Professional Standards and NQESH Performance of School Heads in Region XII Basis for Review Package Development

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Abstract

The professional standards and performance of school heads play a crucial role in ensuring effective school leadership, yet gaps in these areas persist, particularly among Category C school heads in Region XII, Philippines. This study investigates their professional standards and performance using a comparative with descriptive correlation research design, assessing proficiency across five leadership domains: strategic leadership, operations management, instructional leadership, professional development, and stakeholder engagement. The study involved 156 Category C NQESH takers from the eight school divisions in Region XII, utilizing a modified survey instrument based on DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2020, for data collection. Findings indicate that school heads generally demonstrate professional standards at an "Experienced" level, though gaps exist, particularly in Developing Self and Others. Performance assessments reveal a need for targeted training, with stakeholder engagement being relatively strong but resource management and instructional leadership requiring improvement. Statistical analysis confirms significant relationships between certain leadership competencies and performance outcomes. Furthermore, variations in professional standards across divisions highlight the influence of local policies and resource allocation, while performance levels remain relatively uniform. The study also evaluates the general acceptance of a review package designed for aspirants, which received high approval but suggests improvements in cognitive structuring. Based on these findings, recommendations include targeted leadership development, context-specific training, mentorship initiatives, and enhanced performance evaluation mechanisms. Further research is suggested to assess the long-term impact of leadership interventions and external factors affecting school leadership effectiveness.

Keywords: Performance Standard, NQESH Performance, School Heads, Region XII

INTRODUCTION

Amidst the dynamic paradigm of education, the significant role of school heads grew to be of paramount relevance in nurturing academic exposure and overall growth. Effective school leaders played a key role in shaping the quality of education, student outcomes, and overall performance. The Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) served as a rigorously framed set of standards detailing the competencies and performance expectations that school leaders must possess to ensure their capability in skillfully leading and managing schools (DepEd Order 24, s. 2020).

The region exemplified a range of socio-economic and cultural contexts that provided both challenges and opportunities for school leadership in Region XII. Assessing the institutional capacity and effectiveness of school heads in this region was necessary for proper benchmarking. This study comprehensively investigated the competencies of school heads in Region XII. It aimed to create a foundation for more focused leadership capability development programs that would help educators develop the skills needed to lead and improve learning outcomes (Villanueva et al., 2021).

This study was anchored on Republic Act No. 9155, otherwise known as the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, which underscored that school leadership played a pivotal role in providing basic education services effectively (Senate and House of Representatives, Philippine Congress). This act prescribed specific standards for principals and emphasized ongoing professional development to ensure the provision of quality education. The PPSSH was complemented by Department of Education (DepEd) Order No. 24, series of 2020, which formalized its nationwide adoption and provided an organized guide for assessing school head performance while promoting development through a mentoring process.

Despite the crucial role of school leadership, research gaps existed in understanding how the PPSSH affected the performance and outcomes of school heads on a broader scale. The National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) results, as released under DM 100, s. 2022, indicated that a total of 2,203 or 36.93% of examinees fell under Category A, making them eligible for the next stage for Principal I positions, including interviews and paper screening. However, in Region XII, only 136 or 2.28% belonged to Category A. Meanwhile, 2,096 or 35.10% were classified under Category B, with 162 or 2.72% eligible to retake the NQESH in 2024 after undergoing coaching and mentoring sessions with an experienced or outstanding principal. These candidates were prioritized for designation as Officer-in-Charge/Teacher-in-Charge in cases where eligible Principal I applicants were insufficient. Due to the extensive provision of coaching and mentoring, they all qualified to apply for the Principal I position.

A critical gap that needed to be addressed was the 1,667 or 28% of Category C schools and 156 or 2.61% of school heads in Region XII who were required to undergo an intensive School Heads Development Program (SHDP) through NEAP or authorized external service providers before being allowed to retake the NQESH in 2024 (DM 100, s. 2022). The limited focus on how qualification results could support the development of review package materials posed a challenge. Closing this gap was essential for enabling actionable strategies to develop school leaders, informed by insights from these evaluations.

To address this, the current study sought to interpret evidence from evaluations to design a focused review package specifically targeting the capabilities and challenges faced by Category C school heads. This combined effort aimed to strengthen school leadership, ultimately resulting in improved student performance across Region XII.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to describe and compare the professional standards and school heads' performance using Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads in Region XII. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:

1.1 age;

1.3 length of service; and

1.3 highest educational attainment?

2. What is the level of category C school heads' professional standards in Region XII in terms of the following domains:

2.1 Leading strategically;

2.2 Managing School Operations and Resources;

2.3 Focusing on Teaching and Learning;

2.4 Developing Self and Others; and

2.5 Building Connections?

3. What is the latest result of category C school heads' performance in Region XII in terms of the following domains:

3.1 Leading strategically;

3.2 Managing School Operations and Resources;

3.3 Focusing on Teaching and Learning;

3.4 Developing Self and Others; and

3.5 Building Connections?

4. Is the demographic profile significantly affect the performance and professional standards of school heads?

5. What is the level of general acceptance of the review package of category C aspirants?

Significance of the Study

The study aimed to investigate the professional standards and performance of category C school heads in Region XII, Philippines using Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads. This would allow for an exploration of how these leaders work in relation to leading strategically, managing school operations and resources, focusing on teaching and learning; developing self and others; as well building connections (CRENAT 2015), then a subsequent mapping exercise that aimed to illuminate areas of strength or growth within the region's leadership landscape. The results of this research will not only contribute to our understanding of how school leadership was currently taking place, but it also can offer a platform for the development of on-site principals professional training based on what they believe serves as an effective leader in their schools. The program would have catered to the particular requirements of school heads so as to help enhance basic education in Region XII. This study is beneficial to the students, teachers, staff, school administrators, parent's other stakeholders of the school, and department of education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section comprehensively examines the literature, studies, theories, and findings related to this study. It also establishes a foundation by exploring previous works that contribute to understanding key concepts, trends, and gaps in this field.

Legal Bases

DepEd Order No. 24, Series of 2020, titled "National Adoption and Implementation of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH)," was issued to guide school leaders at all levels in navigating their professional development throughout their careers as educators. This initiative focuses on supporting their growth, identifying areas for improvement, and ensuring proper performance evaluation.

PPSSH was collaboratively developed by the Bureau of Human Resource and Organizational Development (BHROD), the National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP), and the

Philippine National Research Centre for Teacher Quality (RCTQ, 2012). The new set of standards was designed to address both the current and future needs of school leaders, grounded in a vision of effective leadership aligned with the K-12 education system and global benchmarks.

As a progressive step for professional practice, PPSSH continues to evolve alongside educational reforms. Moreover, it encourages private school principals to adopt these standards, ultimately enhancing their leadership and school management. By doing so, it aims to improve teaching quality and student learning outcomes.

Demographic Profile of the School Heads

The socio-demographic characteristics of school heads educational attainment, length of service, and age are critical to their effectiveness in leadership and test performance on instruments such as the NQESH.

Age determines leadership style and decision-making significantly. According to Cruz and Villena (2019), older school heads tend to have improved interpersonal skills because of their long experience. Santiago (2021), on the other hand, believed that younger leaders can easily adjust to technological advancements, citing that age is associated with both strengths and weaknesses in educational leadership.

In addition, length of service has been found to relate to leadership skills. Manlapig (2018) stated that veteran school heads are more accustomed to school operations, in which the Department of Education (2020) also reiterates experience as a major element of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads. Lastly, Pimentel (2021) added that veteran school heads have a higher probability of passing the NQESH, as praxis experience increases their utilization of theoretical learnings.

Finally, highest educational attainment was important for readiness in leadership. Salandanan (2016) declared that higher educational qualifications have positive relations with enhanced analytical and administrative abilities. Llego (2019) also confirmed this by adding that advanced degree holders tend to perform better in leadership positions and competency exams. Therefore, the comprehension of these related variables is important for creating effective support for emerging school leaders in Region XII.

Professional Standards

The Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads highlight the vital role played by school leaders in developing successful educational environments across a range of dimensions. Leading strategically, school heads have to anticipate changes and empower others to be able to change as noted by Carvalho et al. (2021). Strategic leading is important to bring long-term sustainability and efficient governance (Davies, 2003). Moving on to school operations and resource management, effective leadership entails not just instructional management but also resource administration, such that financial and human resources are aligned with educational objectives (Villanueva et al., 2021).

Additionally, in the case of teaching and learning, there is a need for school heads to build collaborative cultures that foster stakeholder involvement, which has a direct impact on student performance (Nacionales, 2024). Also, self and other development is imperative; ongoing professional growth for both staff and school leaders improved school performance overall (Buban & Digo, 2021. Building Connections creates a positive community, and this is what is needed to develop a good school climate (Winzer, 2023). Together, these areas described an integrated framework for successful educational leadership.

School Heads Performance

The Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads highlight the important role of school leaders in improving educational quality in various areas. Leading strategically, effective school heads needed to adjust to changing contexts and develop a culture of ongoing improvement (DepEd Order 24, s. 2020; Carvalho et al., 2021). This strategic leadership is necessary to attain educational objectives and sustain growth. Moving on to the management of school operations and resources, school heads are responsible for monitoring not only academic achievement but also efficient use of resources, which is critical towards creating an effective learning environment (Isa et al., 2020; Buban & Digo, 2021).

In addition, instructional supervision and technical assistance to enhance the quality of teaching and learning as well as student performance are some of the duties school heads should perform (Peariso, 2017; Villanueva et al., 2021). Furthermore, in developing oneself and others, school heads have the role of enhancing professional development among their employees, ultimately leading to school performance (Buban & Digo, 2021). Overall, these areas show the complete roles of school heads in facilitating educational enhancement as well as student success.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed a comparative and descriptive-correlational research design to examine the professional standards and performance of Category C school heads in Region XII, Philippines. A review package was formulated based on findings. A modified survey, grounded on DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2020, evaluated school heads during the NQESH, on PPSSH domains such as instructional leadership, human resource, and school management. The research had identified strengths and weaknesses in aspects of strategic leadership and teaching and learning, which informed the construction of the review package. The strategy offered explicit insights into competencies and how they affected school performance (Tubungbanua, 2019; Villanueva et al., 2021).

The respondents of the study were the 156 Category C school heads in Region XII, specifically from the Schools Division of South Cotabato, Schools Division of Tacurong City, Schools Division of Koronadal City, Schools Division of General Santos City, Schools Division of Sarangani Province, Schools Division of Kidapawan City, Schools Division of Sultan Kudarat, and Schools Division of Cotabato. To ensure a comprehensive representation of various division types, sizes, and geographical locations within the region, the study employed a complete enumeration technique.

This study employed modified survey questionnaires adapted from DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2020, also known as the National Adoption and Implementation of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH). The questionnaire for the initial quantitative phase was designed to assess the professional standards and performance of Category C school heads.

Specifically, these questionnaires measured school heads' competencies and performance to ensure they could effectively fulfill their roles in schools, particularly in improving teacher quality and, consequently, learner achievement. The instrument covered five (5) domains, namely: leading strategically, managing school operations and resources, focusing on teaching and learning, developing self and others, and building connections. Furthermore, each domain consisted of a total of thirty-four (34) strands, which corresponded to the number of questions aimed at evaluating the competencies and performance of Category C school heads in Region XII. By structuring the questionnaire this way, the

study ensured a comprehensive assessment of school leadership effectiveness based on the PPSSH framework.

The researcher utilized mean scores and standard deviation to assess the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, length of service and highest educational attainment, and the level of category C school heads' professional standards and NQESH performance of school heads in Region XII in the five domains such as leading strategically, leading strategically, managing school operations and resources, focusing on teaching and learning, developing self and others, and building connections. To assess the significant relationship of two variables Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used, and to determine the significant difference of the variables ANOVA was utilized.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This contains the results and discussions of the data gathered in this study.

This study aimed to assess the professional standards and performance of school heads in Region XII, Philippines, using the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) as the guiding framework. Specifically, it sought to examine the relationships and differences between Category C school heads' professional standards and performance across various domains and divisions within Region XII. The various results are presented on the succeeding tables.

Table 2 shows demographic profile of school heads by age, the results indicate an age distribution that is representative of maturity and professional experience typically found in school leadership. The evidence points towards age and years of experience in the education field playing a major role in the appointment and presence of individuals as school heads, with a discernible pattern of favoring older and more experienced professionals.

The highest percentage of school heads, at 44.9%, fall in the 51-and-above age bracket. This significant majority suggests that school administration is predominantly left in the hands of those who have served for many years, gaining the skills and abilities to deal with intricate educational settings. As Day and Sammons (2016) pointed out, effectiveness in leadership is usually the result of acquired professional experience, which allows school heads to lead with foresight, stability, and insight. This observation points to the education system's preference for experienced teachers who have shown steady performance and commitment over the years.

Table 2. Demographic Profile of School Heads in terms of Age

Age	f	%
25-30	1	0.60
31-40	21	13.50
41-50	64	41
51-above	70	44.90
Total	**156**	**100**

Coming immediately after this category are those between the ages of 41 and 50, who make up 41% of the school heads. This age group is generally representative of mid-to-late career professionals moving

into more strategic and higher-responsibility positions. Fullan (2014) highlighted that professional at this stage marry experience with vitality, and thus are in a good position to enact reforms and maintain innovative practices within their institutions. Additionally, they tend to be receptive to ongoing learning and adaptation, a trait that is absolutely essential in leading schools in the rapidly evolving educational environment today.

On the other hand, just 13.5% of school heads are in the 31–40 age range, indicating a sharp decline in leadership representation by younger professionals. This could be due to systemic barriers or the conservative practice of assigning leadership posts to those with fewer years of experience. This is supported by Bush (2008), such roles usually involved extensive field exposure and a critical appreciation of school operations factors that can be acquired over many years of service. Whereas younger leaders can contribute innovation and technical savvy, their comparatively lesser experience can be seen as a drawback in more conventional leadership frameworks.

Similarly, only 0.6% of school principals fall within the 25–30 age group, highlighting the exceptional nature of early-career teachers holding such high-responsibility positions. Robinson (2011) posited that good school leadership does not necessarily rest on academic qualifications but also on people skills and context sensitivity, which tend to take time to develop. This implies that school leadership is not often viewed as a starting point but as the end of a career path with increase, introspection, and compounded experience.

The findings implied that age profile of school leaders shows a strong bias towards experienced educators as heads. Although novice professionals bring greater potential for innovation, the prevailing profile shows a leadership environment in which tenure and tried capability are strongly emphasized. As Hallinger and Heck (2010) noted, school leadership is a key lever for school change, and hence stakeholders may prefer to appoint persons of established professional expertise and good record of educational service.

Table 3. Demographic Profile of School Heads in terms of Length of Service

Length of Service (years)	f	%
6 - 15	39	25.00
16 – 25	62	39.70
26 – 35	54	34.60
36-above	1	0.60
Total	**156**	**100**

Table 3 shows the demographic profile of school heads by their years of service. As indicated, most school heads (62 or 39.70%) have provided service for 16 to 25 years. This indicates that majority of the school leaders have gained a lot of experience, which is essential for successful school leadership (Fullan, 2014). Experienced school heads tend to gain a better understanding of the school system, instructional leadership, and stakeholder engagement.

Moreover, 54 respondents, representing 34.60%, indicated that they had served for 26 to 35 years. This also suggests that most school leaders have long-term exposure to the changing education environment,

enabling them to adjust and react effectively to educational reforms (Leithwood et al., 2008). In contrast, 39 participants (25.00%) have served between 6 and 15 years, which shows a relatively smaller number of mid-career school heads who are perhaps still in the stage of professional development and identity construction as school leaders (Day & Sammons, 2016).

Conversely, a mere 1 school head (0.60%) has remained in office for more than 36 years, indicating that very few school administrators remain in office for more than three decades. This can be explained by reasons like retirement, career change, or administrative reorganization within the education system (Pont et al., 2008).

In addition, the aggregated data show that a considerable majority (74.30%) of school heads have been serving for over 15 years, which supports the idea that school leadership posts are largely held by people with entrenched educational backgrounds. This trend indicated the need for long-term professional development and mentorship programs for potential school leaders to provide continuity in leadership and succession planning (Bush, 2008).

The finding implied the evidence reports a strong concentration of experienced leadership in schools with the majority of school leaders possessing over a decade and half of experience. In turn, such depth in experience can likely improve school performance, instructional leadership, and policy compliance.

Table 4. Demographic Profile of School Heads in terms of Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment	f	%
Master Unit	91	58.30
Master Graduate	37	23.70
Doctorate Unit	27	17.30
Doctorate Graduate	1	0.60
Total	**156**	**100**

Table 4 shows the educational background of school heads according to their educational attainment. Interestingly, most of the respondents, or 58.30%, have acquired master's units but have not yet finished their degrees. This result corresponds to the constant quest for higher education among teachers, which is frequently motivated by professional growth and career development (Salandanan, 2016).

Meanwhile, 23.70% of the school principals are master's degree holders, indicating that a significant number have been able to achieve postgraduate qualifications. The data shows how much compliance with the Department of Education's (DepEd) thrust for quality leadership is evident, wherein earning a master's degree is also taken as the minimum qualification to become a school leader (Department of Education, 2020).

Additionally, 17.30% of the respondents have taken doctoral courses, and (0.60%) have achieved their doctoral degree. This is indicative of a humble yet hopeful trend toward further studies in academics by school heads. Though holders of a doctorate are still small in number, the figure shows increased acknowledgment of higher studies as a tool for boosting strategic leadership skills and instructional leadership, as underscored by the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) (DepEd, 2020).

Similarly, the data shows that although the majority of school heads are in the process of transitioning to full postgraduate qualifications, there is already a portion that has reached such milestones. This development highlights the dedication of school leaders to ongoing professional development, which is crucial in enhancing the quality of education. Evidently, as school heads progress up the academic career ladder, their ability to lead strategically and address the intricacies of the 21st-century learning environment is also increased (Llego, 2019).

Table 5 shows the professional standards of Category C school heads in Region XII regarding strategic leadership. The highest mean score, (M=3.15; SD = 0.35), corresponds to the practice of leading with the school's vision, mission, and core values in mind. This emphasizes the school heads' strong commitment to aligning their leadership with the foundational principles of their institutions. Such alignment is crucial for fostering a cohesive school culture and guiding decision-making processes. This finding aligned with the study by McBrayer et al. (2020), which emphasized that principals who effectively supervise and evaluate instruction, and monitor student progress, thereby aligning their actions with the school's mission and vision, exhibit higher leadership self-efficacy.

Table 5. Level of Category C School Heads' Professional Standards in Region XII in terms of Leading Strategically

	Statements	Mean	SD	Description
1	I always lead with the vision, mission, and core values of my school in mind	3.15	0.35	Experienced
2	I develop and execute strategies that are consistent with achieving the schools' goals.	3.05	0.25	Experienced
3	I effectively implement and monitor policies in school.	3.08	0.32	Experienced
4	I research and work on new ideas to increase school performance.	3.09	0.31	Experienced
5	I plan and implement developmentally appropriate and challenging learning experiences for students.	2.94	0.38	Experienced
6	I promote and protect learner voice in the development and implementation of school policies and practices.	3.09	0.31	Experienced
7	I use monitoring and evaluation tools to measure progress at school level.	3.08	0.30	Experienced
	Section Mean	**3.07**	**0.32**	**Experienced**

Note: 1.00-1.74 Beginning, 1:75-2:49 Developing, 2.50-3.24 Experienced, 3.25-4.00 Expert

On the other hand, the lowest mean score, (M=2.94; SD = 0.38), pertains to planning and implementing developmentally appropriate and challenging learning experiences for students. While still within the "Experienced" category, this lower score implies a need for enhanced focus in this area. Effective instructional leadership is crucial in promoting teacher professional development, which in turn enhances the quality of learning experiences provided to students. This is supported by the study of Latris and Orongan (2021), which found that instructional leadership practices significantly correlate with school administrators' performance, highlighting the importance of continuous professional development in curriculum and instruction.

The overall section mean (M=3.07, SD=0.32), categorized as "Experienced," reflects a solid foundation in strategic leadership among Category C school heads in Region XII. This finding suggests that while these school heads possess a commendable level of professional standards, there remains room for targeted professional development to further enhance their leadership capabilities.

This implication aligned with the study by Gümüş and Bellibaş (2020), which found a positive relationship between principals' professional development and their leadership practices, with self-efficacy playing a significant mediating role. The study suggested that engaging in professional development activities can strengthen principals' confidence in their abilities, thereby enhancing their leadership practices.

Similarly, Batool et al. (2024) examined the relationship between school leadership development programs and the skill development of secondary school heads. Their findings revealed a significant positive correlation, indicating that participation in leadership development programs substantially enhances the competencies of school heads.

Table 6. Level of Category C School Heads' Professional Standards in Region XII in terms of Managing School Operations and Resources

	Statements	Mean	SD	Description
1	I can keep the school records in order.	3.08	0.27	Experienced
2	I ensure financial management is handled appropriately to enable school priorities.	3.04	0.28	Experienced
3	I ensure the function, availability and maintenance of school property and equipment	3.06	0.29	Experienced
4	I efficiently supervise the school staff needed to maintain a productive school climate.	3.06	0.24	Experienced
5	I am an administrator who prepares the school for climate catastrophe and inculcates resilience in the staff and students.	3.02	0.21	Experienced
6	I adapt to new changes and possibilities, so the school community gains from it.	3.08	0.27	Experienced
	Section Mean	**3.06**	**0.26**	Experienced

Note: 1.00-1.74 Beginning, 1:75-2:49 Developing, 2.50-3.24 Experienced, 3.25-4.00 Expert

Table 6 shows the professional standards of Category C school heads in Region XII regarding managing school operations and resources. The highest mean scores, both at (M =3.08; SD = 0.27), are associated with two competencies: maintaining orderly school records and adapting to new changes and possibilities for the benefit of the school community. This suggests that school heads are proficient in organizing essential documentation and are responsive to innovations that enhance the educational environment. Such competencies are crucial, as effective record management ensures compliance and accountability, while adaptability fosters resilience and continuous improvement within the school community. These findings align with the study by Hernandez (2024), which highlighted that school administrators who effectively manage records and adapt to changes contribute significantly to the delivery of basic education services.

On the other hand, the lowest mean score, (M=3.02; SD = 0.21), pertains to preparing the school for climate catastrophes and inculcating resilience in staff and students. While still within the "Experienced"

category, this lower score suggests a need for enhanced focus in disaster preparedness and resilience-building. The increasing frequency of climate-related events necessitates that school leaders develop comprehensive strategies to protect their communities. This finding resonated with the study by Valenzuela and Buenvinida (2021), which emphasized the importance of disaster preparedness in school management to ensure safety and continuity of education.

The overall section mean (M=3.06, SD=0.26) indicates that school heads in Region XII are generally experienced in managing school operations and resources. Their ability to oversee financial management, school facilities, and personnel supervision reflects strong administrative capabilities. According to Leithwood et al. (2020), effective management of school resources and operations significantly impacts school success, as well-organized leadership ensures smooth day-to-day functions and long-term sustainability.

The findings implied that while school heads demonstrate professional standards in school management, more emphasis should be placed on enhancing disaster preparedness and resilience-building efforts. Educational agencies should integrate climate resilience training and emergency response planning into professional development programs for school leaders. Strengthening these areas will further improve school sustainability and preparedness for unforeseen challenges.

Table 7. Level of Category C School Heads' Professional Standards in Region XII in terms of Focusing on Teaching and Learning

	Statements	Mean	SD	Description
1	I review learning standards and explore their meaning and use in my school.	3.02	0.24	Experienced
2	I encourage high teaching standards and innovative pedagogies in staff.	3.06	0.26	Experienced
3	I offer constructive suggestions on how they can improve.	3.06	0.23	Experienced
4	I use learner achievement and other indicators to monitor educational outcomes	3.05	0.22	Experienced
5	I positively assess learning to inform instruction.	3.08	0.27	Experienced
6	I foster an interactive learning environment.	3.09	0.29	Experienced
7	I agree with career exploration activities related to the selection of a path for their future.	3.02	0.29	Experienced
8	I use positive discipline practices that meet the needs of all students	3.08	0.29	Experienced
	Section Mean	**3.06**	**0.26**	**Experienced**

Note: 1.00-1.74 Beginning, 1:75-2:49 Developing, 2.50-3.24 Experienced, 3.25-4.00 Expert

Table 7 shows the professional standards of Category C school heads in Region XII regarding their focus on teaching and learning. The highest mean score, (M = 3.09; SD = 0.29), corresponds to fostering an interactive learning environment. This suggests that school heads are proficient in creating engaging and participatory educational settings, which are essential for effective teaching and learning. Such environments encourage student involvement and enhance learning outcomes. This finding aligns with the study by Hwang et al. (2021), who emphasized the effectiveness of interactive learning environments in promoting student engagement and academic performance.

On the other hand, the lowest mean scores, both at 3.02, pertain to reviewing learning standards and exploring their application within the school (SD = 0.24) and agreeing with career exploration activities related to students' future paths (SD = 0.29). While still within the "Experienced" category, these suggest areas where school heads might benefit from additional focus. Ensuring that learning standards are thoroughly understood and effectively implemented is crucial for maintaining educational quality. Similarly, actively supporting career exploration activities is vital for guiding students toward successful futures. According to Lee et al. (2024), aligning educational standards with teaching practices and leadership actions ensures cohesive educational progress. Additionally, implementing career exploration activities, such as job shadowing and workplace learning, has been found to provide students with real-world experiences that inform their future career choices.

The overall section mean (M=3.06, SD=0.26) suggests that school heads in Region XII are generally experienced in ensuring high-quality teaching and learning. Their ability to encourage effective teaching strategies, provide constructive feedback, and utilize assessment data reflects strong instructional leadership. According to Robinson (2011), school leaders who actively engaged in instructional leadership positively influence teaching effectiveness and student outcomes.

The findings implied that while school heads demonstrate professional standards in enhancing teaching and learning, more emphasis should be placed on deepening their understanding of learning standards and strengthening career guidance initiatives. Educational leadership programs should provide targeted training on curriculum development, instructional coaching, and career pathway planning to ensure holistic student development. Strengthening these areas will further improve school performance and long-term student success.

Table 8 shows the professional standards of Category C school heads in Region XII regarding developing self and others. The highest mean score, (M = 3.11; SD = 0.33), pertains to engaging in activities for personal and professional development. This suggests that school heads are proactive in pursuing growth opportunities, which is essential for effective leadership. Such engagement not only enhances their skills but also sets a positive example for their staff, fostering a culture of continuous improvement. This finding aligns with research of Diesel (2024) emphasized the importance of leadership development in educational settings, where leaders who invest in their own growth can better support their teams and improve overall school performance.

Table 8. Level of Category C School Heads' Professional Standards in Region XII in terms of Developing Self and Others

	Statements	Mean	SD	Description
1	I engage in activities for my personal and professional development.	3.11	0.33	Experienced
2	I regularly reflect on my practices to identify areas for improvement.	3.06	0.26	Experienced
3	I build and maintain professional networks that contribute to my growth.	3.03	0.25	Experienced
4	I manage performance effectively to enhance productivity.	3.05	0.22	Experienced
5	I engage in continuous professional development to support other school staff.	3.04	0.19	Experienced
6	I foster leadership development in individuals and teachers.	3.08	0.27	Experienced

7	I prioritize the general welfare and well-being of my staff.	3.08	0.27	Experienced
8	I implement rewards and recognition to motivate my teachers.	3.04	0.21	Experienced
	Section Mean	**3.06**	**0.25**	**Experienced**

Note: 1.00-1.74 Beginning, 1:75-2:49 Developing, 2.50-3.24 Experienced, 3.25-4.00 Expert

On the other hand, the lowest mean score, (M = 3.03; SD = 0.25), relates to building and maintaining professional networks that contribute to personal growth. While still within the "Experienced" category, this lower score suggests an area where school heads might benefit from additional focus. Developing strong professional networks can provide valuable support, resources, and insights, enhancing leadership effectiveness. According to Wang (2018), established local networks for school leaders helps them connect with others facing similar challenges, fostering a supportive community that contributes to personal and professional growth.

The overall section mean (M=3.06, SD=0.25) indicates that school heads in Region XII are generally experienced in developing themselves and others. This reflects a strong inclination toward self-improvement, staff motivation, and leadership development, which are crucial for fostering a high-performing school environment. According to Leithwood et al. (2020), school leadership effectiveness is strongly linked to continuous professional growth, reflective practices, and staff development.

The results implied that while school heads actively engage in self-improvement and leadership development, there is a need to strengthen professional networking opportunities. Educational agencies and school leadership programs should encourage collaboration among school leaders by providing platforms for mentorship, peer learning, and professional communities. Investing in leadership development not only benefits school heads but also enhances the overall performance of the school community.

Table 9. Level of Category C School Heads' Professional Standards in Region XII in terms of Building Connections

	Statements	Mean	SD	Description
1	I manage and maintain relationships in the wider school community.	3.09	0.28	Experienced
2	I coordinate school organizations and systems that promote collaboration.	3.08	0.26	Experienced
3	I ensure effective problem-solving strategies that include everyone with whom I am working within the school community.	3.04	0.22	Experienced
4	I communicate well with all stakeholders.	3.06	0.24	Experienced
5	I actively engage with the wider community to strengthen school support	3.04	0.24	Experienced
	Section Mean	**3.06**	**0.25**	**Experienced**

Note: 1.00-1.74 Beginning, 1:75-2:49 Developing, 2.50-3.24 Experienced, 3.25-4.00 Expert

Table 9 shows the professional standards of Category C school heads in Region XII regarding building connections. The highest mean score (M = 3.09; SD = 0.28), pertains to managing and maintaining relationships within the wider school community. This emphasizes that school heads are adept at

fostering strong connections beyond the immediate school environment, which is crucial for garnering community support and enhancing educational outcomes. According to Jack (2023), effective relationship-building by school leaders leads to increased trust and collaboration among stakeholders, positively impacting school performance.

On the other hand, the lowest mean scores, both at 3.04, relate to ensuring effective problem-solving strategies that include all school community members (SD = 0.22) and actively engaging with the wider community to strengthen school support (SD = 0.24). While still within the "Experienced" category, these areas may benefit from additional focus. Engaging the broader community and inclusive problem-solving are vital for creating a supportive educational environment. As highlighted by the Hernandez and Rivero (2024), schools that emphasized relationship-centered approaches experience improved student outcomes and community involvement.

The overall section mean (M=3.06, SD=0.25) suggests that school heads in Region XII are generally experienced in building connections. This competency is crucial as strong relationships between school leaders, teachers, parents, and the wider community contribute to improved student outcomes and overall school effectiveness. According to Bryk and Schneider (2002), relational trust among school stakeholders is a fundamental factor in fostering a positive and productive educational environment.

The results imply that while school heads demonstrate professional standards in building connections, there remains room for improvement, particularly in implementing inclusive problem-solving strategies. Training programs and leadership development initiatives can further enhance their ability to engage all stakeholders effectively. Strengthening community partnerships and fostering a culture of shared decision-making will contribute to a more cohesive and effective school leadership framework.

Table 10. Summary on the Level of Category C School Heads' Professional Standards in Region XII

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
Leading Strategically	3.07	0.32	Experienced
Managing School Operations and Resources	3.06	0.26	Experienced
Focusing on Teaching and Learning	3.06	0.26	Experienced
Developing Self and Others	3.06	0.25	Experienced
Building Connections	3.06	0.25	Experienced
Overall Mean	**3.06**	**0.27**	**Experienced**

Note: 1.00-1.74 Beginning, 1:75-2:49 Developing, 2.50-3.24 Experienced, 3.25-4.00 Expert

Table 10 shows a summary of the professional standards of Category C school heads in Region XII across five key leadership indicators. The highest mean score (M=3.07, SD=0.32) was recorded in Leading Strategically, suggesting that school heads excel in setting a clear vision, making informed decisions, and implementing long-term strategies for school improvement. This aligns with the findings of Davies and Davies (2013), who emphasized that strategic leadership is crucial in ensuring sustainable school development and responsiveness to educational challenges.

The other four indicators - Managing School Operations and Resources (M=3.06, SD=0.26), Focusing on Teaching and Learning (M=3.06, SD=0.26), Developing Self and Others (M=3.06, SD=0.25), and Building Connections (M=3.06, SD=0.25) - all have the same section mean. This consistency suggests that school heads demonstrate well-rounded leadership skills, balancing administrative tasks, instructional leadership, professional growth, and community engagement. According to Leithwood et

al. (2020), effective school leadership requires professional standards in multiple areas to ensure that schools operate efficiently while fostering high-quality teaching and strong community relationships.

The implications of these findings suggested that while school heads are experienced in all leadership domains, there is still room for further enhancement, particularly in refining strategic leadership practices and strengthening instructional leadership. Leadership development programs should continue to focus on equipping school heads with advanced skills in decision-making, resource management, and stakeholder collaboration to drive continuous school improvement.

Table 11. Latest Results of Category C School Heads' Performance in   Region XII

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
Leading Strategically	53.81	7.16	Needing Intervention
Managing School Operations and Resources	52.56	8.18	Needing Intervention
Focusing on Teaching and Learning	52.32	8.07	Needing Intervention
Developing Self and Others	50.93	9.27	Needing Intervention
Building Connections	54.23	8.45	Needing Intervention
Section Mean	**52.77**	**8.23**	**Needing Intervention**

Table 11 shows the latest assessment of Category C school heads' performance in Region XII which highlights a critical need for intervention across all leadership indicators. The overall section mean of 52.77 (SD = 8.23) suggests that school heads are struggling to meet the expected leadership competencies, which may impact school effectiveness and student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Among the five leadership domains, Building Connections recorded the highest mean score of 54.23 (SD = 8.45). This domain reflects the ability of school heads to establish relationships with teachers, parents, local government units, and other stakeholders. Muijs et al. (2020) emphasized that strong school-community partnerships contribute to student achievement and institutional success. However, despite being the highest-scoring domain, it still falls under the "Needing Intervention" category, suggesting that school heads require further training and support in fostering meaningful collaboration and engagement.

The second-highest score was in Leading Strategically, with a mean of 53.81 (SD = 7.16). This domain encompasses vision setting, decision-making, and aligning school goals with broader educational policies. Effective strategic leadership is crucial in driving school improvement and fostering innovation (Hallinger & Wang, 2020). The low performance in this area suggests that school heads may struggle with long-term planning and data-driven decision-making, which are essential for guiding schools toward sustainable development.

In Managing School Operations and Resources, school heads obtained a mean score of 52.56 (SD = 8.18), indicating challenges in handling finances, facilities, and human resources. Effective school management ensures that resources are allocated efficiently to support teaching and learning (Bush, 2021). Poor performance in this area may result in mismanagement of school funds, inadequate infrastructure, and operational inefficiencies, ultimately affecting the overall quality of education.

The domain Focusing on Teaching and Learning had a mean score of 52.32 (SD = 8.07), reflecting weaknesses in instructional leadership. School heads play a crucial role in shaping the teaching and learning environment by supervising instruction, implementing curriculum reforms, and supporting teachers (Leithwood et al., 2020). The results suggest that school leaders may need further professional development in instructional leadership to enhance teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

The lowest-performing domain was Developing Self and Others, with a mean of 50.93 (SD = 9.27). This domain focuses on professional growth, mentoring, and capacity-building efforts. Leadership development is essential for ensuring continuous school improvement and empowering teachers to excel in their roles (Oplatka, 2020). The findings suggest that school heads may lack opportunities for self-improvement, professional learning communities, and leadership coaching programs, which are crucial for sustaining school leadership effectiveness.

Overall, the results highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions to improve the competencies of Category C school heads in Region XII. Implementing leadership development programs, mentorship initiatives, and policy support can help strengthen their effectiveness in managing schools and driving student success (Bush, 2021). Addressing these leadership deficiencies is crucial in ensuring that school heads are well-equipped to lead their institutions toward educational excellence.

Table 12. Results of ANOVA Analysis on the effect of Age to the School Heads' Performance and professional standards.

Indicators		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Description
Performance	Between Groups	45.103	3	15.034	.874	.456	Not Significant
	Within Groups	2615.278	152	17.206			
	Total	2660.381	155				
Professional Standards	Between Groups	.075	3	.025	2.131	.099	Not Significant
	Within Groups	1.786	152	.012			
	Total	1.861	155				

Significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 12 shows the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) results in the above table offer insight into whether there are statistically significant differences in school heads' performance and their perceived professional standards across grouped categories, most probably due to socio-demographic factors (e.g., age, length of service, or educational level).

Beginning with Performance, the ANOVA outcome presents an F-value of 0.874 with a p-value (Sig.) of 0.456, which is higher than the usual alpha level of 0.05. The outcome implies that there is no statistically significant performance difference between groups. That is, the variation in performance ratings between the various categories of school heads is due to chance instead of a genuine group difference. This result corroborates earlier research by Carreon (2020), which concluded that demographic traits do influence leadership style but do not necessarily equate to differences in measurable performance.

Similarly, the F-test of professional standards shows an F-value of 2.131 and a p-value of 0.099, which is again greater than 0.05. This finding also indicates no significant differences in the perceived or

exhibited professional standards among the grouped respondents. Though closer to significance than the performance value, it does not yet achieve the statistical level for rejecting the null hypothesis. These results strengthen the assumption by Santiago (2021) that school heads across demographic profile usually work under the same professional standards framework as set by the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (DO 24., s.2020).

In addition, the comparative high within-group variances of the two indicators (2615.278 for performance and 1.786 for professional standards) indicate that individual variations across each demographic group are greater than variations across the groups themselves. This finding is in line with Manlapig's (2018) claim that the effectiveness of school leadership is typically more determined by the individual dispositions and leadership practices rather than background variables like age or tenure in isolation.

The findings confirmed no statistically significant difference in performance and professional standards of school heads between demographic in terms of age. Such findings imply that although demographic characteristics have the potential to affect leadership growth, they don't uniquely control assessment results or professional skills. Hence, review packages and leadership development programs need to focus more on individual competency development than simply demographic differentiation.

Table 13. Results of ANOVA Analysis on the effect of Length of Service to the School Heads' Performance and professional standards.

Indicators		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Description
Performance	Between Groups	40.010	3	13.337	.774	.510	Not Significant
	Within Groups	2620.372	152	17.239			
	Total	2660.381	155				
Professional Standards	Between Groups	.018	3	.006	.486	.692	Not Significant
	Within Groups	1.843	152	.012			
	Total	1.861	155				

Significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 13 shows the analysis of variance (ANOVA) test on whether school head length of service significantly affects performance and compliance with professional standards. As shown, both measures gave p-values larger than the significance level of 0.05, indicating there are no statistically significant differences among groups by tenure.

To begin with, the results for Performance show a between-group sum of squares of 40.010, an F-value of 0.774, and a p-value of 0.510. Since the p-value is considerably higher than the 0.05 threshold, it can be concluded that length of service does not have a significant impact on school heads' performance. This is consistent with the report of Pimentel (2021), where it was highlighted that even if experience can develop confidence in leadership, this does not always correspond with increased performance results in standardized tests like the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH).

Similarly, Manlapig (2018) noted that while longer service can create familiarity with school workings, it should be accompanied by ongoing professional development to impact quantifiable performance measures.

Likewise, the ANOVA for professional standards also shows a non-significant difference between the groups. The analysis provided a between-group sum of squares of 0.018, an F-value of 0.486, and a p-value of 0.692, once more beyond the 0.05 level. This implies that years of service do not have a significant influence on the way school heads think or enforce the professional standards enunciated in the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (DepEd, 2020). In support of this, Cruz and Villena (2019) reported that compliance with professional standards is more related to formal training, mentoring, and leadership development programs than to the duration of service.

Further, the comparatively high within-groups variances for performance (2620.372) and professional standards (1.843) also underscore those individual differences within each group are more distinct than between-groups differences. That is, variations in school heads' competencies could result from personal initiative, leadership approach, or participation in ongoing learning instead of just experience duration.

Finally, the results of ANOVA indicated that length of service is not by itself a major factor in the performance or the professional standard competencies of school heads. This reinforces the relevance of competency-based professional development as opposed to basing leadership performance or promotion on years of service. Professional development interventions, such as review programs for the NQESH, should therefore center on mastery of skills and adherence to standards regardless of years of service.

Table 14. Results of ANOVA Analysis on the effect of Educational Attainment to the School Heads' Performance and professional standards.

Indicators		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Description
Performance	Between Groups	14.443	3	4.814	.277	.842	Not Significant
	Within Groups	2645.939	152	17.407			
	Total	2660.381	155				
Professional Standards	Between Groups	.021	3	.007	.589	.623	Not Significant
	Within Groups	1.840	152	.012			
	Total	1.861	155				

Significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 14 shows the findings of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test to assess if educational attainment has a significant impact on school heads' performance and professional standards. According to the data, both indicators were non-significant, indicating that educational attainment is not responsible for statistically significant variations in these domains.

First, the ANOVA summary for Performance shows a between-group sum of squares of 14.443, an F-value of 0.277, and a p-value of 0.842. Since the p-value is significantly greater than the 0.05 significance level, it can be confidently stated that educational level exerts no significant impact on school heads' performance in this instance. This finding appears to contradict earlier assertions by Salandanan (2016), who emphasized that higher levels of educational attainment master's or doctoral degrees were typically associated with higher instructional leadership and decision-making. However, the present findings suggest that performance is more influenced by actual experience, leadership behavior, and professional growth than by formal academic credentials alone.

Similarly, ANOVA findings for professional's yield a between-group sum of squares of 0.021, an F-value of 0.589, and a p-value of 0.623, also greater than the 0.05 significance level. This verifies that there is no statistically significant difference in the compliance of school heads with professional standards by educational levels. Supporting this statement, Llego (2019) explained that even if postgraduate education could enhance theoretical ability, its actual application based on professional standards depends considerably on training, mentoring, and alignment with DepEd competency structures. In addition, the Department of Education (2020) indicates that continuous professional development, rather than academic accomplishment per se, is still imperative for high-standard school leadership.

Besides, the relatively high within-group variances in both performance (2645.939) and professional standards (1.840) highlight those differences among school heads at an individual level are higher than differences at a group level based on educational qualification. This supports the contention presented by Santiago (2021), since she underscored that leadership effectiveness is a byproduct of lifelong learning, innovation, and context responsiveness, and not academic achievements.

The findings of the study showed that levels of education have little effect on school heads' performance or adherence to professional standards. The implications of the results are that while formal education is important, it needs to be complemented by experiential leadership learning and ongoing capacity-building programs. Thus, review courses and competency development programs for school administrators especially those who plan to take the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) should not be academically credential-based alone but should instead focus on the enhancement of applied leadership competencies and standards awareness.

Table 15. The Level of General Acceptance of the Review Package of Category C Aspirants

Criterion	Mean	Description
Content Validity Checklist	3.91	Very High
SOLO Taxonomy Alignment	2.87	High
Technical Quality Assessment	3.93	Very High
Reliability Assessment	4.00	Very High
Overall Evaluation	4.00	Very High
Total Mean	**3.74**	**Very High**

Note: 1.00-1.74 Very Low, 1:75-2:49 Low, 2.50-3.24 High, 3.25-4.00 Very High

Table 15 shows a very high overall acceptance of the review package for Category C aspirants, with a total mean score of 3.74. This indicates that the review package is perceived as effective and well-structured by its evaluators. Among the different criteria assessed, Reliability Assessment received the highest rating (M = 4.00, Very High), highlighting the consistency and dependability of the review materials. A highly reliable assessment ensures stability and accuracy in measuring competencies, which

is crucial for maintaining fairness and effectiveness in educational evaluations (Santoso et al., 2023). Similarly, the Overall Evaluation also scored 4.00 (Very High), reinforcing the positive perception of the review package as a well-developed tool for assessing aspirants. This aligns with research on automated programming assessment systems, which suggests that comprehensive evaluations help refine and enhance the quality of educational tools (Perkins et al., 2023).

The Technical Quality Assessment followed closely with a mean score of 3.93 (Very High), indicating that the review package meets the necessary standards for clarity, formatting, and comprehensibility. High technical quality ensures that learning materials are accessible and effectively structured, which is essential for a fair and valid assessment process (Perkins et al., 2023). Similarly, the Content Validity Checklist scored 3.91 (Very High), suggesting that the review package is highly relevant and well-aligned with the required competencies. This is consistent with studies on content validity in educational assessments, which emphasize that strong alignment between assessment content and learning objectives improves the accuracy and usefulness of evaluation results (Ghosh et al., 2024).

The SOLO Taxonomy Alignment received the lowest rating at 2.87 (High), indicating that while the review package follows the Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes (SOLO) taxonomy, there is room for improvement in ensuring better alignment with progressive learning levels. Effective use of the SOLO taxonomy helps educators assess learners' cognitive development, ensuring that materials support gradual learning progression (Svensäter, 2023). The relatively lower score suggests that revisions may be needed to improve how the review package supports aspirants in reaching higher-order thinking skills.

The findings suggest that the review package is highly accepted and well-designed, particularly in terms of reliability, technical quality, and content validity. However, the lower score for SOLO Taxonomy Alignment implies that adjustments are needed to enhance the structure of learning materials to better support progressive cognitive development. Moving forward, policymakers and educators should consider refining the alignment of review materials with learning frameworks to ensure that aspirants receive optimal support for their development. Additionally, maintaining high standards of reliability and technical quality will be essential in sustaining the effectiveness and credibility of the review package.

CONCLUSION

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

The research concluded that Region XII school leadership is predominantly made up of older, long-serving, and academically progressing professionals. This profile is consistent with national trends that prioritize tenure and formal education in leadership recruitment. While these traits imply stability and institutional memory, they can restrict leadership diversity and innovation. Therefore, balancing experience with the presence of younger, dynamic leaders remains crucial in improving leadership effectiveness and maintaining education reforms in schools.

The professional standards of Category C school heads in Region XII are generally at an experienced level across all leadership domains. Their proficiency in strategic leadership, operations management, instructional leadership, professional development, and stakeholder engagement suggests that they can effectively align their leadership with school goals. However, the consistency in scores across domains indicates a need for further enhancement to reach excellence in leadership.

The performance of Category C school heads in Region XII are generally at needing intervention level. This indicates a critical need for intervention across all leadership domains. While stakeholder

engagement shows relative strength, significant challenges remain in decision-making, resource management, instructional leadership, and professional development. The lowest score in Developing Self and Others highlights the urgent need for targeted training programs to enhance leadership capabilities. These findings emphasize the importance of structured support mechanisms to improve overall school leadership effectiveness.

Demographic variables like age, years of service, and education level do not have a major impact on the performance or professionalism of school heads. These results reaffirmed that leadership performance is influenced more by professional development and initiative than background factors, which argues in favor of competency-based appraisal of leadership rather than demographic-based standards of qualification.

The very high acceptance of the review package for Category C aspirants confirms its reliability, technical quality, and alignment with leadership competencies. However, the slightly lower rating in SOLO Taxonomy Alignment suggests that improvements in cognitive structuring could enhance its effectiveness in preparing aspirants for leadership roles.

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