



LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF SCHOOL HEADS IN UPLAND SCHOOLS: BASIS FOR TRAINING PROGRAM

LENIE ROSE D. LARIETA

Teacher I

Juanico Integrated School
lenierose.larieta@deped.gov.ph

ABSTRACT

This study was implemented to identify the leadership experiences and challenges of school heads in upland schools, as a basis for a training program within the academic year 2025-2026. The study used a phenomenological research design under a qualitative method. Ten (10) selected school heads assigned to the upland schools participated in this research. The method used was descriptive, with in-depth interviews. The researcher used a qualitative research approach and phenomenological design. Thematic analysis was employed to identify common themes and patterns in the responses. Based on the results of the study, the leadership experiences of school heads in upland schools included multitasking, limited learning resources, and technical assistance. However, the challenges encountered were poor basic facilities, risky travel conditions, and weak internet connectivity. Meanwhile, the coping strategies employed were the production of contextualized learning materials, collaboration with stakeholders, and time and work management. The study's output is a training program based on its findings.

Keywords: *Leadership Experiences, School Heads, Upland Schools, Training Program*

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INTRODUCTION

Accepting a leadership position is a decision that requires thoughtful reflection and careful discernment. Although the authority, privileges, and benefits associated with such a role may appear attractive, the weight of its responsibilities often compels one to pause and evaluate whether they are truly the most qualified individual to assume the role of leader.

The transition from instructing in the classroom to leading from an office is becoming increasingly difficult as accountability measures demand more from school leaders (Brown, 2021). Novice school leaders often encounter challenges that were not fully anticipated during their pre-service preparation. In upland contexts, school heads are frequently expected to embody almost superhero-like qualities, and, according to Brill (2023), "Burst out of the cloistered phone booth of an administrative credentialing program, take to the air, and effectively meet the needs of all teachers, students, and parents." Additionally, the challenges current novice administrators face may differ significantly from those faced by their predecessors, who may have been novices several years or decades earlier (Oleszewski, 2022).

Upland school heads face more than task-related problems—their challenges are broader and more complex. Northfield (2023) describes how new leaders must sometimes overcome perceptions of leadership established by the previous administration. New school heads must earn credibility in schools where others already hold power. Negative views of administration often make this even more difficult.

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Comparing novice and veteran school heads across settings reveals clear differences in leadership experiences and challenges. Jagt et al. (2021), for instance, found no association between the rank order of perceived experiences and challenges among upland school heads in elementary and secondary schools.

On the other hand, school heads, teachers, and parents can work together to provide learners in the school with a solid foundation that they can carry with them and build on for the rest of their lives, helping them build careers (Wilfong, 2020).

Upland school heads have always secured respect from society. To ensure a comfortable lifestyle, people help them gain a better reputation and satisfaction. It helps build a better reputation and increases the chances of climbing the career ladder more easily and faster, leading to a more stable life (Boerema, 2021).

On the other hand, researchers believed that upland school heads face gaps in mentorship, structured induction, specific leadership skills, and structured induction, leading to overwhelm with administrative tasks, staff supervision, financial management, and personal development.

The researcher's concern is that this study should be explored. The leadership experiences and challenges encountered by school heads in upland schools serve as the basis for the training program in the 4th Congressional District of Iloilo during the school year 2025-2026.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

The research methodology, research design, study participants, data collection process, research tools, and data analysis employed in this study are presented in this chapter.

Research Method

This study used a qualitative research design using in-depth interviews. According to Boyce and Neale (2020), an in-depth interview is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting an interview with a small number of participants to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, progress, or situation.

Boyce and Neale (2020) added that the qualitative research method was effective in obtaining specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, experiences, and social contexts of particular populations, while an in-depth interview is a type of interview with an individual that aims to collect detailed information beyond initial and surface-level answers. The researcher conducted a face-to-face interview in strict compliance with various health protocols. The study aimed to gather participants' views and experiences through their direct, vivid answers.

Research Design

The design used in this study was a Phenomenological approach under the qualitative method. Phenomenology was the study of the common meanings shared by participants who experience the same phenomenon, to create an understanding of the participating individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, as cited by Merriam, 2020) explained that

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"Phenomenology is the study of experience, particularly as it is lived and as it is structured through consciousness".

In this study, the researcher must identify the phenomenon experienced by participants regarding the experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of school heads assigned to upland schools. Through studying the common experiences of the participants, a deep understanding, valuable for psycho-social interventions, can be achieved (Smith, 2023).

Participants of the Study

The study involved ten upland school heads from the 4th Congressional District of Iloilo in SY 2025–2026.

Considering such inclusion criteria among participants makes them good subjects for this specific study. Purposive sampling, also known as judgment, selective, or subjective sampling, is a sampling technique in which the researcher relies on his or her own judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in the study (Creswell, as cited by Golzar, 2025).

Sampling Design

A purposive sampling design was used in this study.

According to Nikolopoulou (2023), a purposive sample is a non-probability sampling technique where researchers intentionally select the participants based on specific characteristics. It is also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling.

Purposive sampling, or judgmental sampling, is a non-probability method where researchers choose participants based on their judgment. Purposive sampling is the intentional

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selection of informants based on their ability to elucidate a specific theme, concept, or phenomenon (Fraenkel & Wallen, as cited by Betito, 2024).

Research Instrument

The study used a researcher-made interview guide, validated by experts, with their feedback incorporated.

Zoom, Messenger, and other accessible platforms (if face-to-face is not available) were used to conduct the in-depth interviews.

Voice and video recorders were used to capture the full interview proceedings.

Validity of the Research Instrument

The study used a researcher-made interview guide, validated by experts through Good and Scates' Eight-Point Scale (Oducado, 2020).

The instrument utilized in this study underwent content validation by a panel of research experts. Content validity refers to the degree to which a measurement tool adequately represents all dimensions of the construct being examined, thereby ensuring its appropriateness for data collection. To establish the instrument's validity, since it was constructed by the researcher herself, jury validation was used (Nickerson, 2023).

Data Gathering Procedures

After identifying the participants, the researcher secured their voluntary participation through signed consent forms.

Qualified school heads were handpicked, and each was provided with a letter, profile sheet, and consent form granting approval for interview recording.

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Upon receipt of written consent, interviews commenced at times convenient for each participant, conducted either face-to-face or via Facebook Messenger.

The interview design incorporated open-ended, semi-structured, and structured formats, focusing on the research questions. Initially, in-depth interviews were carried out to elicit participants' perspectives, with proceedings recorded to ensure accuracy.

Data from the series of interviews were consolidated and analyzed thematically. Following completion, video recordings were transcribed, translated, categorized into meaning units, and subjected to thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were thematically analyzed to identify leadership themes among upland school heads in Iloilo's 4th District, forming the basis of a training program.

The study used thematic analysis, a qualitative method for finding patterns and themes in the data. According to Delahunt (2020), a thematic analysis aims to identify the themes, such as patterns in the data that are important or interesting, and use these themes to address the research or say something about an issue. This entails making sense of the collected data by summarizing, evaluating, and interpreting it.

On the other hand, Braun & Clark (2023), discussed that thematic analysis involves six steps to find patterns in qualitative data: 1. familiarization (reading data thoroughly); 2. generating initial codes (labeling interesting features); 3. searching for themes (grouping codes into potential themes); 4. reviewing themes (checking themes against data); 5. defining

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& naming themes (clarifying theme meaning); and 6. writing up the analysis, creating a coherent narrative.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study aims to identify the leadership experiences and challenges encountered by school heads in upland schools as a basis for a training program during the school year 2025-2026. The participants of this study are the 10 selected school heads in upland schools in the 4th Congressional District of Iloilo.

This study employed a descriptive methodology with in-depth interviews. The interviewer was allowed to sit at a substantial distance and contemplate a set of questions regarding a certain topic. Through their answers to the questions, participants' primary or essential opinions on a particular topic in a social setting are sought after.

Phenomenology was employed in the study as part of qualitative research. By concentrating on an individual's subjective interpretations of her experiences, phenomenology seeks to understand how others see the world and how this view may differ from widely accepted beliefs. Phenomenology is conducted by interviewing subjects to learn their impressions and is frequently used in fields such as psychology, sociology, and social work (Fraenkel & Wallen, as cited in Tagurigan, 2023).

The research instrument used in this study was a researcher-developed interview schedule focused primarily on the study's purpose.

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The research instrument was a semi-structured interview guide that used questions within a predetermined thematic framework. However, the questions are not ordered or phrased consistently (George, 2022).

Voice and video recorders were utilized to collect and capture data, with consent from the participants. The field notes made during the interview were among the tools used for analysis.

Each item was presented for examination and adjustment by the adviser and a panel of jurors prior to the researcher assessing the authenticity of the interview schedule.

The researcher received permission to perform the study from the adviser, the Graduate School Dean, school administrators, and, most importantly, each participant. To conduct the in-person interview, the researcher personally traveled to the neighborhood, school, or other location that was convenient for the participants.

The researcher combined the information gathered following the interviews. A thematic approach was used to analyze the collected data.

Considering the results of the research, the leadership experiences of upland teachers in upland schools included multitasking, limited learning resources, and technical assistance. The challenges they encountered included poor basic facilities, risky travel conditions, and weak internet connectivity. Moreover, the coping strategies they employed were the production of contextualized learning materials, collaboration with stakeholders, and time and work management. The output of this research is a "training program" that was based on the study's findings.

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CONCLUSION

The leadership experiences of school administrators in upland schools are significant processes that develop and contribute to the achievement of an objective. These encounters involve inspiring and assisting individuals to strive toward a goal based on unique personal and professional values.

The combined tasks of administrative manager and instructional leader are among the leadership challenges and obligations faced by upland teachers. As a result, school administrators have the crucial freedom to provide both quantity and quality education, which results in students who are equipped with desirable values and competitive lifelong skills that will allow them to participate actively in society in the future.

Driven by the passion of their work and motivated to influence the lives of instructors and students, school heads in upland schools continued to wear happy smiles and have a positive outlook. Every week, school administrators drew support from their peers to deal with uncertainty, which ultimately improved the living conditions of educators and students.

A designed training program for school heads was based on the study's results. The training program for school heads encompasses various initiatives aimed at enhancing leadership skills, instructional practices, and overall school management effectiveness.

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