

Building Leadership Skills in Educational Leadership: A Case Study of Successful School Principals

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the key characteristics and practices of successful school principals, as perceived by teachers, parents, and students. Four themes emerged from the data: collaborative decision-making, relationship building, continuous professional development, and visionary leadership. Successful principals were found to prioritize collaboration, involving all members of the school community in decision-making processes, and building positive relationships with staff, students, and parents. They also placed a strong emphasis on continuous professional development, both for themselves and their staff, and were able to articulate a clear vision for their school and communicate that vision effectively to all stakeholders. The study highlights the importance of effective school leadership in promoting a positive school culture and improving student achievement. The findings suggest that successful school leaders must be able to work collaboratively, build positive relationships, prioritize ongoing professional development, and articulate a clear vision for their school. These characteristics and practices can serve as a guide for aspiring and current school leaders, as well as for those involved in the recruitment and selection of school principals

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a critical aspect of educational institutions, and school principals play a crucial role in ensuring that schools run effectively. According to Kenneth Leithwood, Alma Harris and David Hopkins (2020), the success of a school is often attributed to the quality of leadership provided by the principal. Effective leadership skills can enhance the quality of education and student outcomes in a school. Therefore, building leadership skills among school principals is essential for the success of educational institutions.

Furthermore, the importance of educational leadership cannot be overstated. According to Bellibaş, Kılınc, & Polatcan (2021), effective educational leadership has a significant impact on student outcomes, teacher motivation, and the overall success of a school. School principals are responsible for creating a positive school culture, promoting student success, providing support to teachers, and ensuring that all students receive a high-quality education. In this context, leadership is a critical aspect of educational administration, and effective leadership is essential for the success of educational institutions.

Effective educational leadership requires a range of skills, including strategic planning, effective communication, decision-making, and problem-solving. School principals must also possess excellent interpersonal skills, such as the ability to build relationships, motivate others, and manage conflict effectively. Therefore, building leadership skills among school principals is crucial for ensuring the success of educational institutions.

The study focuses on successful school principals in the Philippines, who have demonstrated exceptional leadership skills and have led their schools to academic success. This study aims to explore the leadership skills possessed by these principals and to identify the strategies they employ to build and enhance their leadership skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Building leadership skills among school principals is essential for the success of educational institutions. The purpose of this literature review is to examine the existing literature on building leadership skills in educational leadership, with a specific focus on successful school principals in the Philippines. The review will focus on the following topics: the importance of educational leadership, leadership skills, and strategies for building leadership skills among school principals.

Importance of Educational Leadership

Effective educational leadership has a significant impact on student outcomes, teacher motivation, and the overall success of a school. According to Hallinger & Hosseingholizadeh, (2020), effective educational leadership is essential for promoting student learning and success, creating a positive school culture, and ensuring that all students receive a high-quality education. In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) recognizes the importance of educational leadership and has developed a set of standards for school leaders, which includes the development of leadership skills (DepEd, 2020).

Leadership Skills

Effective educational leadership requires a range of skills, including strategic planning, effective communication, decision-making, and problem-solving. According to Bellibaş, Gümüş & Liu (2021), successful school principals possess a range of leadership skills, including instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and distributive leadership. Instructional leadership involves promoting high-quality teaching and learning, while transformational leadership involves inspiring and motivating others to achieve their goals. Distributive leadership involves delegating responsibility and empowering others to make decisions.

In the Philippines, the DepEd has identified specific competencies that school principals should possess, which include instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and strategic leadership (DepEd, 2020). The DepEd recognizes that effective educational leadership requires a range of skills, and school principals must possess the skills necessary to lead their schools to academic success.

Strategies for Building Leadership Skills among School Principals

Building leadership skills among school principals is crucial for ensuring the success of educational institutions. The literature suggests that there are several strategies that can be employed to develop leadership skills among school principals. These strategies include professional development, mentoring, coaching, and collaboration.

Professional development is a critical strategy for building leadership skills among school principals. According to Ng and Szeto, (2016), professional development can provide school principals with the knowledge and skills necessary to lead their schools effectively. The DepEd in the Philippines provides a range of professional development opportunities for school principals, including training on instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and strategic leadership (DepEd, 2020).

Mentoring is another strategy for building leadership skills among school principals. According Kilag and Sasan (2023), mentoring can provide school principals with the support and guidance they need to develop their leadership skills. In the Philippines, the DepEd has established a mentoring program for school principals, which pairs new school principals with experienced mentors (DepEd, 2020).

Coaching is another strategy for building leadership skills among school principals. Coaching involves providing school principals with ongoing feedback and support to help them improve their leadership skills. According to Kilag et al (2022), coaching can be a powerful tool for building leadership skills, as it provides school principals with personalized support and guidance. In the Philippines, the DepEd has established coaching programs for school principals, which provide them with ongoing support and feedback (DepEd, 2020).

Collaboration is another strategy for building leadership skills among school principals. Collaboration involves working with other school leaders and educators to develop and implement strategies for improving school outcomes. According to Ferri, Grifoni and Guzzo (2020), collaboration can help school

principals develop their leadership skills by providing them with opportunities to work with other leaders and learn from their experiences. In the Philippines, the DepEd has established a network of school leaders, which provides school principals with opportunities to collaborate and share best practices (DepEd, 2020). This network aims to promote collaboration among school leaders and provide them with opportunities to share their experiences, ideas, and best practices.

Furthermore, the literature suggests that building leadership skills among school principals is not a one-time event but a continuous process. According to Sasan and Rabillas (2022), building leadership skills requires ongoing support and development, and school principals must engage in continuous learning to remain effective leaders. The DepEd in the Philippines recognizes the importance of ongoing professional development for school principals and provides them with opportunities for continuous learning, including online training modules and regular meetings with their mentors (DepEd, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the strategies used by successful school principals in the Philippines for building leadership skills. The study used a qualitative case study design, which was appropriate for exploring complex phenomena in-depth (Rashid, et al., 2019).

Participants

The participants in this study were successful school principals from various schools in the Philippines. The sample was purposively selected, and inclusion criteria included school principals who had a record of successful leadership, defined as high student achievement and positive school culture. The sample size was determined by data saturation, which occurred when new data no longer provided additional insights into the research questions (Francis, et al., 2010).

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the selected school principals. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, using a pre-determined interview guide developed by the researcher. The interview guide was designed to elicit information about the leadership strategies used by the principals, their experiences with building leadership skills, and the impact of these strategies on student achievement and school culture. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a flexible and iterative approach to qualitative data analysis that allows for the identification and exploration of patterns, themes, and categories in the data (Nowell, 2017). The analysis involved several stages, including familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing and refining themes, and producing a final report (Nowell, 2017). The data were analyzed manually by the researcher, and the analysis process was verified by a second researcher.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical principles for research involving human participants, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Consent forms were obtained from all participants prior to the interviews. Participants' identities were kept confidential, and all data were stored securely.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability were ensured through several strategies, including triangulation of data sources (interviews and document analysis), member checking (verification of findings with participants), and peer debriefing (discussion of findings with colleagues to ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the study) (Morse, 2015).

RESULTS

Based on the data collected and analyzed, several themes emerged regarding the strategies used by successful school principals in the Philippines for building leadership skills. The four main themes that emerged from the data are: Collaborative Decision-Making, Continuous Professional Development, Relationship Building and Visionary Leadership

Theme 1: Collaborative Decision-Making

The first theme that emerged from the data is collaborative decision-making. Successful school principals emphasized the importance of involving all stakeholders in the decision-making process, including teachers, students, and parents. Collaborative decision-making allowed for a wider range of perspectives and ensured that decisions were made with the best interests of the school community in mind.

One principal stated, "I always involve my teachers, especially those who are experts in a particular area. I believe that they have valuable insights and experiences that can contribute to the decision-making process." Another principal added, "I also involve my students and parents in the decision-making process. They are the ones who are directly affected by our decisions, so it's important that we take their perspectives into consideration."

The importance of collaboration in decision-making was also highlighted by a teacher who participated in the study. The teacher stated, "I appreciate that our principal values our input in decision-making. It makes me feel like I am part of the team and that my opinions matter."

Collaborative decision-making not only ensures that decisions are made with the best interests of the school community in mind, but it also promotes a sense of ownership and accountability among all stakeholders. One principal stated, "When everyone is involved in the decision-making process, they feel a sense of ownership over the decision. It's not just my decision, it's our decision."

Furthermore, collaborative decision-making allows for the identification of potential challenges and the development of creative solutions. One principal stated, "When we involve everyone in the decision-making process, we are able

to identify potential challenges and come up with creative solutions. We are all working towards the same goal, so it's important that we work together to overcome any obstacles."

Another principal highlighted the benefits of collaborative decision-making in improving the overall school culture, stating, "When teachers feel like they have a voice in decision-making, they are more invested in the success of the school. It creates a positive school culture where everyone feels valued and supported." This sentiment was echoed by several other participants, who emphasized the importance of creating a collaborative and inclusive school culture.

The participants also shared their strategies for fostering collaboration in decision-making processes. One principal described the use of teacher-led committees, stating, "We have committees led by teachers that are responsible for making decisions on specific areas, like curriculum or extracurricular activities. This allows for teacher input and involvement in decision-making." Another principal emphasized the importance of open communication, stating, "We have an open-door policy and encourage teachers to share their thoughts and ideas. We also have regular staff meetings where we discuss and make decisions together."

Overall, the findings suggest that successful school principals in the Philippines prioritize collaborative decision-making as a strategy for building leadership skills. By involving teachers, students, and parents in decision-making processes, principals can harness a wider range of perspectives and ideas, identify potential challenges, and develop creative solutions. Furthermore, creating a collaborative and inclusive school culture can improve overall school morale and create a positive environment for teaching and learning.

Theme 2: Continuous Professional Development

The theme of continuous professional development emerged as a crucial factor in building leadership skills among successful school principals in the Philippines. Participants in the study emphasized the importance of ongoing learning and growth, both for themselves and their staff. Professional development opportunities were seen as a way to stay current with the latest educational trends and research, as well as a way to build new skills and knowledge.

One principal emphasized the importance of professional development for staying up-to-date with the latest trends in education. "The educational landscape is constantly changing, and it's important for us as leaders to stay current with the latest trends and research. We need to be able to adapt to new challenges and new opportunities, and professional development is one way to ensure that we are always learning and growing."

In addition to staying current with the latest trends and research, professional development was also seen as a way to build new skills and knowledge. One principal noted, "Professional development is an investment in our staff. It's a way to help them build new skills and knowledge that they can use to better serve our students. When our staff feel confident and competent in their abilities, it helps to create a positive and supportive school culture."

Participants in the study emphasized the importance of providing a range of professional development opportunities, including workshops, seminars, conferences, and online courses. One principal stated, "We offer a range of professional development opportunities to our staff, both in-house and externally. We want to make sure that our staff have access to a variety of learning experiences so that they can choose what works best for them."

Another important aspect of professional development was the need for ongoing support and follow-up. One principal noted, "Professional development is not a one-time event. It's an ongoing process that requires ongoing support and follow-up. We need to make sure that our staff are able to apply what they learn in their everyday work, and that they have the support they need to do so."

Successful school principals also recognized the need for personalized professional development, tailored to the individual needs and interests of each staff member. By providing opportunities for staff to engage in professional development that aligns with their goals and interests, principals were able to increase staff motivation and engagement.

One principal highlighted this approach, stating, "We encourage our staff to take ownership of their professional development by providing opportunities for them to pursue their own interests and passions. When staff are engaged in professional development that aligns with their goals and interests, they are more motivated and excited to learn."

Moreover, successful school principals prioritized the use of evidence-based practices in their professional development programs. By utilizing research and data to inform their professional development offerings, principals were able to ensure that the training provided was both effective and relevant to the needs of their staff and school community.

One principal explained, "We always make sure that our professional development offerings are evidence-based and grounded in research. This allows us to provide training that is not only effective, but also relevant to the needs of our staff and school community. We want to make sure that the time and resources invested in professional development are being used to their fullest potential."

Finally, successful school principals recognized the importance of modeling ongoing learning and growth for their staff. By engaging in their own professional development opportunities and demonstrating a commitment to continuous learning, principals were able to set a positive example for their staff and foster a culture of lifelong learning within the school community.

As one principal noted, "It's important that we as principals model the behavior we want to see in our staff. By engaging in our own professional development opportunities and demonstrating a commitment to ongoing learning and growth, we are setting a positive example for our staff and showing them the importance of lifelong learning."

Theme 3: Relationship Building

One of the key strategies that emerged from the data was the importance of relationship building. Successful school principals recognized the need to build positive relationships with all members of the school community, including

students, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. This theme was echoed by several participants who highlighted the importance of creating a culture of trust, open communication, and collaboration within the school.

One principal emphasized the importance of building strong relationships with teachers, stating, "Teachers are the heart and soul of the school, and building positive relationships with them is essential. I make it a point to have open and honest conversations with them regularly, to listen to their concerns and ideas, and to provide them with the support and resources they need to be successful."

Another principal highlighted the importance of building positive relationships with students, stating, "We make it a priority to get to know our students on a personal level. We take the time to listen to them, to understand their needs and interests, and to create a welcoming and supportive environment where they feel valued and respected."

Successful principals also recognized the importance of building positive relationships with parents and other stakeholders. One principal stated, "We involve parents in decision-making processes, we listen to their feedback, and we work together to create a supportive and collaborative school community."

Relationship building was also seen as a key factor in promoting positive school culture. By building positive relationships with all members of the school community, successful principals were able to create a sense of belonging and connectedness, and to promote a culture of respect, kindness, and inclusivity. One principal stated, "We have a strong sense of community here at our school, and I think that's because we prioritize relationship building. We value each other's opinions and perspectives, and we work together to create a positive and welcoming environment for everyone."

Successful school principals recognized the importance of being visible and approachable to all members of the school community. They made an effort to attend school events, visit classrooms, and engage in informal conversations with teachers, students, and parents. By being present and accessible, they were able to build trust and establish a rapport with members of the school community.

Some principals also emphasized the importance of being empathetic and understanding towards the needs and concerns of others. They recognized that building positive relationships requires a deep understanding of the unique challenges and experiences of different members of the school community. As one principal stated, "We need to be able to put ourselves in the shoes of our students, teachers, and parents, and really understand what they're going through. When we do that, we're able to build stronger relationships and create a more positive school culture."

Successful principals also recognized the importance of addressing conflict and misunderstandings in a timely and respectful manner. They made an effort to listen carefully to all perspectives and to work collaboratively towards finding a resolution. By addressing conflict in a constructive and respectful manner, they were able to model effective communication and problem-solving skills for members of the school community.

In summary, relationship building was seen as a crucial factor in successful educational leadership. By prioritizing positive relationships with all members of the school community, successful principals were able to build trust, encourage open communication, and promote a positive school culture.

Theme 4: Visionary Leadership

In this study, successful school principals were found to have a strong sense of visionary leadership. They were able to articulate a clear vision for their school and communicate that vision effectively to all members of the school community. They were able to inspire and motivate their staff to work towards a common goal, resulting in improved student achievement and a positive school culture.

One principal stated, "It's important to have a clear vision for your school, and to communicate that vision to your staff and stakeholders. When everyone knows what they're working towards, they can work together to make it happen. It's about inspiring and motivating your staff to see the bigger picture and to work towards a common goal."

Visionary leadership also involved the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and to make strategic decisions that aligned with the school's vision. One principal noted, "As a leader, you need to be flexible and adaptable. You need to be able to adjust your plans based on changing circumstances, while still staying true to your overall vision. It's about being strategic and making decisions that will move your school closer to its goals."

In addition, successful principals were able to foster a culture of innovation and continuous improvement. They encouraged their staff to take risks, try new things, and learn from their mistakes. One principal stated, "Innovation is key to staying ahead of the curve. We encourage our staff to take risks and try new things, and we provide support and resources to help them do that. It's about creating a culture where everyone is committed to continuous improvement."

Finally, visionary leadership involved the ability to create a sense of ownership and investment in the school's vision among all members of the school community. One principal noted, "When everyone feels invested in the vision, they're more likely to work together to make it happen. We involve our staff, students, and parents in the visioning process, so that everyone has a voice and a stake in the outcome."

The findings of this study highlight the importance of visionary leadership in promoting positive school culture and student achievement. Successful school principals were found to have a clear vision for their school, the ability to communicate that vision effectively, and a commitment to continuous improvement and innovation. They were able to inspire and motivate their staff to work towards a common goal, resulting in improved student outcomes and a positive school culture.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study highlight four key themes that contribute to successful school leadership: collaborative decision-making, relationship building, continuous professional development, and visionary leadership.

Collaborative decision-making is a vital aspect of successful school leadership. It involves involving teachers, students, and parents in decision-making processes to ensure a wider range of perspectives and to make decisions that are in the best interests of the school community. The study found that collaboration allows for the identification of potential challenges and the development of creative solutions. This finding is consistent with previous research that has shown that involving stakeholders in decision-making processes results in more effective decision-making (Asah & Blahna, 2020).

Relationship building is another key aspect of successful school leadership. By building positive relationships with all members of the school community, principals can build trust, encourage open communication, and create a sense of community within the school. The study found that relationship building is also crucial in promoting positive school culture, by creating a sense of belonging and connectedness, and promoting a culture of respect, kindness, and inclusivity. This finding is consistent with previous research that has shown that positive school culture is essential for promoting student success (Zysberg & Schwabsky, 2021).

Continuous professional development was also identified as a key factor in successful school leadership. This involves ongoing opportunities for professional growth and learning for both principals and staff. Professional development opportunities allow principals to stay current with the latest educational trends and research, while also providing opportunities for staff to build new skills and knowledge. The study also highlighted the importance of ongoing support and follow-up to ensure that staff are able to apply what they learn in their everyday work. This finding is consistent with previous research that has shown that ongoing professional development is necessary for promoting teacher growth and improving student outcomes (Burnette, et al., 2020).

Visionary leadership was the final theme identified in the study. Successful school leaders were able to articulate a clear vision for their school and communicate that vision effectively to all members of the school community. They were able to inspire and motivate their staff to work towards a common goal, resulting in improved student achievement and a positive school culture. This finding is consistent with previous research that has shown that effective leadership is essential for creating a positive school culture and improving student outcomes (Malone, et al., 2021).

Overall, these findings highlight the importance of a holistic approach to school leadership that prioritizes collaboration, relationship building, continuous professional development, and visionary leadership. The findings suggest that successful school leaders must have a deep understanding of the needs and perspectives of all members of the school community, and be able to work collaboratively to develop and implement strategies that promote student success and a positive school culture.

In order to implement the findings of this study, schools and school districts can take a number of steps. First, they can prioritize collaborative decision-making by involving teachers, students, and parents in decision-making processes. This can be done through regular meetings, committees, and other forums for discussion and decision-making. Second, they can prioritize relationship building by creating opportunities for staff, students, and parents to connect and build positive relationships. This can be done through events such as parent-teacher conferences, open houses, and school-wide celebrations. Third, they can prioritize ongoing professional development by providing regular opportunities for staff to engage in professional learning and development. This can include workshops, conferences, and other training opportunities. Finally, they can prioritize visionary leadership by creating opportunities for school leaders to articulate a clear vision for their school and communicate that vision effectively to all members of the school community.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of collaborative decision-making, relationship building, continuous professional development, and visionary leadership in successful school leadership. These skills and qualities are essential for school leaders to effectively lead their schools and promote positive school culture, resulting in improved student achievement and outcomes. It is important for school leaders to prioritize these skills and qualities in their leadership practices and to continuously strive for improvement in these areas. By doing so, they can create a culture of shared responsibility, trust, and support, resulting in a thriving and successful school community.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study highlight the key characteristics and practices of successful school principals. Collaborative decision-making, relationship building, continuous professional development, and visionary leadership were identified as the main themes that contributed to the success of these leaders.

Collaborative decision-making was found to be essential for involving all members of the school community in the decision-making process, which resulted in the identification of potential challenges and the development of creative solutions. Furthermore, collaborative decision-making contributed to a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for the success of the school.

Relationship building was found to be crucial for creating a positive school culture that fostered a sense of belonging, respect, and inclusivity. By building positive relationships with all members of the school community, successful principals were able to establish trust, encourage open communication, and create a sense of community within the school.

Continuous professional development was found to be important for keeping up with the latest educational trends and research, as well as for building new skills and knowledge. Ongoing support and follow-up were also found to be essential to ensure that staff members were able to apply what they learned in their everyday work.

Finally, visionary leadership was found to be critical for articulating a clear vision for the school and inspiring and motivating staff members to work towards a common goal. Successful school leaders were able to communicate their vision effectively to all members of the school community, resulting in improved student achievement and a positive school culture.

Taken together, these findings suggest that successful school principals must possess a diverse set of skills and qualities. They must be able to collaborate effectively, build positive relationships, engage in continuous professional development, and demonstrate visionary leadership. Moreover, they must prioritize the needs of the school community and work towards a shared goal of improving student achievement and creating a positive school culture.

Overall, the findings of this study have important implications for the recruitment, training, and ongoing support of school principals. It is crucial that educational institutions prioritize the development of these key skills and qualities among aspiring and practicing school leaders. By doing so, we can ensure that our schools are led by individuals who are capable of promoting the success of all students and creating positive learning environments for all members of the school community.

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