

School Heads Mobility: Lived Experiences and Effects on Leadership and Succession Program

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Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences of school heads regarding mobility and succession programs in the REINA District of Quezon Province, comprising the municipalities of Real, Infanta, and General Nakar. Anchored on the Transformational Leadership Theory, the study examined the effects of mobility on leadership continuity, school performance, stakeholder relationships, coping strategies, and leadership transitions. A qualitative transcendental phenomenological design was employed to understand the experiences of six school heads who had undergone three to five mobility assignments and had served as school heads for five to ten years. Data were collected through a researcher-made semi-structured interview guide that underwent validation and pilot testing. Individual interviews were conducted and analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological method. The findings revealed that school heads encountered adjustment challenges related to unfamiliar environments, increased responsibilities, and changing stakeholder expectations. However, support from teachers, parents, local government units, and community stakeholders facilitated smoother transitions and strengthened school operations. Mobility enhanced leadership adaptability, resilience, collaboration, and professional growth, although temporary disruptions in continuity and relationship building were also experienced. Participants identified trust-building, inclusive leadership, collaboration, and emotional readiness as critical factors in managing successful transitions. Repeated mobility experiences increased confidence, leadership competence, and the capacity to respond effectively to diverse school contexts. The study concluded that school head mobility is both a leadership challenge and an opportunity for professional development and educational improvement. It recommends strengthening transition support, leadership development initiatives, mentoring programs, stakeholder collaboration, and succession planning mechanisms. The study aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) by promoting effective educational leadership, workforce development, and institutional continuity. The findings contribute to educational, institutional, community, and governance sustainability through strengthened leadership practices and stakeholder engagement.

Keywords: Adaptability, Leadership Continuity, Mobility, School Heads, Stakeholder Engagement, Succession Programs, Transformational Leadership, Transition Experiences

1. Introduction

School heads play a critical role in ensuring the effective delivery of basic education, sustaining school improvement initiatives, and advancing educational quality through instructional and administrative leadership. In the Philippines, School heads are expected to fulfill leadership functions aligned with established professional leadership standards, while adapting to changing educational demands, organizational transitions, and contextual challenges. In geographically isolated and disaster-prone areas such as Real, Infanta, and General Nakar (REINA), leadership mobility presents additional challenges that influence leadership continuity, school performance, stakeholder relationships, and succession planning. This study examines the lived experiences of school heads who have undergone multiple mobility assignments and explores the effects of mobility on leadership and succession programs.

1.1 School Heads Mobility and Leadership Transitions in the REINA District

School heads are responsible for implementing school vision and mission, managing educational programs, and promoting quality basic education. Educational reforms such as School-Based Management have increased expectations for school leadership and accountability. Professional standards for school heads emphasize competencies in strategic leadership, school operations, teaching and learning, relationship building, and professional development. In REINA districts, school heads operate within contexts characterized by geographic isolation, disaster risks, and limited resources. To address leadership needs and organizational requirements, the Department of Education implements reassignment, promotion, and transfer policies that often require school heads to move across schools, districts, and communities. Mobility requires school heads to adapt to new cultures, stakeholders, and organizational environments while maintaining leadership effectiveness and educational continuity. Anacleto (2017) similarly noted that school heads' mobility influences organizational dynamics, educational reform management, and school performance indicators, highlighting the need for

leaders to adapt effectively to changing school contexts. Research indicates that leadership transitions may affect school improvement, institutional memory, and collective efficacy. Similar findings were reported by Fink and Brayman (2006), Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2012), Berry (2014), and DeMatthews, Knight, and Shin (2022), who noted that leadership turnover influences school effectiveness, organizational continuity, and staff stability. Mobility may also create opportunities for innovation, improved school-principal matching, and leadership growth. However, the experiences of Filipino school heads undergoing mobility, particularly in rural contexts, remain underexplored. Studies by Gates et al. (2006), Papa Jr. (2007), and Tekleselassie and Villarreal III (2011) suggest that leadership mobility may contribute to professional growth and improved alignment between school needs and leadership competencies.

1.2 Themes and Insights on School Heads Mobility, Leadership Practices, and Succession Programs

Existing literature identifies both benefits and challenges associated with school head mobility. Leadership transitions often result in temporary declines in school performance as new principals adjust to organizational cultures and stakeholder expectations (Bowers, J. Boyce, and A. J. (2016); Li L. and A. Shaukat (2024); B. Bartanen, J. Grissom, & L. Rogers, 2019). Lee (2015) similarly found that principal succession may alter school performance trajectories as schools adjust to new leadership practices and priorities. Successful transitions are associated with transformational, situational, distributed, and collaborative leadership approaches that build trust, promote participation, and balance innovation with stability (V. Rangel (2018)). Research further highlights the importance of mentoring, leadership preparation, and succession support during transitions (Daresh, 2004; Korach & Cosner, 2017; Aravena, 2022). Parylo and Zepeda (2015) emphasized that professional learning opportunities during principal succession help leaders adjust more effectively to new organizational environments. Studies further indicate that frequent reassignment may disrupt instructional continuity, long-term reform efforts, institutional memory, teacher morale, and policy consistency (D. L. Bickmore and M. M. Dowell, 2019; Naval, C. L., & Santos, D. M. (2025)). Conversely, mobility can broaden leadership experience, improve adaptability, strengthen administrative competence, and enhance situational leadership capabilities (Naval, C. L., & Santos, D. M. (2025)). Research on leadership development also emphasizes the importance of lived experiences and reflective learning. Leadership competencies are shaped by experience, adaptation, resilience, and the ability to respond effectively to challenges (Saleem, 2015; Janson, 2008; Shamir et al., 2005)). Leadership development literature emphasizes experiential learning, reflective practice, and professional growth as essential components of effective school leadership (Hargreaves, 2003; Hargreaves et al., 2007; Zhan, 2023). Effective principals learn from experience and progressively improve leadership performance (Clark, Martorell & Rockoff, 2009; Coelli & Green, 2012).

1.3 Local, National, and Global Context of School Heads Mobility and Leadership Succession

Globally, leadership turnover remains a significant educational concern because frequent principal transitions may negatively affect teacher retention, school effectiveness, and student achievement (Beteille, Kalogrides, and Loeb, 2012; Grissom & Bartanen, 2019). Player et al. (2017) found that principal leadership quality and person-job fit are associated with teacher mobility and attrition, reinforcing the importance of effective leadership placement. The importance of stable leadership is further emphasized by Dhuey and Smith (2014), who demonstrated that school principals significantly influence student learning outcomes and overall school performance. Previous studies have documented the effects of principal mobility and attrition on school performance, teacher retention, and institutional stability (Fuller & Young, 2009; Husain, Miller, & Player, 2021; Yan, 2019; Yan, 2020). Ni, Sun, and Rorrer (2015) likewise reported that leadership turnover often creates periods of uncertainty and organizational adjustment that may affect school operations. Chumba (2014) further observed that principal mobility affects teacher efficacy and organizational effectiveness, particularly when transitions are not adequately supported. International evidence suggests that well-managed mobility may contribute to innovation and stronger leadership-school alignment (Elmalak-Watad, A., & Schechter, C., 2025). Principal pipeline initiatives and leadership succession systems have likewise been recognized as important mechanisms for sustaining leadership quality and continuity (Turnbull et al., 2013; Goldring et al., 2020). Nationally, Philippine school heads are expected to spend substantial time on instructional leadership while managing administrative responsibilities under existing DepEd policies. Leadership succession has become increasingly important due to workforce transitions, educational reforms, and organizational demands. Studies highlight the importance of leadership retention, succession planning, and contextualized leadership practices in sustaining educational improvement (Zheng et al, (2025); Cieminski (2018)). Locally, REINA school heads face unique mobility demands due to geographic dispersion, disaster vulnerability, transportation challenges, and the need to oversee multiple school-related functions. Their experiences provide important insights into leadership continuity, adaptability, and school governance within rural educational contexts.

1.4 Transformational Leadership Theory as Basis for Understanding School Heads Mobility

The study is anchored on the Transformational Leadership Theory. The theory emphasizes leaders' ability to inspire, motivate, and influence positive change within organizations. It provides a framework for understanding how school heads adapt to new school environments, establish relationships, promote collaboration, and sustain improvement despite mobility-related challenges. Transformational leadership highlights trust-building, communication, motivation, shared vision, and professional growth as critical leadership functions. Through mobility experiences, school heads develop adaptability, resilience, and leadership flexibility while fostering positive school cultures and supporting continuous improvement. The theory therefore provides an appropriate lens for examining how school heads manage transitions and sustain educational effectiveness across different school assignments.

1.5 Research Gaps on the Lived Experiences of Mobile School Heads and Leadership Succession

Although extensive literature has examined principal turnover, leadership succession, leadership retention, and school performance, limited qualitative research focuses on the lived experiences of Filipino school heads undergoing DepEd mobility, particularly in rural REINA settings. Existing studies largely emphasize organizational outcomes, administrative effectiveness, and succession structures, while less attention has been given to how school heads personally experience mobility and leadership transitions. Walker and Crow (2006) argued that beginning principals undergo complex socialization processes when entering new school environments, highlighting the importance of examining leadership transitions from the leaders' perspective. There is also limited understanding of how mobility influences leadership practices, stakeholder relationships, teaching and learning processes, emotional experiences, and perceptions of succession programs. This study addresses these gaps by exploring the lived experiences of school heads who have experienced multiple mobility assignments and examining the implications of mobility for leadership continuity and educational improvement.

1.6 Alignment of School Heads Mobility and Leadership Succession with Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This study aligns primarily with:

SDG 4 – Quality Education, by examining leadership practices that contribute to effective school management, instructional improvement, and educational continuity.

SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth, through its focus on leadership development, professional mobility, workforce effectiveness, and organizational sustainability within the education sector.

SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, by contributing knowledge on leadership succession, institutional continuity, governance, accountability, and effective educational administration.

1.7 Contribution of School Heads Mobility and Leadership Succession to Multidisciplinary Sustainability

The study contributes to educational sustainability by generating insights into leadership continuity, succession planning, and school improvement processes. It supports institutional sustainability through a deeper understanding of leadership transitions and organizational resilience in educational settings. The study also contributes to community sustainability by examining how school heads build relationships with teachers, parents, local government units, and other stakeholders during periods of leadership transition. Furthermore, it promotes policy and governance sustainability by providing evidence that may guide DepEd and educational leaders in strengthening leadership mobility policies, succession programs, and support systems for school heads serving in geographically challenged communities.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative transcendental phenomenological design to examine the lived experiences of school heads regarding mobility. Phenomenology seeks to understand experiences as lived and perceived by participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019) and aims to uncover the essence and common meanings of human experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Qualitative inquiry allows researchers to explore complex human experiences within natural contexts and generate rich descriptions of meaning and interpretation (Hatch, 2002; Guetterman, 2015). Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, and Morales (2007) explained that qualitative research designs are particularly useful for understanding human experiences and contextual realities through rich descriptions and participant perspectives. It focuses on conscious and direct lived experiences without imposing external interpretations. The study was grounded in phenomenological traditions developed by Edmund Husserl and later scholars such as Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Moran, D. (2013). Phenomenological research describes the common meaning of participants lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016) and explores how individuals interpret and transform experiences into shared meaning. Guided by Moustakas (1994), the study focused on describing both what participants experienced and how they experienced mobility. The transcendental phenomenological approach was selected because it aligned with the purpose of understanding the mobility experiences of school heads in Real, Infanta, and General Nakar and their implications for leadership practice.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in the REINA District of Quezon Province, which comprises the municipalities of Real, Infanta, and General Nakar. Located along the northeastern Pacific seaboard and adjacent to the Sierra Madre Mountain Range, the area is characterized by coastal and upland communities, geographic isolation, and unique educational leadership challenges. The study focused on elementary and secondary schools within these districts where school heads frequently experience mobility due to administrative assignments and leadership requirements.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents were school heads from the REINA District who had experienced multiple mobility assignments. Participants were selected based on their direct experience with school mobility and their ability to provide rich descriptions of leadership transitions. Only those who had experienced three to five mobility assignments and had served as school heads for five to ten years were included in the study.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research to select participants with experiences relevant to the phenomenon being investigated. Teddlie and Yu (2007) identified purposive sampling as an appropriate strategy for selecting information-rich participants who possess direct knowledge and experience relevant to the phenomenon being studied. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research because it enables the selection of information-rich participants who possess direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation (Guetterman, 2015; Emmel, 2013). Purposive sampling allows researchers to obtain rich and meaningful data from individuals who possess specific knowledge or experiences related to the study (Campbell et al., 2020). Among the prospective school heads in the REINA District, six participants met the established inclusion criteria. These participants were chosen because they had extensive experience with school mobility and leadership transitions, enabling them to provide detailed insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

2.5 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a researcher-made semi-structured interview guide designed to gather comprehensive information about the experiences, challenges, opportunities, leadership practices, coping strategies, and emotional responses of school heads during mobility transitions. The interview questions were developed to encourage participants to describe their experiences in depth and provide detailed narratives relevant to the research objectives. The instrument underwent internal and external validation to ensure content validity, appropriateness, and clarity. Expert feedback was incorporated to improve the quality of the instrument. Prior to actual data collection, a pilot test was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the interview protocol, refine the wording of questions, and improve the overall data collection process.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, approval was secured from the Schools Division Superintendent of Quezon. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, research procedures, and participation requirements. Individual interviews were conducted using the validated interview guide. Each interview began with rapport-building questions followed by discussions focused on participants' mobility experiences, leadership transitions, coping strategies, and perceptions regarding the effects of mobility on leadership and school operations. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim. Participants were given the opportunity to review and validate their transcripts to ensure accuracy and to remove any information they did not wish to include. Filipino responses were translated into English when necessary for reporting purposes. Confidentiality was maintained through the use of coded participant identifiers rather than actual names.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The study utilized Colaizzi's phenomenological method of data analysis. This approach allows researchers to extract significant statements, formulate meanings, and develop thematic representations of participants' experiences. Colaizzi's method remains one of the most widely used approaches in descriptive phenomenological research because of its systematic process for extracting themes and meanings from participants' narratives (Gumarang et al., 2021; Morrow, Rodriguez, & King, 2015). The analysis involved repeatedly reading interview transcripts, identifying significant statements related to the phenomenon, deriving meanings from these statements, and organizing them into thematic clusters. The themes were integrated into a comprehensive description of the lived experiences of school heads regarding mobility. The fundamental structure of the phenomenon was then developed and validated through participant confirmation to ensure that the findings accurately reflected their experiences.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the study. The researcher respected the rights, privacy, and welfare of all participants and secured informed consent before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. Participants were informed of the study's objectives and procedures and were given the opportunity to verify their responses and withdraw information they did not wish to disclose. In qualitative research, maintaining rigor and trustworthiness is essential to ensuring the credibility and quality of findings (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Ethical standards were upheld to ensure the integrity, credibility, and trustworthiness of the research.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 School Heads' Lived Experiences on Mobility and Succession Programs

3.1.1 Adjustment Challenges

The participants reported experiencing adjustment difficulties when transferred from smaller schools to larger institutions. They encountered challenges related to increased responsibilities, unfamiliar school environments, new stakeholders, and different organizational cultures. School heads emphasized the need to adapt to teachers, parents, learners, and community expectations while managing larger school populations. These findings indicate that mobility involves more than a change in assignment; it requires significant personal and professional adaptation. The experiences support the observations of Ed Bengtson, Sally J. Zepeda and Oksana Parylo (2013), who emphasized that transitions involve unfamiliar organizational contexts and stakeholder expectations. Rupole and Ching (2025) also highlighted the challenges associated with competing demands and limited resources during leadership transitions. Staff unpreparedness for change further contributes to adjustment difficulties (Engida et al., 2022; Suhertian & Satrya, 2022).

3.1.2 Support Systems in School Management

Participants emphasized the importance of support from teachers, parents, Parent-Teacher Associations, local government units, and community stakeholders. School-family-community partnerships have consistently been associated with improved organizational effectiveness and stronger stakeholder engagement (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Youngs & King, 2002). They reported that collaboration and stakeholder participation facilitated smoother transitions and strengthened the implementation of school programs and activities. The findings suggest that effective support systems help school heads adapt to new environments and sustain school improvement efforts. According to Haim Shaked, Chen Schechter 2020, mobility experiences enable school leaders to integrate leadership, curriculum, and community participation into a unified management system. A positive school culture also promotes collaboration, motivation, and organizational effectiveness (Ismail, M., KhatiBi, A., & Azam, S. F., 2022).

3.2 Effects of Mobility on Leadership Continuity and School Performance

3.2.1 Leadership as Adaptability

Participants described leadership as adaptive and context-dependent. Research has shown that effective principals adjust leadership practices according to contextual demands while maintaining focus on instructional improvement and organizational goals (Jay, 2014; Guiab & Gallestre, 2015). Mobility allowed them to modify leadership styles, communication approaches, and decision-making strategies according to school size, available resources, and stakeholder needs. They believed that effective leaders should be capable of performing successfully regardless of the environment. These findings demonstrate that mobility develops leadership flexibility and situational awareness. Fancera (2016) similarly emphasized that effective principal leadership contributes to the development of collective teacher efficacy and sustained school improvement. Similar observations were reported by Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2011), who emphasized that leadership effectiveness depends on the capacity to adapt practices to diverse school environments. Likewise, Louis (2015) highlighted that leadership influences learning indirectly through its impact on school culture, teacher collaboration, and instructional practices. School heads become more responsive to varying school conditions and stakeholder expectations. These observations support Ed Bengtson, Sally J. Zepeda, and Oksana Parylo (2013), who emphasized the importance of resilience, adaptability, and interpersonal competence in maintaining school effectiveness during leadership transitions.

3.2.2 Challenges of Leadership Mobility

Participants acknowledged that mobility can create difficulties during leadership transitions. Limited time for adjustment, unfamiliar school systems, and unexpected circumstances affected the implementation and evaluation of programs. These challenges sometimes disrupted continuity and required additional effort from school leaders. The findings indicate that although mobility promotes growth, it may temporarily affect leadership effectiveness during adjustment periods. Successful transitions therefore require resilience, flexibility, and the capacity to respond to emerging challenges while maintaining school operations.

3.2.3 Strategic Alignment and Collaboration

Participants highlighted the importance of democratic leadership, collaboration, and adherence to professional standards. Lavigne et al. (2016) reported that principals balance instructional leadership, management responsibilities, and professional development activities, requiring strategic alignment across multiple school functions. They emphasized shared decision-making, stakeholder participation, and alignment with educational goals and policies. These findings suggest that leadership continuity is strengthened when school heads practice collaborative leadership and engage stakeholders in planning and implementation. David Eedel (2024) explained that adaptability develops through exposure to changing environments and challenges. Likewise, Liu & Werblow (2019) emphasized distributed leadership, collaborative decision-making, and open communication as foundations for trust, accountability, and shared vision.

3.3 Effects of Mobility on Relationships with Teachers, Staff, and the Community

3.3.1 Rebuilding Relationships and Organizational Renewal

Participants reported that mobility influenced relationships within schools and communities. They noted that new leadership often requires teachers and staff to adjust to different leadership styles, while changes in administration may reshape organizational dynamics and existing power structures. These findings suggest that mobility creates opportunities for organizational renewal while requiring school heads to rebuild trust and establish credibility. According to De Torres, E. S., Faltado, S., & Abrea, R. (2025), reassigned school heads often encounter challenges related to staff management, decision-making, and stakeholder trust during leadership transitions.

3.3.2 Leadership Development Through Experience

Participants shared that mobility expanded their professional networks and strengthened interpersonal relationships. Professional networks provide opportunities for knowledge sharing, leadership learning, and organizational improvement during periods of transition (Honig & Rainey, 2014; Levin et al., 2020). Continuous exposure to different school communities enabled them to gain new perspectives and improve their leadership competencies. The findings indicate that mobility contributes to leadership development by exposing school heads to diverse experiences and stakeholder groups. These experiences broaden leadership understanding and improve the capacity to manage varying school environments effectively. Similar findings were reported by Almagro, Bacang, and Calumpang (2025), who found that reflective experiences in school governance contribute to leadership growth and professional competence among school heads.

3.3.3 Trust-Building Through Fairness and Accountability

Participants emphasized fairness, transparency, accountability, and professionalism in maintaining positive relationships. They highlighted equitable task distribution, responsible financial management, and professional boundaries as important leadership practices. These findings demonstrate that trust is strengthened when school heads practice fairness and accountability. Transparent leadership promotes confidence among teachers, parents, and community members while fostering stronger school-community partnerships.

3.3.4 Organized and Inclusive Leadership Practices

Participants reported that organized leadership, shared responsibilities, and stakeholder involvement improved collaboration and school operations. Inclusive decision-making helped establish stronger working relationships and encouraged collective ownership of school programs. The findings support the importance of participatory leadership in creating collaborative and productive school environments. Shared leadership practices contribute to stakeholder engagement and strengthen community support for educational initiatives.

3.4 School Heads' Coping Strategies During Mobility Transitions

3.4.1 Developing Trust and Promoting Collaboration

Participants described observing existing systems, listening to teachers and staff, seeking assistance, and building relationships before implementing major changes. They emphasized understanding school culture and stakeholder concerns during the initial stages of transition. The findings indicate that trust-building and collaboration are essential coping mechanisms during mobility. This approach aligns with Bahadorestani et al. (2020), who emphasized stakeholder involvement in planning and implementation. Eckert & Morgan (2023) likewise highlighted collaborative leadership as a key factor in successful school improvement and organizational change.

3.4.2 Personal and Professional Growth

Participants reported learning from experience, respecting existing systems, and gradually adapting their leadership approaches to fit organizational needs. Reflective practice and experiential learning have been identified as essential strategies for strengthening leadership competence and decision-making in changing organizational contexts (Tu, 2020; Gao, 2021). Rather than introducing immediate changes, they preferred a cautious and strategic transition process. These findings show that mobility promotes both personal and professional development. Exposure to different school environments enhances adaptability, leadership competence, and professional learning. Li, Law, Huang, and Ding (2025)

highlighted that leadership development is strengthened when school leaders successfully balance organizational traditions, educational reforms, and continuous professional growth. Transparent communication during leadership transitions reduces uncertainty and supports organizational alignment.

3.5 Emotions Experienced During Leadership Transition

3.5.1 Emotional Readiness in Mobility

Participants experienced a range of emotions during mobility, including happiness, fulfillment, excitement, uncertainty, reluctance, and anxiety. Leadership transitions frequently involve uncertainty, stress, and emotional adjustment, requiring leaders to develop resilience and coping mechanisms (Jerico, 2009; Rousseau, 2011). Emotional responses varied according to prior experiences, school conditions, and the complexity of new assignments. The findings suggest that emotional readiness is essential for successful leadership transitions. Gato and Escote (2025) likewise emphasized the importance of psychological preparedness and adaptive behavior in managing leadership-related challenges and transitions. School heads who effectively regulate emotions and adapt to change are better able to maintain resilience and productive relationships. Fitzgerald et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of social-emotional competence in developing resilient learning communities and supporting leadership effectiveness.

3.5.2 Overcoming Initial Fear

Participants initially expressed fear, hesitation, and uncertainty regarding new assignments, particularly when assigned to larger or more complex schools. However, repeated mobility experiences increased their confidence and ability to manage transitions effectively. These findings indicate that experience gradually reduces anxiety and strengthens adaptive leadership practices. Emotional intelligence enables school heads to manage uncertainty, build relationships, and respond appropriately to new educational contexts. As mobility experiences accumulate, school leaders become more confident, resilient, and capable of navigating complex school environments.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that school heads' mobility is a complex leadership experience characterized by adjustment challenges, stakeholder engagement, leadership adaptability, relationship building, coping strategies, and emotional transitions. School heads experienced difficulties in adapting to new school environments, cultures, responsibilities, and stakeholder expectations; however, these experiences strengthened their resilience, flexibility, and leadership competence. Mobility influenced leadership continuity, school performance, and relationships with teachers, staff, parents, and the community, while support systems, collaboration, trust-building, and emotional readiness facilitated successful transitions. Overall, mobility served not only as an administrative process but also as an opportunity for professional growth, leadership development, and sustained commitment to educational improvement.

The Department of Education, district supervisors, and educational leaders may strengthen support mechanisms for school heads undergoing mobility by enhancing transition assistance, leadership development programs, mentoring initiatives, stakeholder collaboration, and succession planning processes. School heads may continue to practice collaborative, adaptive, and inclusive leadership approaches while fostering strong relationships with teachers, parents, local government units, and community stakeholders to ensure leadership continuity and effective school management during transitions. The findings may also serve as a reference for future researchers interested in examining school leadership mobility, succession programs, and leadership development in similar educational contexts.

The study was limited to six school heads from the REINA District who had experienced three to five mobility assignments and five to ten years of service as school heads. The findings were based on participants' lived experiences and perceptions gathered through phenomenological interviews and do not measure actual student achievement, organizational outcomes, or school performance indicators. Because the study was conducted within the rural context of Real, Infanta, and General Nakar, the findings are context-specific and may not be generalizable to other divisions, regions, or urban educational settings.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles for research involving human participants. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process to protect participants' rights, privacy, confidentiality, and welfare. Participation was voluntary, and participants were adequately informed about the purpose and procedures of the study. Measures were implemented to ensure the integrity, credibility, and trustworthiness of the research.

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