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Original Research Article

Competency of school heads in leading people influences school performance

Received 24 April, 2021

Revised 3 June, 2021 2021

Accepted 10 June, 2021

Published 7 August, 2021

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Investigating school performance and competencies, especially on leadership, received a considerable attention in the past. In fact, there have been multitudes of evidence that leadership can impact school performance, student achievement, or outcome. Also, there was no single measurement of school performance. This study examined the influence of leadership and core behavioral competencies on the school performance of school heads. This was to build a new model of school performance. Using an explanatory research design, it administered a survey questionnaire to 192 randomly chosen school heads from the 37 districts of Department of Education Division of Surigao del Sur. Also, it used data mining for the performance ratings of school heads from the division office. Regression analysis tested three hypothesized models of school performance where leadership and core behavior competencies serve as independent variables. Results showed that leading people was a significant predictor of school performance. Thus, leading people can best explain the school improvement as a proposed model. The results have implications for future research, leadership practice, and theoretical development of school performance model among school heads.

Keywords: core behavioral competencies, leadership competencies, leading people, school performance

INTRODUCTION

Investigating school performance and competencies, especially on leadership, received considerable attention in the past. There have been multiple empirical shreds of evidence that leadership can impact school performance (Huguet, 2017), student achievement (Dutta and Sahney, 2016), student outcome (Day et al., 2016) as well as on work performance and the morale of the staff (Stewart-Banks et al., 2015). Yet, it was not made clear which competencies of leadership can greatly explain school performance. Moreover, school performance was measured differently in several studies. Thus, there was no single understanding and application of the concept. In most cases, it was associated with school readiness and academic achievement (Lamas, 2015), student outcome (Day et al., 2016), or academic achievement (Dutta and Sahney, 2016). Brissom et al. (2021) presented this assumption that "School leadership matters for school outcomes, including student achievement" (p. 1). Thus, school heads play a serious role

in an effort to raise standards and expectations in teaching and learning (Rester, 2020).

A large body of knowledge from various reviewed literature proved that effective leadership can impact school performance. The "schools' leadership should be trustworthy administrators who encourage collaboration and teacher leadership, as well as employment of educators who are genuinely passionate about teaching and love children" (Huguet, 2017, p. 96). School leaders' influence over the curriculum taught, methods of instruction, and the use of assessment to monitor the progress of students and on the adjustment in instruction had a significant but little effect on student learning.

A leadership model was proposed by Steyn (2019) to improve underperforming schools. This was an output of a case study in Africa. It argues that schools, which are in challenging settings, require suitable and varied strategies to ensure school improvement. Once the school leader has

satisfied all requirements, the underachieving school can improve student performance. Moreover, a study explored the critical factors of school performance among high-performing school leaders. When integrated, personal philosophy, personal abilities, and leadership have the greatest performance effect (Hutton, 2016).

Previous studies were concerned with the impact of leadership and its styles on school performance. This contradicts a claim that school heads can use an integrated leadership approach to improve the achievement of their learners by having an increased focus on teaching and learning, collaboratively establishing school goals and vision, and having a deeper awareness of and more rigorous engagement with the external forces affecting the school (Cruickshank, 2017).

School heads are liable for the authoritative and instructional supervision of the school. In contemporary times, school heads should embrace enthusiastically challenging tasks and think strategically to achieve the goals set by the organization. They must possess the competencies set by the Department of Education. These competencies are clustered into two such as the leadership and core behavioral. These competencies need to be demonstrated in achieving excellent performance (DepEd, 2015). School heads play a key role in student achievement and school improvement. Determining their competencies is crucial in rapidly changing and improving social conditions. The more the school heads acquire these competencies, the higher the student achievement is (Özdemir et al., 2015).

In the latest report which synthesized a large body of research, skills and expertise that drive school heads' contribution and impact to school were identified. These include engaging in instructionally focused interactions with teachers, building a productive school climate, facilitating productive collaboration and professional learning communities, and managing personnel and resources strategically (Grissom et al., 2021).

However, many of the school heads in the Division of Surigao del Sur are non-passers of the principals' test. In fact, there have been low numeracy and literacy rate, low academic performance, the limited number of highly proficient and expert teachers, and, a limited number of schools in the advanced level of School-Based Management. Subsequently, some school heads experienced difficulty in managing schools. With the issues and concerns mentioned above and the lacked of a common understanding of school performance, it was deemed necessary to find out if the leadership and core behavioral competencies of school heads can significantly influence school performance. The output of this research may guide the effective and efficient delivery of quality basic education services in the country when school heads' competencies in leadership and core behaviors are addressed.

Objective of the study

The study examined the influence of leadership and core behavioral competencies on the school performance of

school heads in the Division of Surigao del Sur, Philippines by building a new model of school performance. This research was guided by these questions:

1. Does the leadership competency of school heads influence their school performance?
2. Does their core behavioral competence of school heads influence their school performance?

The study had tested the following hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant influence of leadership competencies of school heads on school performance (H_{01}).
2. There is no significant influence of core behavioral competencies of school heads on school performance (H_{02}).

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed an explanatory research design. Accordingly, explanatory design applies statistical methods that test causal hypothesis. This research was conducted in 37 districts of the Division of Surigao del Sur, Philippines.

Participants

The participants of the study were the 192 school heads from public schools. Random sampling was utilized in determining the participants and representations were selected based on the inclusion criterion: at least they had served the school for at least one year.

Ethical Consideration

The involvement of the participants was voluntary through an informed consent form. In this form, the ethical principles are applied and observed in the conduct of the study. Permission was requested from the relevant authorities at the division and district levels to allow the conduct of this research.

Research Instrument

The study adopted a standardized instrument from the Guidelines on the Establishment and Implementation of the Results-Based Performance Management System (RPMS) in all public high schools (Department of Education, 2015) which served as the tool for gathering the data. The indicators are also based on the leadership (16 items) and core behavioral (28 items) competencies identified by the agency. The leadership component was consisting of leading people (5 items), people performance management (5 items), and people development (6 items), while the core behaviors include self-management (5 items), professional ethics (5 items), results focus (4 items), team work (5 items), service orientation (5 items), and innovation (4 items). The data obtained from the participants were scored based on the 5-point Likert Scale with 5 as very high

Table 1. Results on Regression Model 1 of School Performance

Variables	Coefficients	SE	t	sig.
Constant	3.952	0.123	32.140	.000
Leading People	.212	0.087	2.446	.015
People Performance Management	-.065	0.075	-.859	.392
People Development	-.029	0.070	-.419	.676
R =.280	R ² =.079 (7.9%)	F=5.351	Sig=.001	SE=.24958

competence to 1 very low competence. The range describes to what extent the participants agree in every situation in a certain dimension in determining the school head's core behavioral and leadership competencies and level of organizational performance. The researchers used the online Google form application to tally the data gathered. The results were presented in tabular form. Performance of School Heads were requested from the Division Office. The refers to the average ratings in key results areas such instructional leadership, learning environment, human resource and development, parents' involvement and community partnership, school leadership management and operations, and plus factor.

Data Analysis

To test the hypothesized school performance models, the study utilized a stepwise and entered all methods of multiple regression since the study determined the influence of core behavioral and leadership competencies on school performance of school heads. For diagnostic purposes, the looked into the goodness of fit and standard error for every model to ensure that accuracy of the information.

RESULTS

The first model consists of three dimensions of leadership competencies that served as predictors or explanatory variables. The school performance was the outcome or dependent variable in the model. Results show that the model has passed in the goodness of fit test ($F=5.351$, $p<.05$), which indicates that there was enough data for the model or there were enough representations from the population, thus, the results may be conclusive. The standard error (SE) is within the allowable margin. However, Table 1 displays that only leading people is the best predictor of school performance whose regression coefficient is statistically significant at the 0.05 level of significance. People performance management and people development are seemingly deterrents to school performance. This is demonstrated in the direction or negative sign (-) of their regression coefficients. However, these are not statistically significant. Yet, these results give a hint that too much competence of school heads on people performance management and people development may negatively affect school performance. This may have a lot of implications in the actual practice. This has also implications

for the theoretical development of the model.

Including the non-predictors, model 1 has a very minimal (7.9%) variance that can be accounted for leadership competencies, especially leading people. This is shown in its determination coefficient (R²). School performance can be attributed to variables other than leadership competencies. And these variables were not considered in this study. The results suggest that there is a need to capitalize on the competence of school heads in leading people. The results imply that the more the school heads could demonstrate competence in leading people, the more likely the school performance would improve.

In model 2, there are six dimensions of core behavioral competencies, which are the explanatory variables or predictors of school performance. For diagnostic purposes, the model has passed the goodness of fit test ($F= 2.786$, $p<.05$). This means that the model has drawn enough sample from the population and the information they provided can represent the entire population of school heads in the locality. The standard error (SE) is within the allowable margin too. And so, it is 95% confident that the information provided by the sample is accurate and can be inferred.

Table 2 shows the results of the regression of model 2 in which none among the six dimensions of core behavioral competencies can best predict the school performance. This means that self-management, professionalism and ethics, results focus, teamwork, service orientation, and innovation do not have bearing and cannot improve school performance. And so, no matter how competent the school heads are in these dimensions, these do not have a bearing and significant contribution in improving school performance. This may suggest as well to confirm the results in future studies. Future studies can include a bigger sample to finally conclude these results.

For the third model, both the leadership and the core behavior competencies with their respective dimensions were included as explanatory and independent variables. Unlike in models 1 and 2 in which *entered all method* of regression was used, the model 3 was subjected to stepwise regression analysis since it has multiple variables. F statistics ($F=14.785$, $p<.05$) indicates that the model has passed the goodness of fit test too. Thus, it has also enough representation from the population. And thus, whatever information the sample provided, is also true to the population. It has also been supported with a minimal standard error which is within the allowable. This means that the results are accurate.

Table 3 shows the regression results for model 3. Again,

Table 2. Results on Regression Model 2 of School Performance

Variables	Coefficients	SE	t	sig.
Constant	3.903	0.136	28.776	.000
Self-Management	.074	0.081	.910	.364
Professionalism and Ethics	.053	0.069	.768	.444
Results Focus	.063	0.072	.867	.389
Teamwork	.045	0.070	.634	.527
Service Orientation	-.129	0.077	-1.690	.093
Innovation	.024	0.074	.324	.746

R =.288 R² = .083 (8.3%) F=2.786 Sig. =.013 SE=.25102

Table 3. Results on Regression Model 3 of School Performance

Variables	Coefficients	SE	t	sig.
Constant	3.945	0.122	32.234	.000
Leading People	.120	0.031	3.845	.000

R=.269 R²=.072(7.2%) F=14.785 Sig.=.000 SE=.24914

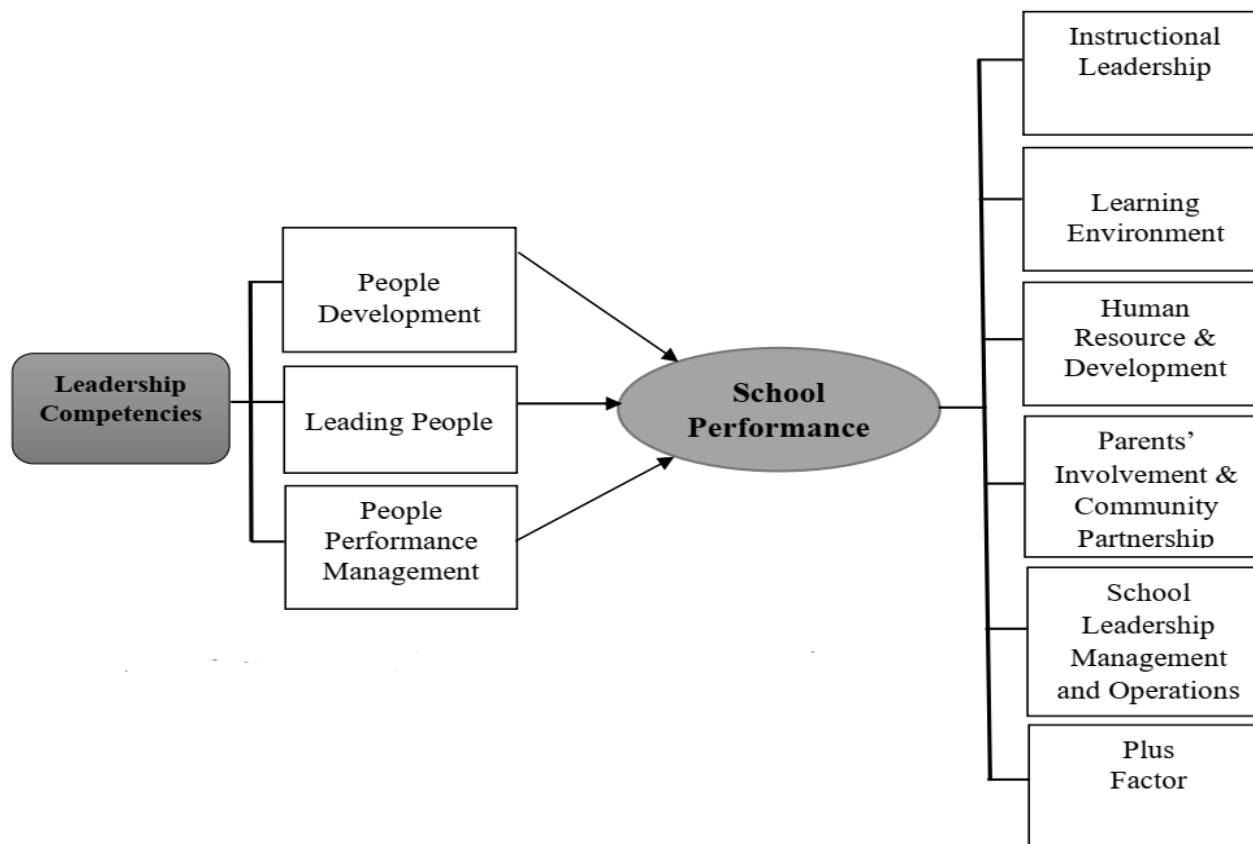


Figure 1: School Performance is a Function of Leading People

the competence of leading people was found significant predictor of school performance. The results corroborate the results in model 1 where three dimensions of leadership competencies were included. It has the same meaning and implication that there is a need to capitalize the competence

in leading people among school heads. Based on the determination coefficient, model 3 is less powerful to explain and predict the school performance compared to model 1 since it can only account for 7.2% of the variance for the said competence. This suggests that model 1 is more

preferable among the three models tested.

DISCUSSION

In this research, competency in leading people can be demonstrated with 1) the use of basic persuasion techniques in a discussion or presentation (e.g., staff mobilization, appeals to reason and/or emotions, uses data and examples, visual aids); 2) persuade, convince, or influence others, to have a specific impact or effect; 3) set a good example (a credible and respected leader; and demonstrates desired behavior); 4) forward personal, professional and work unit needs and interests in an issue; 5) assume a pivotal role in promoting the development of an inspiring, relevant vision for the organization; 6) influence others to share ownership of DepEd goals; and 7) create an effective work environment. This research does not limit to a type or model of leadership that have been existing in literature nor it favors a type of leadership.

The study has come up with a proposed model that school performance is a function of leading people. Although this is a too simplistic linear model, it has several practical applications and implications in school-based management. However, school performance may be explained by variables other than leadership and core behavioral competencies. And these variables were not considered in this study. The results suggest that there is a need to capitalize on the competence of school heads in leading people. The results imply further that the more the school heads could demonstrate competence in leading people the more likely the school performance would improve in the following Key Result Areas: instructional leadership, learning environment, human resource and development, parents' Involvement and community partnership, school leadership management and operations, and plus factor.

Somehow, the report of Grissom et al. (2021) supports the current findings. They identified expertise that drives school heads' contribution and impact to school. They must be expert in engaging focused interactions with teachers, building a productive school climate, facilitating a productive collaboration and professional learning communities, and managing personnel and resources in a strategic manner. These leadership behaviors require skills to fully drive impact. School heads need to acquire and demonstrate human development and relationship skills, skills to support teaching and learning process, and skills that transcend schools (Figure 1).

On the other hand, Cabigao (2019) postulated that effective leadership can also be evident among school leaders who are capable of showing creativity in the practice of leading people, particularly during the most trying times. In the literature review conducted by Lund (2016) it was revealed the strategies for strengthening leader legitimacy that can apply to leaders of organizations employing highly specialized/highly educated people. If these strategies are applied, leaders leading people would strengthen their possibilities for being perceived, legitimate leaders.

CONCLUSION

Leading people turned out to be the best predictor for school performance. Thus, school performance can be explained significantly by leading people more competently, and eventually, every school may become more efficient and effective in achieving targets in the Key Result Areas of school-based management. The results have implications for future research, leadership practice, and theoretical development of school performance model among school heads. The results imply the need to confirm the findings of this research to a bigger sample of school heads and add more variables for a more comprehensive model. For praxis, school heads must practice more often the use basic persuasion techniques more frequently; persuade, convince, or influence others, to have a specific impact or effect, especially to organizational performance; become a good example to constituents; give more priority to the personal, professional and work unit needs and interests of stakeholders, especially teachers; create an inspiring and relevant vision for the school; influence stakeholders to take ownership in achieving organizational goals, and create an effective work environment by doing things right. The results may advance the development of a theory that school performance is greatly influenced by leadership competence. Thus, this research contributed to the limited literature that investigated the factors of optimizing school performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Human Resource and Development section and Performance Management Team of the Schools Division Office needs to create intervention programs (e.g., training) and to develop a deeper understanding of leadership and core behavioral roles and the factors that influence a role model behavior among associates. As the key unit in the division office that handles human capital, the human resource and development section needs to assess regularly and give attention to the level of leadership and performance of school heads and closely monitor the quality and provide timely mediation when needed. This research recommends conducting a study among educational leaders that leads to additional information into the factors that cause or influence the manifestation of exemplary performance and role model leadership within the Department of Education. These recommendations may be adopted to further improve the level of competence in leadership among public school heads in the country.

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