educational management courses, and engaging in regular reading.

Most participants agreed that attending training sessions and seminars is crucial for staying updated with the ever-evolving landscape of school administration. P9, for example, emphasized the importance of continuing professional development, noting that attending seminars and training provides valuable opportunities to enhance leadership skills and stay informed about the latest trends, strategies, and policies in education. Similarly, P1 and P2 highlighted that training is essential not only for staying current but also for acquiring crucial knowledge in areas such as educational laws, governance, and administrative procedures, which are vital for effective decision-making. This continuous professional development allows novice principals to better navigate the complexities of their roles, from legal compliance to improving school operations, ultimately supporting their growth as effective leaders. The consensus among participants underscores the necessity of lifelong learning in leadership, particularly in a field where regulations, best practices, and expectations constantly evolve.

"To identify their upskilling needs, we can assess teachers through their current performance and self-assessment tools, like the skills audit and feedback from classroom observations. The division also provides guidelines on critical skills required, so we have both internal training sessions and division-led programs to support their professional growth. Teachers are encouraged to attend relevant seminars and workshops offered by the division. So far, upskilling for teachers has been manageable; while there are areas for improvement, the challenges aren't overwhelming, and with the support in place, progress has been smooth." (P9)

While professional development training for school principals in the Philippines is not mandatory, it is highly valued and plays a significant role in the principal ranking system, helping to assess and elevate their leadership capabilities. Globally, continuous professional development has become an essential component of school leadership, with many countries recognizing the need for structured training programs to prepare principals for the challenges of their roles. For instance, countries like Denmark, Chile, and Ireland emphasize well-organized training programs that provide principals with the skills needed to manage schools effectively. In contrast, England, Finland, and Israel offer training at various career stages, ensuring that school leaders are equipped to handle the evolving complexities of leadership as they progress through their careers [50]. These global practices highlight the growing recognition of professional development as a critical element in fostering effective school leadership, demonstrating its importance not only in the Philippines but also internationally.

In the Philippines, educational qualifications such as a master's or doctoral degree in education management are also important for ranking. P1 mentioned pursuing management courses to gain relevant leadership knowledge. Principals noted that advanced studies facilitate collaboration with peers, enhancing their leadership capacity through shared experiences. Comprehensive principal preparation programs in countries like Canada and Singapore further emphasize practical knowledge and collaborative learning models, as highlighted by Sandó *et al.* [51].

b. Having the right attitude

The attitude of school principals is crucial for effectively navigating the challenges of educational leadership [52]. Interviews with participants in this study revealed that a positive mindset is essential for overcoming obstacles. One participant (P3) emphasized that attitude significantly affects a principal's effectiveness, particularly in their early leadership years (P2).

Participants also noted that building strong relationships with teachers relies on transparency; being open about intentions fosters trust. Additionally, humility is vital for novice principals, as they must recognize their limitations and seek guidance from experienced colleagues. Mentorship and collaboration were identified as essential support systems (P6 and P4).

“So, you will be guided by different school heads in the field who you can approach for suggestions or interpretation if needed for your technical assistance... You also need to stay humble because you're bound to make mistakes here and there, as you're still new to the service. You just need the assistance and guidance from those who can teach you.” (P6)

Passion emerged as a crucial element in effective school leadership, with participant P3 noting that a love for the job helps principals navigate challenges more effectively. Passionate leaders inspire teachers and students alike, fostering an environment of enthusiasm and engagement that contributes to enhanced educational outcomes. Their commitment not only motivates staff but also cultivates a shared vision among all stakeholders, facilitating collective efforts toward a common goal [53]. Alongside passion, effective principals exhibit approachability, decisiveness, stress management, collaboration, listening skills, honesty, motivation, and resilience—traits that underscore the importance of interpersonal skills, moral purpose, and maintaining high standards in educational leadership.

Overall, the study highlights that the right attitude—comprising positivity, transparency, humility, and passion—is crucial for school principals to successfully navigate the complexities of educational leadership. These traits enable principals to effectively manage challenges, build trust with their staff, and create a supportive and productive school culture. As the educational landscape continues to evolve, the importance of these characteristics becomes even more pronounced. They are vital not only for attracting visionary leaders who can inspire their teams but also for fostering a positive school environment that encourages collaboration, growth, and student success. In this ever-changing context, principals who embody these values are better equipped to lead with resilience and adaptability, ensuring long-term success for both their schools and communities.

3.3. Theme matrix

3.3.1. Challenges experienced by novice principals in school management

Table 1 outlines the challenges novice principals encounter in school management, categorized into two main themes: interpersonal challenges and intrapersonal challenges. Interpersonal challenges revolve around creating a safe, conducive learning environment while managing relationships with stakeholders. These include a lack of classrooms and facilities, budget constraints, and maintaining school safety. Additionally, novice principals often face difficulties in instructional leadership and in handling teachers with varying personalities and skills. Engaging stakeholders—such as parents, LGUs, and the community—further compounds these challenges. Principals must often rally for support to enhance school resources and actively involve stakeholders in events and decision-making processes.

On the other hand, intrapersonal challenges relate to the internal adjustments required for transitioning into higher roles and responsibilities, with many principals struggling due to limited managerial experience, particularly in handling administrative tasks and financial documentation, such as the management of maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE). The need to acquire new knowledge and skills further complicates their role, adding to the complexity of school leadership. These challenges demonstrate the multifaceted nature of school leadership, where interpersonal challenges emphasize the importance of collaboration, while intrapersonal challenges highlight the necessity for self-development and adaptability. Table 1 effectively illustrates these categories, providing a structured understanding of the obstacles faced by novice school principals.

3.3.2. Strategies employed by novice principals to overcome management challenges

Table 2 presents the strategies employed by novice school principals to address the challenges they face in school management. These strategies are categorized into two main themes: growing interpersonal skills and growing intrapersonal skills. To address interpersonal challenges, novice principals focused on establishing good relationships with stakeholders. This included actions such as communicating sincerely and informatively with stakeholders, coordinating effectively with community authorities, and expanding connections to secure resources for school improvement. Additionally, principals worked on building good

rapport with teachers by familiarizing themselves with their strengths and weaknesses, conducting classroom observations, and encouraging professional development through seminars and training.

Table 1. Principals' descriptions of challenges in school management

Research objectives	Initial categories	Sub themes	Main themes
Challenges experienced by novice principals	Lack of classrooms allocated for all enrollees	Keeping the school safe and conducive	Interpersonal challenges
	Improvement in the physical aspect/facilities of the school		
	Keeping the school safe (health and theft)		
	Lack of budget	Engaging with stakeholders	
	Handling teachers with a different set of skills and personalities		
	Instructional leadership		
	Asking for a helping hand from stakeholders in terms of resources to use for the improvement of the school		
	Engaging other stakeholders (e.g., LGU) in the events of the school		
	Engaging parents in taking part in the education of their children		
	Engaging the community to take participation in the events of the school		
	Transitioning to a higher position with more responsibilities and accountabilities	Transitioning to higher roles and responsibilities	Intrapersonal challenges
	Lack of experience in terms of the managerial aspect	Catching up with the new knowledge and skills needed to acquire	
	Lack of knowledge and skills in completing paperwork/documents (e.g., MOOE)		

Table 2. Strategies used by principals to overcome management challenges

Research objectives	Initial categories	Sub themes	Main themes
Ways on how novice school principals overcome challenges encountered	Communicating sincerely and informatively to the stakeholders	Establishing a good relationship with stakeholders	Growing interpersonal skills
	Coordinating with the authorities of the community		
	Expanding connections for school partnership		
	Expanding connections that can help in getting more resources for the school	Build good rapport with teachers	
	Getting familiar with the culture of the school and community		
	Having a good relationship with stakeholders		
	Proper communication with teachers		
	Familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of your teachers		
	Conducting class observations with teachers		
	Letting teachings attend seminars or training for professional development	Upskilling and reskilling	Growing intrapersonal skills
	Attend seminars/training		
	Becoming more knowledgeable by enrolling in educational management courses	Have the right attitude	
	Becoming more knowledgeable by reading resources in terms of instructional leadership		
	Becoming more knowledgeable by reading resources related to legal terms		
	Becoming physically involved in implementing solutions to the problem of the school		
	Becoming resourceful of what the school only has		
	Bring forth the right attitude in accomplishing tasks		
	Seek advice from tenured school principals		
	Transparency as to where proceeds from donations and budgets will go		

On the intrapersonal side, principals demonstrated a strong commitment to upskilling and reskilling, which involved attending seminars and training programs, enrolling in educational management courses, and expanding their knowledge through instructional leadership and legal resources. They also emphasized the importance of having the right attitude by implementing resourceful solutions to challenges, seeking advice from seasoned school leaders, and ensuring transparency in financial transactions, particularly in the allocation of donations and budgets. These strategies highlight the dual focus of novice principals on both interpersonal and intrapersonal growth. By cultivating stronger relationships with stakeholders and enhancing their own leadership capabilities, these principals exhibited resilience and adaptability in navigating the complexities of school management. Table 2 provides a detailed overview of these strategies, emphasizing the importance of holistic development in effectively overcoming management challenges.

3.4. Novice school principal's challenges model framework

The study introduces the novice school principal's challenges model framework, as shown in Figure 1, categorizing the challenges novice principals face into two main types: interpersonal and intrapersonal. Interpersonal challenges arise from interactions with various stakeholders, requiring beginning principals to manage demanding relationships while ensuring a safe and conducive school environment. In contrast, intrapersonal challenges pertain to personal growth and self-management, including the transition to higher roles and the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for effective leadership.

Additionally, the findings reveal strategies novice principals employ to overcome these challenges, classified into two areas: developing interpersonal skills and enhancing intrapersonal skills. Developing interpersonal skills involves fostering strong relationships with stakeholders and building rapport with teachers, which is vital for addressing external challenges. Conversely, enhancing intrapersonal skills focuses on continuous learning and maintaining a positive attitude. By acknowledging these challenges and emphasizing the importance of both skill sets, the study highlights the need for targeted support and training opportunities to empower novice principals in fulfilling their mission and vision effectively.

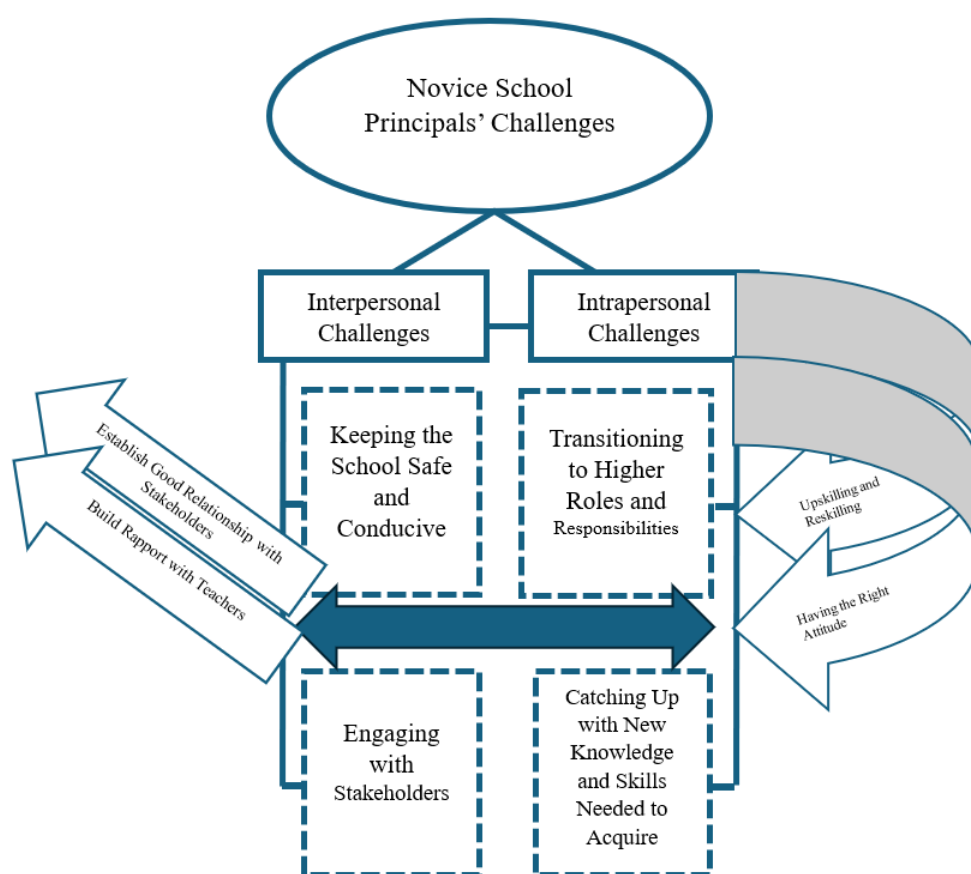


Figure 1. Novice school principal's challenges model framework

4. CONCLUSION

This study identified the key challenges faced by novice school principals, categorized into interpersonal challenges—such as engaging stakeholders and maintaining a safe school environment—and intrapersonal challenges, including transitioning to higher roles and acquiring new skills. To address these challenges, novice principals focus on developing interpersonal skills through building relationships with stakeholders and fostering rapport with teachers. They also enhance their intrapersonal skills via continuous learning and cultivating a positive attitude. These efforts demonstrate the importance of both interpersonal and intrapersonal growth in navigating the complexities of school leadership. The findings emphasize the importance of shared governance, urging novice principals to build strong relationships with stakeholders and implement school policies that encourage community support. Professional development opportunities, such as faculty activities and collaborative initiatives, are crucial for fostering an effective learning environment.

The DepEd should establish school head induction programs and mentor-mentee initiatives to equip novice principals with essential leadership skills and guidance. These initiatives can help strengthen the leadership capabilities of novice principals, ensuring they are well-prepared for the demands of their roles. Future research should explore the long-term impact of mentorship and induction programs on novice principals, as well as the role of emotional intelligence in addressing challenges. Studies should also investigate context-specific strategies for rural and urban schools, as these environments present unique obstacles. Understanding these dynamics can help refine leadership training and support mechanisms for school leaders. These studies can ultimately inform policies and practices that better support novice school leaders in their critical roles.

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C : **C**onceptualization

M : **M**ethodology

So : **S**oftware

Va : **V**alidation

Fo : **F**ormal analysis

I : **I**nvestigation

R : **R**esources

D : **D**ata Curation

O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft

E : Writing - Review & **E**editing

Vi : **V**isualization

Su : **S**upervision

P : **P**roject administration

Fu : **F**unding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no competing financial, personal, or professional interests that could influence the work reported in this paper.

INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent was obtained from all participants included in this study.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The interview data supporting this finding of this study are not publicly available due to privacy/ethical restrictions but may be shared in anonymized form by the corresponding author [RPSL], upon reasonable request.




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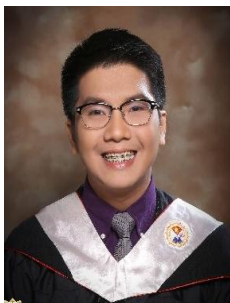
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