Exploring School Heads' Initiatives in Empowering Teacher–Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the initiatives undertaken by public elementary school heads in empowering teacher-leadership within the division of Malaybalay City during school year 2024–2025. Guided by transformational leadership theory, distributed leadership theory, and Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological approach, the study examined how school heads cultivate teacher - leadership, the challenges they encounter, and the capacity-building needs necessary for sustaining empowerment. The research employed a qualitative phenomenological design to gain deep insights into the lived experiences of school heads. Data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), with validated interview and motive guide questions developed through expert consultation. Fourteen school heads were purposively selected based on their leadership experience and involvement in teacher development programs. Using Moustakas' (1994) analytical framework—epoche, horizontalization, clustering of meaning units, and synthesis—the findings revealed three core themes: (1) strategic and relational delegation, where leadership roles were assigned intentionally to build teacher capacity and trust; (2) the power of affirmation, which emphasized recognition, inclusion, and emotional support; and (3) leading by example, where school heads modeled integrity, consistency, and commitment to inspire leadership. Challenges included low teacher self-efficacy, reluctance to lead, and systemic constraints such as limited resources. In response, participants advocated for holistic, values-based training and technical capacity-building programs to further empower teacher-leaders. This study affirms the pivotal role of school heads in building collaborative, inclusive, and resilient school cultures through intentional teacher empowerment. The findings contribute to leadership discourse and offer insights for policy-makers, education leaders, and future researchers aiming to strengthen teacher-leadership in the Philippine basic education context.

Keywords - teacher-leadership, school heads, empowerment, transformational leadership, distributed leadership, qualitative research, phenomenology, Philippine education

I. INTRODUCTION

Empowering teachers to take on leadership roles within schools is increasingly recognized as a cornerstone of effective educational reform. In the 21st-century learning environment, leadership is no longer confined to formal positions—it is distributed, collaborative, and rooted in everyday practice. At the heart of this paradigm shift are school heads, whose initiatives to empower teacher-leadership have become central to promoting innovation, teacher agency, and school-wide improvement.

In the Philippine educational context, the Department of Education (DepEd), through the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), calls on school leaders to be instructional leaders who champion shared leadership, foster professional learning communities, and create systems that develop teacher capacity. Moreover, the Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP) 2030 outlines the necessity of building teacher leadership to address persistent learning gaps and ensure sustained quality and equity in basic education. These directives position school heads as key enablers of teacher-leadership.

Despite these progressive policy directions, the actual empowerment of teacher-leaders remains uneven. Many

teachers are still reluctant to take on leadership roles due to lack of confidence, fear of criticism, or unclear role expectations. These challenges call for intentional and strategic initiatives by school heads to identify, nurture, and support leadership potential among their teaching staff. These initiatives may include assigning coordinatorships, initiating coaching and mentoring programs, offering recognition, delegating responsibilities, and fostering a culture of inclusivity, collaboration, and psychological safety (Edmondson, 2019; Tucker et al., 2023).

Recent literature underscores that when teachers are empowered as leaders, they become catalysts of innovation, agents of change, and role models to peers (Liang et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2021). Effective school heads recognize this potential and intentionally cultivate leadership capacity among teachers—not only to distribute workload, but to build a more resilient, adaptive, and empowered school community.

Teacher-leadership, as defined in recent literature, refers to the ability of teachers to influence instructional practices, lead peers, and participate meaningfully in decision-making processes (Nguyen et al., 2021; York-Barr & Strahan, 2023). It encompasses both formal and informal leadership roles, including mentoring colleagues, leading learning teams, driving curriculum reforms, and initiating school-based innovations. However, research has shown that many teachers hesitate to take on leadership roles due to fear of criticism, lack of institutional support, and absence of recognition (Bangs & Frost, 2022).

This highlights the pivotal role of school heads' initiatives in bridging these gaps. From delegating responsibilities, coaching and mentoring, promoting inclusive decision-making, to providing recognition and growth opportunities, school heads must foster a culture that values teacher-leadership (Tucker et al., 2023). These leadership practices influence not only the development of teachers but also the transformation of school culture and learning outcomes.

This study, therefore, aims to explore and analyze the initiatives undertaken by school heads in empowering teacher-leadership in public elementary schools. It seeks to understand the lived experiences and strategies of school leaders as they cultivate a culture of shared leadership, develop teacher capabilities, and foster empowerment in their respective schools. By documenting these practices, the research hopes to contribute to leadership discourse and provide insights for strengthening leadership capacity at the grassroots level. Ultimately, this study is grounded in the belief that teacher-leadership, when nurtured through strategic school head initiatives, becomes a powerful mechanism for continuous school improvement and learner success.

In essence, this chapter introduces a study that goes beyond leadership theory and into the everyday realities of school leadership. It highlights the need to document and reflect on the empowering practices of school heads—those seemingly small but significant actions that inspire teachers to take initiative, grow professionally, and lead from where they are. In doing so, the study acknowledges that school heads who empower teachers are not merely delegating tasks—they are shaping the future of Philippine education.

II. Framework of the Study

This study is anchored on the theory developed by Bass and Leithwood (1990), which states that transformational leaders inspire, motivate, and intellectually stimulate their followers, enabling them to exceed expected performance levels. In the school setting, this theory emphasizes the importance of vision-driven leadership, individualized support, and the development of a collaborative culture where teachers are empowered to take initiative and grow professionally.

Leithwood and Jantzi (2020) further contextualized this theory within educational leadership by outlining four key dimensions: setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program. These dimensions align with how school heads cultivate teacher-leadership—through trust-building, strategic delegation, affirming recognition, and fostering a shared sense of purpose.

By applying this lens, the study views school heads not merely as managers of tasks but as agents of transformation who unlock the leadership potential within their teachers. Transformational leadership, therefore, serves as a foundation for understanding how teacher-leaders emerge in environments where school heads provide moral guidance, model professional behavior, and offer ongoing support.

This theoretical perspective is complemented by Spillane's distributed leadership theory (2006), which views leadership as a collective practice spread across various individuals within the school. Both theories converge in this study to frame the school head's role as both a visionary and a facilitator—creating enabling structures where teachers are trusted, included, and empowered to lead in meaningful and sustainable ways.

Taken together, these theories and policy instruments establish the lens through which the school heads' leadership practices are examined. The study focuses on how school heads implement initiatives such as mentoring, task delegation, recognition of teacher efforts, inclusion in decision-making, and providing professional development support. At the same time, it explores the challenges they encounter in doing so— ranging from teacher hesitancy and low confidence to resource limitations and policy ambiguities.

By synthesizing theoretical principles with actual policy directions and grounded experiences, this study offers a deeper understanding of the transformational and distributed leadership practices of school heads as they empower teachers to lead. It further aims to draw implications for leadership training, school governance, and institutional support systems that nurture teacher-leadership as a key component of educational improvement.

III. Objectives

This study seeks to explore the concrete initiatives undertaken by school heads to empower teacher-leadership, the challenges they encounter in these efforts, and the capacity-building needs necessary to strengthen teacher-leadership practices. Specifically, it sought to: Identify the school heads' initiatives in empowering teacher-leadership, Determine the challenges encountered by the school heads in their initiative to empower teachers to lead, and Propose capability trainings that empower teacher-leadership.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design utilizing Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach, to understand the lived experiences of school heads in empowering teacher-leadership. Data were gathered through individual and focus-group interview, allowing collection of rich, in-depth data regarding the school heads' initiatives in fostering teacher leadership.

The study was conducted in three selected public elementary school category, representing small schools, medium schools and large schools. The school heads were chosen based on their active involvement in promoting teacher-leadership and implementing school-based leadership practices. The focus was on their lived experiences and professional insights as they carried out their roles in leading and empowering teachers within their respective schools.

Participants included 14 purposively selected school heads in Division of Malaybalay. Eight of these school heads were assigned for individual interview and six were assigned for focus group discussion (FGD). Selection criteria required at least 3 years of service as school head. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and their identities were not revealed in any part of the paper.

An interview guide served as the main research instrument. It was reviewede and validated by experts to ensure clarity, relevance, ad ethical compliance. Transcripts were returned to participants for validation and to ensure accuracy of interpretation.

Ethical considerations such as voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the study on School Heads' Initiatives in Empowering Teacher Leadership. Data were organized into three major components: (1) School Heads' Initiatives in Empowering Teacher-Leadership, (2) Challenges Encountered in the Empowerment of teacher Leadership, and (3) Capacity Intervention Strategies that Empower Teacher-Leadership.

1. School Heads' Initiatives in Empowering Teacher Leadership

Theme 1: Strategic and Relational Delegation

Empowerment in schools does not occur by chance — it is intentionally cultivated through thoughtful strategies and a deep understanding of human relationships. One of the most evident initiatives school heads employ to nurture teacher leadership is delegation. However, delegation in this context is not merely task assignment; it is strategic and relational — designed to develop leadership potential, build trust, promote collaboration, and strengthen the organizational culture of the school.

The participants emphasized that effective delegation begins with recognizing leadership capacity. School heads tap teachers who exhibit potential and assign them gradually increasing responsibilities—from small tasks to more complex roles — as a way to build their confidence and competence. Delegation also becomes an opportunity to bridge generations within the teaching force, where experienced teachers are paired with younger ones to foster mentorship and dynamic collaboration. This cross-generational model ensures continuity and shared learning.

Moreover, some leaders employ seniority as a basis for leadership roles, believing that experienced teachers deserve opportunities to leave a legacy before retirement. Others focus on interpersonal qualities, such as trustworthiness, accountability, and strong peer relationships, when choosing who to delegate tasks to—understanding that leadership is not just about skills but also about influence and relational harmony.

Several participants noted that delegation is not a sign of weakness but a mark of wise leadership, emphasizing that the success of the school is a collective endeavor. By entrusting teachers with meaningful roles, school heads affirm their trust in them, which in turn motivates teachers to take ownership and perform at their best.

Ultimately, strategic and relational delegation is a leadership tool that empowers teachers, strengthens school communities, and builds a culture where leadership is shared, practiced, and developed. It is a deliberate process of shaping teacher-leaders who are not only capable but also deeply connected to their peers and committed to the collective vision of the school.

Empowering teachers does not rest solely on giving them roles—it lies in how roles are assigned, the trust that underpins those assignments, and the strategic vision behind developing teacher leadership. School leaders in this study emphasized that effective delegation is not about offloading tasks but building capacity, nurturing trust, and recognizing teacher potential.

The first aspect that shows strategic delegation is the creation of potential leaders. As the saying goes, "Potential is a spark; belief is the flame." Courage is potential in motion. One has to believe in the ability to go beyond today.

Evidence of this is the sharing of Participant 3: "Akong i-tap those who have leadership potentials. Have them lead tasks, progressing from small to large ones. Ganahan sila ana."

The participant articulated a deliberate strategy of recognizing and tapping into the leadership potential of teachers by gradually assigning them responsibilities—from minor to more significant tasks. This approach reflects a relational understanding of empowerment, where school heads observe, trust, and guide teachers based on their readiness and interest. By doing so, school heads strategically cultivate leadership in a supportive and non-intimidating manner.

This mirrors DepEd's distributed leadership approach, as highlighted in the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH, 2020), which encourages school heads to provide developmental opportunities and foster shared leadership through delegation. In particular, domain 4 of the PPSSH emphasizes building professional learning communities and involving teachers in school-based management.

Moreover, this practice is consistent with Katzenmeyer and Moller's (2018) assertion that teacher leadership flourishes when leaders create platforms where teachers can lead beyond their classrooms. Giving teachers the

chance to lead "from small to big tasks" allows them to build confidence and skills progressively.

Similarly, York-Barr and Duke (2004, in Wenner & Campbell, 2017) emphasized that teacher leadership grows when school structures allow incremental exposure to leadership roles under a supportive environment.

Additionally, relational leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, 2018) supported this notion by highlighting the importance of recognizing the social and developmental context in which leadership unfolds. Delegation, when done relationally, enhances trust and builds the confidence of emerging leaders.

In essence, this initiative illustrates how school heads act as talent developers, identifying and nurturing leadership among their teachers. By employing strategic and relational delegation, they lay a foundation for sustained teacher-leadership, contributing to a more collaborative and resilient school culture.

In the same manner, participant 6 emphasized this idea, saying: "Delegation of work, ma'am. This means sharing of responsibility. The success of one is the success of the entire school." This statement highlights that empowerment is not only functional but also collective. This statement further illustrates a belief in shared accountability, where success is achieved not through individual effort alone, but through the collective strength of the school team. This principle resonates with DepEd's push for shared governance and collaborative leadership as outlined in the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH, 2020), specifically, under school leadership and management domain, which encourages heads to distribute tasks for collaborative school improvement. Further reinforcing this idea, FGD-P4 remarked, "It is only in the giving of responsibility to a teacher to lead that gives them the chance to practice their leadership skill."

This perspective supports the concept that delegation is not just task distribution but also a leadership development tool. It aligns with Wenner and Campbell (2017), who argued that authentic teacher leadership emerges when teachers are trusted with real responsibilities that stretch their leadership capacity.

Similarly, Ind-P7 acknowledges the necessity of delegation: "Not all work can be done by the school head alone. So, it is essential to assign teachers."

This pragmatic view reflects a leadership model that values efficiency through collaboration and avoids over-centralization. It aligns with Gurr and Drysdale's (2020) assertion that effective school leaders act as facilitators of leadership among teachers, distributing tasks to maximize school functioning and professional growth.

Moreover, Ind-P3 adds nuance to the delegation process by stating: "Magpili kog leader kay kanang accountable and understands their role. I can tell who is able and who can lead." This statement reflects a strategic lens to delegation, where the selection of teacher-leaders is based on maturity, responsibility, and clarity of role. The emphasis on intentional selection speaks to the relational nature of leadership—understanding teachers' capacities and matching them with appropriate opportunities. This practice aligns with DepEd's School-Based Management (SBM) framework, which encourages contextualized leadership practices and capacity-based delegation.

Collectively, these statements underscore a leadership philosophy that sees delegation not as relinquishing authority but as a strategic act of empowerment. By giving teachers responsibility, especially those who show initiative and accountability, school heads create a culture of ownership, trust, and shared success. As Harris and Jones (2019) argued, teacher leadership thrives when leadership is both distributed and relational—grounded in shared values, mutual respect, and a common vision for school success.

In addition to building leadership capacity among emerging teacher-leaders, school heads also recognize the strategic value of delegating leadership roles to senior and experienced teachers.

Participant FGD-P9 expressed this perspective: "My way of delegating is through seniority. Siyempre mas una man sila magretire dayon mas dugay sila sa serbisyo, at least they can leave a legacy."

This approach reveals a deeper intent—to sustain leadership culture and institutional memory by involving tenured teachers who have already demonstrated commitment and service. These experienced educators are entrusted not only with responsibilities but with the role of mentorship and legacy-building.

This practice reflects the DepEd-endorsed Professional Learning Community (PLC) model, wherein senior teachers often serve as mentors or peer coaches to younger colleagues, thereby transferring best practices and professional values. According to the DepEd Order No. 16, s. In 2017, mentorship emerged as a key strategy to support teacher development and enhance instructional leadership within schools.

Furthermore, this leadership initiative connects with the insights of Day and Gu (2019), who emphasized the importance of experienced teachers in shaping school ethos and mentoring the next generation of teacher-leaders. Delegating leadership roles to senior teachers not only validates their contributions but also strengthens continuity and coherence in school leadership transitions.

Additionally, Scribner et al. (2020) explained that veteran teachers hold deep knowledge of both the organizational culture and pedagogical expectations of their school community. When they are given leadership roles, they naturally serve as anchors of stability.

Another strategic approach that surfaced in the participants' responses is the intentional pairing of experienced teachers with younger ones, blending wisdom with dynamism in leadership tasks.

Participant Ind-P1 shared, "Magdelegate gyud ko and ipartner nako ang tigulang sa batan-on nga teacher aron bibo, the old ones can mentor the young ones and the young ones work faster – collaborative effort."

Similarly, participant Ind-P5, a younger school head, affirmed this practice, saying:"I am the youngest of all in school, so, what I did is delegation of work, ipartner nako ang tigulang ug ang batan-on nga teachers."

 Both statements demonstrate the relational insight that generational pairing enhances both mentoring and productivity, leading to balanced and collaborative leadership development.

This initiative reflects DepEd's promotion of peer coaching and mentoring, especially in the Results-Based Performance Management System (RPMS) and the Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions. The PPSSH (2020) under domain 3—instructional leadership—explicitly encourages school heads to promote team learning and mentoring among teachers. This strategy aligns with SBM practices where decision-making and professional growth are shared among teachers of varying experience levels, fostering intergenerational learning and professional respect.

Research also supports this method. Bangs and Frost (2019) explained that intergenerational collaboration enhances teacher leadership by creating reciprocal relationships where senior teachers offer wisdom and guidance while younger teachers contribute energy, innovation, and tech-savviness. This type of collaboration nurtures distributed leadership (Spillane, 2012) and builds a culture of mutual accountability, where responsibilities are co-owned and solutions are co-developed.

By intentionally bridging generations, school heads foster not only task completion but also transformative learning environments. These partnerships develop leadership capacity in both parties: the experienced teachers feel valued as mentors, while the younger ones gain confidence and guidance. This dual growth cultivates a resilient, collaborative school culture, laying the foundation for sustainable and inclusive teacher leadership.

Strategic delegation does not merely involve the assignment of tasks—it also involves building trust, nurturing relationships, and inspiring confidence, as captured in Ind-P3's statement: "I listen to their ideas and personal stories. I also task them into peer coaching (old ones and new ones). I also encourage them that they can do something good and that any tasks given is doable." This statement reveals a multi-dimensional approach to delegation where the school head acts not only as a manager of responsibilities, but also as a coach, motivator, and empathetic leader.

The integration of peer coaching, especially among senior and junior teachers, reflects a continuation of the intergenerational mentoring model previously highlighted. However, what makes this account unique is the emotional investment in the process—through active listening, personal validation, and encouragement. This approach speaks to the relational nature of leadership wherein empathy, communication, and support enhance the effectiveness of any delegated responsibility.

This leadership practice strongly aligns with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH, 2020), particularly under domain 4: developing self and others, which encourages leaders to foster a culture of continuous improvement through coaching, mentoring, and feedback. Likewise, DepEd's LAC sessions endorse peer coaching as a strategy to build collective capacity while respecting the individuality of teacher-leaders.

From a theoretical perspective, this echoes the principles of servant leadership (Greenleaf, in Eva et al., 2019), where listening, empathy, and encouragement are fundamental to empowering others. Furthermore, Leithwood et al. (2020) emphasized that successful school leadership requires a balance between technical delegation and emotional intelligence, especially when building teacher confidence to embrace leadership tasks.

The inclusion of teacher personal stories and the leader's affirmation that "any task is doable" underscores the leader's role in motivating through belief—a central concept in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which suggests that people are more likely to succeed when they are led by those who believe in their capabilities.

Ultimately, this approach reinforces the relational foundation of delegation. By coupling task assignment with affirmation and listening, the school head creates a psychologically safe environment where teachers feel heard, empowered, and capable of growing into leadership roles. Such emotional scaffolding ensures that empowerment is not merely operational, but deeply personal and sustainable.

Trust emerges as a powerful driver of teacher leadership in the reflections of Ind-P8, who shared, "I show them that I trust them to take over the school in my absence. Mo-show off man na sila kung sila nalang. Maningkamot ra na sila ug ilaha."

This statement underscores a deeply relational act—entrusting teachers with authority and responsibility in the absence of the school head—that naturally draws out leadership initiative, confidence, and performance. The insight captures a key principle in teacher empowerment: people rise when they are trusted.

This practice reflects DepEd's vision of school-based empowerment, wherein leadership is no longer exclusive to formal titles, but rather fostered through trust, support, and shared responsibility. The PPSSH (2020), under domain 5, explicitly emphasizes the need for school leaders to build a culture of shared accountability by allowing teachers to lead in both routine and critical situations. DepEd's emphasis on instructional supervision and school governance encourages school heads to mentor leaders from within, cultivating an internal pool of capable teacher-leaders through trust and modeling.

From a scholarly lens, Leithwood and Azah (2017) argued that trust-based delegation significantly contributes to collective teacher efficacy, as it affirms teachers' competence and encourages initiative. Similarly, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) confirmed that when teachers perceive trust from their administrators, they are more willing to engage in leadership roles and collaborative problem-solving.

Moreover, this result aligns with empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 2000), which posits that giving people actual decision-making authority leads to increased ownership, commitment, and skill development. Ind-P8's observation that "maningkamot ra na sila ug ilaha" shows that autonomy leads to agency, where teachers feel a greater sense of duty and motivation when they are entrusted with the school's well-being.

By demonstrating trust, the school head not only lightens the administrative load but also sends a strong message that teachers are capable, valued, and essential contributors to school leadership. It transforms everyday delegation into a form of leadership preparation, where teachers begin to envision themselves in more significant roles, eventually paving the way for formal leadership succession within the school.

A critical yet often understated component of effective delegation is the quality of interpersonal relationships within the school. This is emphasized in Ind-P4's reflection: "I see to it nga ang akong ipalead kay katong naka-establish ug positive relationships with colleagues."

The school head underscores the strategic decision to delegate leadership roles to teachers who have already earned the respect and trust of their peers. This approach not only ensures smoother implementation of tasks but also fosters a harmonious and supportive leadership environment.

This practice closely aligns with DepEd's emphasis on school culture and shared leadership. Under domain 1, leading strategically, of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH, 2020), leaders are encouraged to create inclusive and respectful working relationships, recognizing that leadership effectiveness is not based solely on competence, but also, on the ability to influence and collaborate. Delegating leadership to teachers who maintain positive relational capital helps build school-wide trust and shared responsibility, a cornerstone of School-Based Management (SBM).

Supporting this, Spillane (2012) argued that leadership is distributed not merely by roles but through interactions among individuals. Therefore, those who exhibit strong interpersonal ties often serve as more effective catalysts for school-wide initiatives. Likewise, Harris and Jones (2019) highlighted that teacher-leaders who are embedded in strong relational networks are better positioned to lead change, as they are perceived as approachable, credible, and inclusive by their peers.

Ultimately, this approach reinforces that empowering teacher-leadership is not just about assigning authority, but about selecting those whose presence and character already influence others positively. Leadership that emerges from positive relationships is more likely to inspire collaboration, reduce conflict, and result in sustainable teacher-leader engagement.

Theme 2: The Power of Affirmation

Leadership begins with recognition—not of status, but of potential. The voices of the participants in this study echoed a common truth: affirmation is a powerful catalyst for empowerment. Teachers are more likely to lead, grow, and reach for greater heights when they feel seen, valued, and supported. In schools where the culture honors both small victories and shared struggles, a space is created where teachers feel safe to rise, take initiative, and aspire for leadership roles.

The school heads interviewed in this study consistently emphasized the importance of verbal praise, public recognition, trust, and active listening. Whether through heartfelt expressions of thanks, certificates of recognition, or simply acknowledging a teacher's potential, affirmation was used not only to validate efforts but also to inspire action. These seemingly simple gestures carry deep emotional weight, reinforcing each teacher's sense of purpose and belonging in the school community.

Beyond verbal praise, participants described how empathy and presence build psychological safety, enabling teachers to express ideas, take on new responsibilities, and even apply for promotion. Acts such as mentoring, technical assistance, inclusion in decision-making, and peer coaching further deepen this culture of affirmation. It is within this emotionally supportive environment that teachers begin to see themselves not just as followers, but as leaders in their own right.

Affirmation then becomes more than motivation—it becomes transformation. It is a leadership tool that builds confidence, promotes collaboration, and nurtures leadership readiness. As the participants highlighted, when teachers are affirmed and empowered, they do not just perform—they flourish. They carry the vision of the school forward, not because they are told to, but because they believe they can.

Affirmation in leadership is a foundational approach that builds confidence, enhances performance, and motivates teachers to lead. Creating a culture of appreciation emerged as a central theme in empowering teachers. One participant emphasized the importance of recognizing even the smallest achievements.

In nurturing teacher-leadership, one of the most accessible yet powerful strategies school heads can employ is the consistent affirmation of teachers' efforts and achievements. This is illustrated in the insight of Ind-P2, who shared,"Giving recognition and appreciation on their achievements, even in small wins. Di ba mas mamotivate sila to lead. Iboost gyud." This statement underscores the profound effect of verbal recognition and praise in fostering motivation and encouraging teachers to embrace leadership roles.

Affirmation, particularly in the form of recognizing "small wins," plays a critical role in building teachers' confidence and sense of self-efficacy—both of which are essential prerequisites for leadership. When school heads acknowledge even modest accomplishments, they create an environment where teachers feel valued, seen, and capable of doing more. This practice aligns with DepEd's commitment to teacher motivation and morale, as highlighted in the National Adoption and Implementation of the Results-Based Performance Management System (RPMS-PPST, 2018), where recognition and feedback are embedded in the performance appraisal process to promote continuous growth.

Recent studies also support this. Wang and Hall (2019) found that verbal affirmation significantly increases teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and willingness to take on leadership responsibilities. Similarly, DuFour and Fullan (2013) asserted that affirmation fuels teacher-leaders when it is tied to meaningful contributions, helping them see their role not just as performers of tasks but as agents of change.

By highlighting and celebrating small wins, school heads are not merely offering compliments—they are laying down the psychological groundwork for transformational leadership development. Affirmed teachers are more likely to take initiative, inspire others, and go beyond their comfort zones. In this way, affirmation becomes a leadership act, creating ripples of empowerment across the school.

Empowering teacher-leadership does not always begin with formal training or policy—it often starts with something much more personal and immediate: appreciation. Several participants underscore that recognition, whether verbal, symbolic, or emotional, is foundational to building confidence and motivation in teachers who may one day lead.

Ind-P6 captured this when saying: "Recognizing their achievements through rewards will let them feel important and appreciated. A good leader produces good leaders, too." This statement points to a direct relationship between recognition and empowerment, emphasizing that leadership multiplies when it is grounded in appreciation. By rewarding achievements—even symbolic gestures like a certificate or mention during meetings—school heads reinforce a teacher's value to the school community. This practice aligns with DepEd's RPMS-PPST (2018), which encourages leaders to recognize individual and collective contributions to promote professional growth and motivation.

In a separate but related reflection, the same participant added: "I tell them that there is something good in them and that they are a contributor to any accomplishment of the school." Here, the school head demonstrates positive reinforcement and strengths-based leadership, which helps teachers develop a sense of belonging and purpose. This closely aligns with the concept of strength-based supervision, a model encouraged in many DepEd schools where school heads highlight and nurture teacher strengths rather than merely correcting deficits.

FGD-P5 echoed this same sentiment, sharing: "I am grateful to the teachers. I motivate and encourage them. The word 'thank you' is a simple appreciation. I praise the teachers so that they will be motivated." This statement reflects the emotional and relational foundation of affirmation. While seemingly simple, expressions of gratitude such as "thank you" play a crucial role in making teachers feel acknowledged, uplifted, and ready to take on more. In the context of DepEd practices, this aligns with LACs that promote team morale and mutual appreciation as part of professional learning environments.

From a research perspective, Kim and Kim (2021) found that regular recognition from school leaders is strongly correlated with teacher resilience and willingness to lead initiatives. Similarly, Cerna et al. (2019) emphasized that public praise and informal rewards contribute to a positive school climate where teachers feel safe to innovate and lead. These findings support the participant insights, showing that a culture of appreciation enhances leadership motivation and long-term commitment.

Connecting these statements, it becomes clear that affirmation is not a one-time act but a leadership habit that contributes to a culture where teachers feel seen, valued, and empowered. When school heads consistently celebrate teacher strengths and contributions—no matter how small—they reinforce an environment where teacher-leadership naturally emerges.

In essence, creating a culture of appreciation is a deliberate leadership initiative—one that doesn't require

resources but demands mindfulness and sincerity. And when school heads live out this practice, they not only inspire others to lead but also shape a school culture that honors excellence, encourages risk-taking, and builds a community of empowered educators.

Empowerment begins not only with recognition but with deep understanding. In schools where teacher-leadership thrives, school heads do more than assign tasks or recognize performance—they listen, empathize, and respond to the struggles of teachers with compassion and sincerity.

FGD-P1 expressed this by stating: "Meet them and listen to their struggles. Make them work as a team. Medyo bibo gyud ni pero in the end masabtan man sa school head ang ilang struggles and then you can assist." This statement clearly emphasizes the value of presence and active listening. By making time to hear teachers out—not only during formal conferences but even in casual, team-based moments—school heads can respond meaningfully to teachers' needs. This aligns with DepEd's policy on teacher wellness and mental health (DepEd Order No. 14, s. 2020), which advocates for empathetic leadership as a core value in strengthening teacher motivation and retention.

Similarly, FGD-P2 highlighted the importance of empathy as a first step toward meaningful leadership: "Seek first to understand to be understood. Dili sa mag react nganung ingon ani ang outcome. A good leader intends to understand that is why he listens." This sentiment reflects a Stephen Covey-inspired principle embedded in modern leadership—that leaders listen not to reply, but to understand. In educational settings, such empathy allows teachers to feel emotionally safe, which, according to Leithwood et al. (2020), is a condition that encourages initiative, collaboration, and leadership development among staff.

By creating a space where teachers' voices are heard and their challenges validated, school heads foster a leadership culture built on relational trust. According to Bryk and Schneider (2018), relational trust between school leaders and teachers significantly predicts the success of leadership distribution and innovation in schools. Teachers who feel genuinely listened to are more likely to step up as leaders, confident that their struggles will be supported and not judged. This empathic approach also reflects the transformative leadership style encouraged by DepEd, where emotional intelligence, humility, and compassion are seen not as soft traits, but as strategic tools for building strong professional learning communities.

In sum, cultivating an empathic culture is a powerful affirmation strategy. When school heads take time to listen and understand truly, they lay the foundation for trust, motivation, and ultimately, the emergence of empowered teacher-leaders.

Empowering teacher-leadership does not occur in isolation—it thrives when school heads provide consistent technical assistance and when institutions formally recognize teachers' contributions. As emphasized by DepEd's SBM framework and supported by studies like those of Hargreaves and Fullan (2020), leadership flourishes when schools foster a culture of support and celebration. This subtheme captures how school heads facilitate growth through both hands-on guidance and meaningful recognition.

Ind-P8 expressed his related thoughts with the statement, "Ang akong ginahimo mao ang technical assistance or mentoring and coaching, LAC session. Simple lang ang kalipay sa teacher, appreciation and recognition lang payts na gyud."

The participant highlights a practical yet impactful approach in empowering teacher-leadership: combining capacity-building mechanisms such as mentoring, coaching, and LAC sessions with genuine recognition and appreciation. This practice affirms that teachers thrive when they feel supported, seen, and valued.

From a leadership standpoint, this reflects the transformational and instructional leadership models, which assert that leaders who invest in professional development and offer consistent feedback promote not just compliance, but commitment (Bass & Riggio, 2014).

In the Philippine context, this is echoed in DepEd Order No. 35, s. In 2016, the institution established the LAC as a school-based strategy for continuing professional development. It aims to enhance teacher quality by creating opportunities for peer learning, coaching, and mentoring—activities directly referenced by Ind-P8.

Moreover, the statement affirms that appreciation—no matter how simple—can deeply motivate teachers. According to Ingersoll and Merrill (2017), teachers are more likely to remain committed and exhibit leadership when school culture reinforces their efforts through public acknowledgment and moral support. Even without monetary incentives, affirmation in the form of praise, trust, or increased responsibility can drive teachers to take initiative and aspire for growth.

The integration of technical assistance with emotional reinforcement serves as a dual approach: it builds competence while sustaining morale. This dual strategy creates a fertile ground for teacher-leaders to emerge, primarily when school heads act not only as administrators but also as mentors, listeners, and advocates.

Ultimately, the point of technical assistance and institutional recognition proves that empowering teacher-leadership does not require grand gestures. As shown in the statement, consistent development support, combined with timely affirmations, can inspire teachers to rise, lead, and make a meaningful impact within and beyond their classrooms.

Great leaders, aside from managing, they mentor, inspire, and open doors to growth. When school heads champion continuous learning and actively involve teachers in professional development, they ignite a culture of excellence. This subtheme highlights how leadership becomes a driving force behind every teacher's journey to becoming better, bolder, and more empowered in their craft. FGD-P3 clearly emphasized this statement: "I encourage them to perform best so they can have promotion papers. Number one akong goal is dapat ma-promote sila. Together we stand, together we fall. Kaya na, dito, hindi paselfish. It's win-win."

Meanwhile, Ind-P3 confirmed by saying this, "I motivate them to submit papers for promotion, to gather papers for ranking and never hesitate to try." Additionally, Ind-P1 affirmed it with the statement: "I encourage them to perform at their best to qualify for promotion."

Across the three participants' insights, a unifying thread emerges: school heads recognize the crucial role of affirmation and encouragement in steering teachers toward professional advancement. The consistent emphasis on "promotion", "motivation", and "encouragement" reflects a leadership culture rooted in collective upliftment, where the success of one becomes a shared victory for the entire school community.

Empowering teachers begins with making them feel seen, heard, and valued. When school heads create inclusive spaces and foster motivation, teachers gain a stronger sense of belonging and purpose. This subtheme emphasizes how inclusive leadership and encouragement can uplift teacher morale and fuel a shared commitment to school success.

Ind-P3 gave a proof of this same finding, saying: "I also include them in the decision-making for the school when needed. I also encourage them that they can do something good, and that any tasks given are doable." This statement further illustrates a school head's approach to affirmation through inclusion and belief-building, underscoring a leadership strategy that values the empowerment of teachers through trust and participatory roles. By involving teachers in decision-making processes and reinforcing their capability, the school head instills a deep sense of belonging, importance, and potential in them.

Such acts of inclusion reflect affirmational leadership, where empowerment arises not from formal promotion alone, but from being seen, heard, and trusted.

According to Leithwood et al. (2020), leadership that engages teachers in shared decision-making strengthens professional identity and develops leadership confidence among staff. Furthermore, this approach aligns with

the teacher leadership for learning framework (OECD, 2016), which emphasizes that schools must build a culture where teachers feel confident to contribute to decisions, take initiative, and lead changes. Inclusion, paired with verbal encouragement, becomes a powerful leadership tool to move teachers from passive implementers to active decision-makers.

In the context of public schools in the Philippines, where hierarchical leadership is often dominant, a school head's effort to involve teachers in decisions is a progressive initiative toward democratic leadership. This not only boosts morale but also nurtures a pipeline of teacher-leaders who feel equipped and affirmed to lead beyond the classroom.

The unit meaning of inclusion and motivation reflects a school head's belief in shared governance and motivational affirmation. By inviting teachers into key decisions and encouraging them with words of support, school heads plant seeds of confidence, competence, and leadership capacity, all of which are essential in empowering teachers toward future leadership roles.

A school environment that nurtures trust, respect, and open communication allows teachers to express themselves without fear of judgment or retaliation. Psychological safety is a cornerstone of empowered leadership—it fosters risk-taking, innovation, and honest feedback. This subtheme highlights how school heads cultivate emotionally secure spaces where teachers feel safe to lead, grow, and collaborate.

Participant Ind-P7 specifically mentioned: "There is a good effect of work when built on trust. Teachers will become leaders who know their place and seeks always for positive results. They would love to work in teams and collaborate."

Ind-P5 added: "As a school head, I foster a shared sense of purpose where teachers feel empowered. Importante kaayo ning trust gyud. Creating a safe, supportive environment where dili mahadlok ang teachers moduol sa imo."

Both participants stress that trust is foundational in creating a school culture where teachers feel not only safe but also motivated to step up into leadership roles. The concept of psychological safety—a climate where individuals feel accepted, valued, and unafraid to express themselves or take initiative—is central in these statements. Teachers, when surrounded by trust and support, are more willing to collaborate, take risks, and accept leadership responsibilities.

This finding aligns with Edmondson's (2019) concept of psychological safety in team settings, which posits that when individuals believe their environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, they are more likely to show initiative, innovation, and leadership. Applied in the school setting, it suggests that affirmation through a trusting culture is a strategic leadership tool that transforms ordinary teachers into confident leaders.

Further, these practices show a movement toward transformational leadership, where trust is not demanded but built through intentional relationships (Bass & Riggio, 2006). School heads who cultivate trust not only affirm their teachers' value but also create a school climate where shared goals, positive expectations, and emotional security drive leadership growth.

In the Philippine context, where cultural respect for authority can sometimes limit teacher voice, fostering trust serves as a deliberate empowerment strategy. It tells teachers that their ideas matter, and that leadership is not confined to titles but begins with the freedom to engage and lead within a supportive environment.

Thus, under the theme, the power of affirmation, the unit meaning creating psychological safety, illustrates that school heads who build trusting, supportive spaces do more than manage—they mentor, empower, and liberate leadership potential within their schools.

Theme 3: Leading by Example

Authentic leadership is not proclaimed—it is practiced. Among the most consistent insights shared by participants is the belief that school heads must first embody the very values and behaviors they wish to instill

in their teachers. This theme, leading by example, underscores the importance of modeling leadership through action, consistency, integrity, and emotional maturity.

School heads play a crucial role in modeling behaviors, values, and mindsets that shape the professional culture within schools. When leaders consistently display integrity, punctuality, emotional maturity, and authenticity, they indirectly guide teachers in how to lead themselves. Teachers often mirror the character and leadership approach of their administrators. This theme reveals that empowerment begins not with words, but with lived actions.

The participants pointed out that credibility begins with the leader's character. Whether it is punctuality, commitment, transparency, or resilience in the face of adversity, teachers closely observe and mirror the standards set by their leaders. When school heads demonstrate discipline, fairness, and accountability, they inspire their teachers to do the same—not out of obligation, but out of respect and trust.

Moreover, school heads emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence and authentic leadership. Leading with both heart and conviction enables school leaders to connect deeply with their teachers, foster mutual understanding, and create a culture where decision-making is both firm and compassionate. Teachers are more likely to step into leadership roles when they see that leadership is human, values-driven, and inclusive.

Leadership in schools is most effective when school heads model the behaviors, values, and attitudes they seek to cultivate among their teachers. Leading by example is not just about being present—it is about being consistent, emotionally intelligent, authentic, and inspirational, especially in times of challenge. Below is the synthesized analysis of participant insights.

One recurring thread in the voices of school heads is the conviction that leadership is not merely a position, but a visible, lived example. The participants in this study emphasized that teachers are more likely to be empowered when their leaders model the very values, discipline, and dedication they expect from their team,

Participant Ind-p4 made sure to point out:"I think that a leader must be an example,a model. That's why it's tough to be a leader. You know this Bible quote, you will be measured by the measure that you use to measure others. For example, if I expect my teachers to be there before 7:15, I should be there before 7:15. And so if the teachers see me doing it, then there's no need for explanation. No need for an excuse. If she can do it, we can too, si maam nga ganun."

This participant's insight powerfully underscores the idea that exemplary leadership begins with the self. The school head embraces role modeling as a deliberate and conscious practice in shaping teacher conduct and professional disposition. The emphasis on arriving ahead of time becomes more than a personal habit—it becomes a symbolic leadership standard that subtly compels teachers to internalize similar expectations without coercion.

Anchored in the biblical wisdom of reciprocity and fairness, the participant highlights the moral dimension of leadership. The statement, "You will be measured by the measure that you use to measure others," reflects not only ethical consistency but also mirrors a values-based approach to school leadership.

This aligns with DepEd's school leadership framework, which promotes transformative and servant leadership as foundational in fostering teacher capacity. DepEd emphasizes the importance of leadership by influence rather than authority, where school heads model desired values and behaviors as a way to build respect, not compliance.

Moreover, this echoes Bandura's social learning theory (as cited by Schunk, 2012), which posits that individuals learn behaviors by observing role models, particularly those in positions of authority. Teachers, especially novice ones, are more likely to emulate behaviors demonstrated by respected leaders—making the principal's presence and punctuality a powerful form of silent mentoring.

Supporting this, Bush and Glover (2016) noted that effective school heads model professional behavior that

establishes expectations and sustains school culture. Similarly, Hallinger (2021) emphasized that instructional leaders inspire followership not only through directives but more importantly through visible, consistent actions aligned with school goals.

In a local context, Brillantes and Fernandez (2018) noted that in Philippine public schools, leadership influence is strongest when seen in everyday actions rather than formal mandates. A principal's consistency, humility, and discipline often generate a ripple effect among teachers, resulting in enhanced collective accountability and morale.

The participant's statement ultimately reinforces the notion that empowering teacher-leaders starts by demonstrating what responsible, values-driven leadership looks like in action. When school heads embody the behaviors, they want to instill, they build credibility, reduce resistance, and motivate teachers to lead by their example.

Effective school leadership requires a balance of emotional intelligence and hands-on support. Leaders who understand the emotional landscapes of their teachers while providing practical guidance and mentorship foster deeper trust and stronger professional bonds. This subtheme underscores how school heads combine empathy with actionable leadership to inspire confidence, reduce stress, and enhance teacher effectiveness.

Participant Ind-P4 expressed his thought about this by saying, "Another is to have a greater emotional intelligence, one who does not only think of the ideals but practical in any aspect. I think leadership would only be effective if you influence others to lead."

This reflection highlights a deeper dimension of leading by example—the internal qualities that school heads must embody, particularly emotional intelligence and practical judgment. The participant emphasizes that leadership is not just about lofty ideals but also about pragmatism—the capacity to adjust, understand others, and deal with real-life situations in the school context with composure and clarity.

By advocating for emotional intelligence (EI), the school head recognizes that leadership effectiveness rests heavily on one's ability to understand and manage emotions, both their own and those of others. This ability to respond, not react, helps create a calm, supportive atmosphere where teachers feel psychologically safe and emotionally understood.

In the local education setting, Dimmock and Walker (2019) and Llego (2020) observed that many Filipino school heads succeed when they demonstrate approachability, empathy, and decisiveness, thereby encouraging teachers to step into leadership roles with confidence.

Furthermore, this perspective affirms PPSSH domain 5, personal and professional attributes and interpersonal effectiveness, which encourages school leaders to become reflective and emotionally aware, modeling traits that inspire others to lead. Leaders who balance idealism with realistic strategies often command deeper trust and mobilize others more effectively.

This statement reinforces that leadership modeling is not only about visible behaviors (like punctuality or presence), but also about internal dispositions—how the leader responds with humility, flexibility, and human understanding. When school heads exemplify emotional maturity and practical thinking, they foster a culture of influence, where leadership becomes a shared and inclusive journey, not an exclusive position.

Trust is the cornerstone of any thriving school culture, and it is built through consistent integrity and fairness from those in leadership. When school heads uphold ethical standards and treat teachers with impartiality, they nurture a climate of mutual respect and psychological safety. This subtheme highlights how modeling honesty and equity fosters a strong foundation for teacher empowerment and collaborative growth. Clearly stated in his statement, Ind-P7 pointed out, "When a school leader is transparent, teachers will also do the same. A good school leader maintains good morale among their teachers."

This insight underscores how integrity and fairness, when consistently modeled by school heads, serve as foundational traits that influence teacher behavior and morale. The participant believes that transparency in

leadership has a cascading effect: when school leaders are open, honest, and equitable in their decisions and actions, it encourages teachers to adopt the same ethical standards in their own professional conduct.

By practicing transparency, the school head sets a moral benchmark for the teaching staff. This aligns with moral and ethical leadership theories such as those described by Leithwood et al. (2020), which stress that trust and respect are earned through consistent, fair, and values-driven leadership. Teachers are more likely to lead, innovate, and take ownership when they believe their leaders act with honesty, clarity, and fairness.

This principle also mirrors the transformational leadership approach, where a leader's authenticity and ethical

example inspire others to emulate similar values. Transparency allows for open communication and shared decision-making, reducing feelings of favoritism or exclusion—factors often cited as demotivators among teachers in hierarchical systems (Day & Sammons, 2016).

In the Philippine educational context, PPSSH domain 5 also advocates for leaders to exhibit ethical behavior, integrity, and personal accountability as these build professional credibility. When a leader is perceived as fair and transparent, they are more likely to inspire voluntary leadership among teachers, rather than relying on authority or obligation.

Moreover, transparency boosts teacher morale, as noted by Navarro and Santos (2018), who emphasized that Filipino teachers feel more confident in assuming leadership roles when they work in a school environment where expectations are clear and recognition is fair.

Ultimately, leading by example through fairness and integrity not only cultivates a culture of trust but also strengthens the moral fiber of the school community, making leadership a shared and replicable practice.

One of the most potent ways school heads empower teacher-leadership is by modeling the very values and behaviors they wish to cultivate among their teachers. Through consistent actions that reflect conviction, integrity, and empathy, leaders create a ripple effect that encourages teachers to emulate the same qualities. As such, leadership becomes not just a title or role but a way of being that is observed, internalized, and passed on.

To open the idea about this, Ind-P8 mentioned: "Another is being a model for decision making. A good leader takes stand and weighs things to make a decision, no fear, all hopes and trust.Lead with the heart. Lead with the heart because if we lead with the heart, everything follows."

This reflection draws attention to the moral core of leadership—that authentic leadership is not merely about authority or technical decision-making but about making choices rooted in conviction, compassion, and hope. The participant affirms that "leading with the heart" embodies the kind of authentic leadership that school heads must demonstrate to empower teachers to lead with confidence, humanity, and trust. Such leadership echoes the principles of heart-centered leadership, which prioritize empathy, values, and connection over cold, procedural governance.

This approach is particularly vital in schools, where decisions impact not only instructional systems but also human relationships. When a school head models courageous yet compassionate decision-making, they signal to teachers that leadership is not about perfection but about accountability, integrity, and empathy. This sets the tone for teachers to take initiative, make sound decisions, and embrace leadership roles without fear of judgment.

As affirmed by De Guzman and Tan (2021), Filipino school leaders who demonstrate emotional depth, openness, and compassion are more effective in building a culture of mutual trust and collective action, empowering teachers to lead not out of obligation but from a place of shared purpose. By modeling heartfelt decision-making, the school head not only sets a strong ethical standard but also instills courage and trust among teachers—key factors in nurturing a new generation of empowered, reflective teacher-leaders.

In the context of teacher-leadership development, school heads carry the immense responsibility of being both

instructional leaders and moral exemplars. Their behavior sets the tone for the school's professional climate and the leadership culture within. Modeling professional integrity, emotional intelligence, and decisiveness not only builds credibility but also influences teachers to emulate these behaviors, thereby developing their own leadership capacities (Kruse, 2021; Sahin & Duran, 2020).

Participant FGD-P1 said, "Being a school head is being a leader, so as much as possible I should be the leader they should look up to. The way I inspire them is already a motivation to practice their leadership." The participant's statement emphasizes that school heads empower teacher-leadership not only by delegating tasks or providing rewards, but by consistently embodying the values they wish to cultivate in their teams. This aligns with the findings of Hallinger and Wang (2022), who emphasized that teacher-leadership often emerges when leaders model authentic behaviors grounded in transparency, responsibility, and values-driven action.

The idea of "walking the talk" reinforces what Leithwood et al. (2019) called as "value-based leadership," which fosters both respect and intrinsic motivation among teachers. In this case, inspiration itself becomes a leadership strategy—driving transformation through admiration and trust. School leaders hold a mirror through which teachers observe the values, behaviors, and resilience expected in their professional journey. Their presence and demeanor—especially during times of adversity—can be powerful tools for modeling how a leader should respond, adapt, and inspire. When school heads show consistency in their professional attitude and decision-making, they reinforce the kind of leadership behavior they want their teachers to adopt (Nguyen & Slavit, 2021; Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

Participant FGD-P3 firmly said, "I try my best to model the attitude, lisud man ni pero dapat gyud kay kita maaoy models sa school as a leader. The way we deal with each challenge. It is a lesson for them to learned. They have to see the best in us amidst imperfections."

This statement highlights that effective modeling is not confined to ideal situations. Instead, it is through visible, composed responses to real-life school problems that leaders most powerfully influence aspiring teacher-leaders. The idea of "modeling perseverance and professionalism" is essential, especially in today's volatile educational environments (Alvoid & Black, 2014; Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016). When school heads uphold integrity, resilience, and humility—even in the face of difficulty—they demonstrate a grounded form of leadership that inspires trust and emulation. As asserted by Kearney et al. (2020), consistent behavior and visible emotional regulation from leaders serve as key indicators of trustworthiness and effective mentorship.

Effective school leadership goes beyond administrative efficiency—it is deeply rooted in modeling the values, behaviors, and work ethic expected of teachers. School heads who embody integrity, consistency, and service-mindedness serve as living templates of the leadership they aim to cultivate in others. Their actions become the mirror through which teacher-leaders shape their practices. In the DepEd ecosystem, modeling leadership is especially significant as it directly influences school culture, teacher morale, and the sustainability of empowerment initiatives.

From FGD-P5, the following was her statement: "Empowering teacher leaders is not an easy one because as a school leader. I have to be a good resemblance of my expectations. I influence; I inspire."

The statement of FGD-P5 emphasizes the idea that leadership begins with personal example. By stating that she must first be a "good resemblance" of her expectations, the participant acknowledges that teacher empowerment is not simply a directive but a reflective process—teachers respond to what they observe. As Kouzes and Posner (2017) articulated, exemplary leaders "model the way" by aligning actions with shared values, making them credible and influential. Similarly, DepEd (2020) underscores in its National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP) training programs the importance of leaders becoming "learning leaders"—not only managing but embodying pedagogical and professional excellence.

Inspiring others, as the participant highlights, entails embodying integrity, humility, and consistent dedication. According to Fullan and Quinn (2016), effective school heads act as "system players" who lead by influence rather than authority, fostering trust, autonomy, and shared ownership among teachers. When a school head embodies the leadership ideals they promote—such as punctuality, excellence, or empathy—teachers become

more confident in stepping into leadership themselves, knowing their environment supports them through authentic role-modeling.

Moreover, DepEd's Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP 2030) outlines a framework where transformational leadership must be evident at all levels, beginning with principals and head teachers who demonstrate behaviors that foster innovation, initiative, and integrity. As reflected in this quote, leadership becomes a continuous act of influencing, not imposing.

2. Challenges Encountered by School Heads in Empowering Teacher Leadership

While school heads strive to cultivate leadership among teachers, the journey toward empowerment is often obstructed by factors beyond the school leader's direct control. This theme encapsulates the external constraints that hinder teachers from embracing leadership roles—ranging from fear of confrontation with parents, judgment from peers, workload overload, to institutional hierarchies that discourage initiative.

Despite the sincere intention of many school leaders to empower teachers, various external constraints hinder teachers from fully embracing leadership roles. The participants highlighted experiences of criticism, intimidation, fear of failure, lack of authority, and time limitations—factors that erode their confidence and capacity to lead.

These findings point to the invisible barriers that operate within school ecosystems, shaped by culture, perception, and workload realities.

While school leaders strive to foster teacher empowerment, their efforts are often limited by external constraints that originate beyond the school walls. These include bureaucratic limitations, community pressures, and emotionally charged stakeholder interactions. A particularly under-addressed barrier is the fear and emotional toll teachers experience when navigating complex relationships with parents or stakeholders who hold conflicting views. Such confrontations can hinder a teacher's willingness to step into leadership roles, fearing criticism, misunderstanding, or lack of institutional support. Leadership thrives in psychologically safe spaces—and when that safety is compromised, empowerment becomes elusive.

Participant Ind-P4 expressed: "Another difficulty is facing the complaining parents. Yes, it can be difficult as well with people who have different views." Ind-P4 highlights a subtle yet significant barrier to teacher leadership: the emotional strain of dealing with confrontational or unsupportive parents. This fear of interpersonal conflict can dampen teachers' confidence and discourage them from assuming leadership roles that demand public visibility and engagement. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), effective teacher leadership requires not only instructional competence but also relational courage—something that becomes difficult in hostile or highly critical environments.

In the Philippine context, DepEd acknowledges the importance of stakeholder involvement through its SBM framework and partnership building policy. However, as noted in the implementation review by Tabares and Llego (2021), stakeholder engagement often lacks clear protocols for conflict resolution and communication ethics. Teachers frequently feel unprotected or ill-equipped to handle confrontations, especially when the school leadership does not intervene promptly or offer emotional support.

Furthermore, Day and Gu (2013) emphasized the concept of emotional resilience in school leadership. Teachers, especially those aspiring to lead, must be shielded and trained to manage emotionally taxing interactions. A culture of psychological safety, where teachers know they will be supported in tough interactions with stakeholders, is crucial to foster confidence and leadership growth. To address this concern, some schools under DepEd's Brigada Eskwela Plus model have instituted proactive communication training for teachers, enabling them to engage with parents more confidently. Still, as this response suggests, the emotional labor involved in conflict resolution remains an under-discussed barrier to empowerment.

Teacher leadership thrives in environments where support, respect, and mutual trust are present. However, external pressures such as judgment from peers, community misunderstandings, and the lack of a protective school culture often hinder teachers from stepping forward. Many capable teachers withdraw from

opportunities for growth due to the fear of being ridiculed, misunderstood, or unfairly criticized—especially when their efforts are met not with encouragement, but with skepticism. These external social dynamics, while less visible than structural issues, profoundly affect the motivation and confidence of aspiring teacher-leaders.

Moreover, FGD-P1 described his observation: "Gai-criticize by others, so this makes them doubt accepting tasks assigned. Mao ng dili nalang pud ganahan mag-leader leader kay naa may mga himantayon pod nga igo ra sa pagpanghilabot."

The statement from FGD-P1 captures a painful but common reality in many school environments: the presence of toxic peer dynamics. When teachers are subjected to ridicule or subtle sabotage from their colleagues, they are likely to internalize these criticisms and withdraw from leadership responsibilities, fearing further judgment. This experience, as discussed by Thornton (2019), is often referred to as "collegial resistance," where leadership efforts are undermined by peer jealousy or misunderstandings, limiting a school's leadership potential from within.

In the local context, DepEd's PPST emphasizes the importance of professional collegiality and mutual respect as foundations for growth. However, as found in the process evaluations of the National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP) reforms (DepEd, 2021), many schools still lack structured interventions to address toxic interpersonal dynamics or to reward peer support systems.

Moreover, the human resource development framework of DepEd promotes the establishment of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to foster collaboration and support. However, the effectiveness of these PLCs is often compromised when internal politics or judgmental attitudes prevail, as highlighted in this participant's experience.

Creating a psychologically safe environment where teachers feel free to lead without fear of peer judgment is crucial. School heads must take a proactive role in addressing this issue by modeling respect, affirming efforts publicly, and holding reflective sessions that promote empathy and inclusivity among staff.

Despite the presence of structures that promote teacher empowerment, many educators remain hesitant to take on leadership roles due to factors that are beyond their direct control. These include negative social experiences, toxic workplace behaviors, and rigid hierarchical norms within the school environment. One such significant constraint is the presence of authoritarian leadership styles, which can intimidate potential teacher-leaders and suppress initiative. The emotional residue of past experiences often leads to self-doubt, reluctance, and withdrawal from opportunities that could have otherwise nurtured leadership growth.

As mentioned by Ind-P2 with this statement, "They have this fear of taking a chance to lead because others are intimidating," it reflects how the behavior of dominant personalities in the school setting—whether they are school heads or senior colleagues—can inadvertently stifle leadership in others. According to Wenner and Campbell (2017), environments dominated by authoritarian or unsupportive leaders discourage initiative, especially among teachers who are still building confidence. When potential teacher-leaders associate leadership with intimidation rather than inspiration, they are less likely to step forward.

This result aligns with the findings of Bush and Glover (2016), who asserted that leadership that relies heavily on power distance and hierarchical control is detrimental to distributed leadership models. Such environments do not only suppress the voices of teachers but also cultivate fear and disengagement. A culture of dominance contradicts the DepEd's vision of teacher leadership embedded in the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), which advocates for mentorship, shared decision-making, and professional encouragement.

Moreover, in the DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2020—which operationalizes the NEAP transformation—one of the emphasized leadership qualities is the ability to create enabling environments that allow teachers to thrive. This includes recognizing that relational trust and inclusive behavior are essential leadership practices. Ind-p2's insight underscores the importance of replacing authoritarianism with relational leadership, where school heads and senior teachers serve not as gatekeepers of leadership but as enablers.

To address this constraint, school systems must invest in retraining leaders to move from a command-and-control style toward transformational leadership, which is rooted in empathy, empowerment, and support. This involves not only professional development but also deep personal reflection and feedback mechanisms to eliminate intimidation from the leadership culture.

Empowering teacher-leaders requires more than just capacity-building and encouragement—it also necessitates dismantling the psychological and cultural barriers that hinder teachers from stepping forward. One of the most damaging of these barriers is the pervasive blame culture, where individuals fear that taking initiative may result in unfair criticism or accountability when challenges arise. Such a culture fosters avoidance rather than leadership, particularly among those who already feel vulnerable in their roles.

More emphasis was from FGD- P6, who said: "Naa poy ubang MT nga dili maglead kay basin basolon lang lage pud sila." This statement from FGD-P6 highlights the psychological burden of fear—specifically, the fear of blame—as a serious deterrent to teacher leadership. Even experienced teachers, such as master teachers, may resist leadership roles when they perceive that accountability is weaponized rather than shared. This reinforces a culture of blame rather than one of growth and support.

Research by Harris and Jones (2020) reveals that in high-blame environments, teachers tend to remain passive to avoid criticism, thus weakening the implementation of shared leadership models. This behavior is intensified when the school climate lacks protective leadership structures that normalize mistakes as part of the learning and innovation process.

This concern is echoed in the DepEd RPMS, which emphasizes collaboration and accountability with a developmental perspective. When accountability turns punitive—when teachers feel they would be blamed for failures rather than supported—trust and initiative collapse.

Furthermore, under the PPST, domain 7 stresses creating a positive work environment where teacher professionalism is promoted and psychological safety is ensured. A culture of mutual responsibility and support, as recommended in DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017, is essential in moving from individual blame to collective efficacy.

To address this, school heads must model non-punitive responses to challenges and foster an environment where failures are treated as opportunities for learning, not judgment. Leadership that consistently recognizes effort, clarifies expectations, and provides developmental feedback can transform a blame culture into a coaching culture, where teachers feel safe and encouraged to lead.

While many school heads strive to empower teachers to take on leadership roles, several external constraints remain difficult to address. These constraints include negative school culture, lack of trust, fear of failure, and interactions with external stakeholders such as parents. In particular, some teachers hesitate to lead not because of a lack of ability but due to low confidence in conflict resolution. When faced with potentially confrontational situations—especially with demanding or critical parents—teachers may feel ill-equipped, thereby retreating from leadership opportunities. This reflects a need not only for professional training but also for emotional and interpersonal preparedness in leadership.

From his own observation, Ind-P4 stated that, "They have the difficulty dealing with complaining parents." The fear of facing confrontational parents has become a common concern, especially as communities grow increasingly vocal and assertive regarding school matters. Ind-P4's statement illustrates how even competent educators may resist leadership roles when they feel unprepared to manage external pressures, particularly in navigating parental complaints.

This observation aligns with the findings of Cansoy and Parlar (2018), who noted that unresolved external pressures—such as unstructured parent-teacher relationships—contribute to teacher burnout and reduce motivation to assume leadership tasks. The fear of parental confrontation does not only signal a lack of training in conflict resolution but also reflects the absence of institutional support for teachers facing emotionally charged situations.

In the Philippine context, DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, also known as the Child Protection Policy, emphasizes the need for positive communication strategies and professional behavior, particularly in engaging with parents and guardians. However, without specific support structures such as training in crisis communication, assertiveness, and mediation, teachers may continue to avoid visible leadership positions that increase their exposure to external criticism.

Moreover, the PPST, specifically domain 6 (community linkages), calls for teachers and leaders to engage families and communities in a respectful, constructive manner. This necessitates strong interpersonal skills, confidence, and institutional backing—elements often lacking in the current school culture.

Therefore, school heads are encouraged to offer mentoring and coaching on conflict management, create a non-adversarial platform for parent feedback, and empower teachers with both the tools and the emotional readiness to lead even in the face of external stressors.

Despite ongoing efforts by school heads to nurture teacher-leadership, a number of external and cultural barriers hinder its full realization. One critical constraint lies in the institutional mindset and traditional power structures that shape how teachers perceive their roles in school leadership. Many teachers still associate leadership exclusively with formal authority, especially with the school head, and hesitate to act beyond what they believe their position allows. This highlights the presence of perceived boundaries and deeply embedded hierarchical norms that limit initiative and participation.

Specifically mentioned by participant Ind-P3 was:

"They believe they are not the authorized ones. They believe only the school head should solve the problem. They think, 'nganung maglead man ko nga naa may school head? Overpoweran lugar nako?"

Ind-P3 reveals a persistent belief among some teachers that leadership is tied to formal titles and hierarchy. The assumption that only school heads are authorized to solve problems reflects not just a structural view of authority but also cultural hesitation to take proactive roles in leadership. This mentality discourages initiative, stifles teacher empowerment, and limits collaborative governance within schools.

This is consistent with the findings of Sergiovanni (2016), who emphasized that school cultures steeped in top-down leadership discourage shared responsibility. When teachers feel they must defer all decisions to the school head, it creates dependency rather than empowerment.

Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2020) pointed out that in many traditional school systems, the fear of "overstepping bounds" is rooted in institutional practices that fail to explicitly define or promote distributed leadership. In these environments, teachers may worry that asserting leadership might be misinterpreted as insubordination or power-grabbing.

In the Philippine setting, while DepEd Memorandum No. 144, s. 2022 encourages shared leadership and participative governance, many schools still operate under unwritten norms of positional authority. This results in reluctance among teachers to accept leadership responsibilities, even when invited, for fear of appearing presumptuous or challenging the school head's role.

To address matter, school heads must explicitly affirm and normalize teacher-leadership roles through practices like shared decision-making, role delegation with clear boundaries, and public affirmation of teacher contributions. Cultivating a school culture where leadership is seen as collaborative rather than hierarchical is key to overcoming these internalized limitations.

Even with empowering leadership at the school level, external demands and institutional pressures continue to limit the actualization of teacher-leadership. Teachers are often caught between administrative duties, instructional delivery, and co-curricular tasks, leaving them with limited time and energy to explore leadership roles. This reality reflects how structural constraints, especially time-related, can hinder even the most willing teachers from stepping up.

According to Participant Ind-P8, "Time constraints is a challenge to empowering them to lead because of their workloads." This statement reveals a pragmatic yet recurring barrier in the context of teacher-leadership: overload and time scarcity. Ind-P8's insight reflects the very real burden placed on teachers by the expanding scope of their responsibilities, which often include paperwork, compliance reports, extracurricular advising, and community coordination—on top of classroom instruction. As a result, even when leadership opportunities are presented, teachers may find it impractical to accept them due to lack of time and mental bandwidth.

This concern is echoed by Nollet and Waddell (2021), who noted that one of the primary deterrents to teacher-leadership is the lack of structural time embedded within the workday for leadership functions. Without institutional support to free up time, leadership remains a theoretical ideal rather than a practical role for many teachers.

In the Philippine context, DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016 on workload reduction acknowledges the issue of teacher burnout due to excessive clerical tasks and seeks to refocus teachers on instruction and learning leadership. However, the continued burden of reports and multiple non-teaching assignments remains a bottleneck, particularly in understaffed schools.

As Aguinaldo and Dela Cruz (2023) asserted, teacher-leadership only thrives when schools implement supportive systems—such as restructuring of duties, designated leadership time, or peer collaboration mechanisms—that recognize leadership as a shared professional function rather than an added burden. Therefore, empowering teacher-leaders requires more than motivation or affirmation—it calls for institutional adjustments that make space for leadership, both in schedule and in system.

While leadership potential exists within many teachers, their willingness to take initiative is often hindered by a prevailing sense of insecurity and low self-efficacy. This theme encapsulates the internal struggles of teachers who, despite having the capacity to lead, hesitate to step forward due to self-doubt, fear of failure, perceived incompetence, or lack of motivation for advancement.

This theme highlights the internal struggles many teachers face when offered leadership roles. The data reveals that low self-confidence, fear of failure, lack of experience, and comparison with others inhibit teachers from taking initiative or embracing leadership tasks. Despite observable potential in some, psychological barriers—especially low self-efficacy—limit their willingness to lead.

Leadership is not merely a structural designation—it is deeply personal. For many teachers, the idea of leading comes with an invisible weight: the fear of failure, fear of judgment, and fear of inadequacy. These inner struggles stem not from lack of willingness but from a lack of confidence in their own capabilities. In schools where leadership is encouraged at every level, it is still possible to find teachers who retreat from such roles—not because they are incapable, but because they believe they are.

Meanwhile, Participant Ind-P1 expressed, "Kanang hesitance to accept the tasks kay dili daw lage kabalo, basin dili kaya dayon ipasa ang responsibility sa uban." This participant's insight sheds light on the psychological barriers teachers face in assuming leadership roles. The statement reveals an internal dialogue rooted in self-questioning - "dili daw lage kabalo"—suggesting low self-efficacy, or the belief that one lacks the competence to perform tasks effectively. The tendency to "pass the responsibility to others" reflects a defensive strategy to avoid failure, which is a common reaction when people feel inadequately prepared or fear the consequences of taking initiative.

According to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015), low teacher efficacy can lead to diminished involvement in school-wide improvement initiatives. When teachers are not confident in their capabilities, they are less likely to volunteer, lead, or make decisions independently. In the Philippine setting, this issue becomes even more pronounced in schools with limited mentoring support or where hierarchical structures are rigid.

This is why the DepEd Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP) 2030 highlights the need to strengthen teacher leadership pathways by improving professional coaching, peer mentoring, and reflective practice. Programs such as the LAC and School-Based in-service trainings (INSETs) are designed to help teachers not just improve skills, but develop the confidence to apply them in real leadership scenarios.

Moreover, DepEd Order No. 11, s. 2019 (Policies on the Implementation of the NEAP L&D System) emphasizes that school heads must not only provide technical training but also cultivate psychosocial safety so that teachers feel secure in trying—even failing—as they learn to lead.

The account of Ind-P1 illustrates that the empowerment of teacher-leaders must begin by addressing their internal barriers. School heads must build a culture of trust, encouragement, and guided exposure, gradually removing the fear that hinders leadership growth. As DepEd advocates, fundamental transformation begins when teachers are not only trained—but also affirmed, accompanied, and believed in.

While teacher empowerment is often associated with skill development, a less visible barrier is a lack of aspiration or motivation to advance. Some teachers have the talent, the ability, and even the respect of their peers—but they do not envision themselves in leadership roles. This hesitation may stem not only from insecurity or fear of failure, but from deeply rooted uncertainties about purpose, identity, or alignment with leadership expectations.

Additionally, Participant FGD-P8 emphasized, "Naay mga naay potential leaders pero walay plano magpapromote so wala nag-effort." This statement reveals a disconnect between leadership potential and professional ambition. Despite having the capability to lead, some teachers consciously choose not to pursue promotions or formal leadership roles, which may appear as apathy but is more accurately understood as a form of insecurity, passivity, or disengagement from the larger career progression process.

According to Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory (2017), motivation to act is strongest when three psychological needs are met: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. If a teacher lacks a sense of agency or belonging in the leadership environment, or if past experiences have discouraged them from stepping up, they may shy away from opportunities, even if others perceive them as capable.

In the Philippine educational context, this is not uncommon. A study by Manzon et al. (2020) observed that many public-school teachers with leadership traits are reluctant to apply for promotion due to fear of increased stress, lack of political backing, or unclear expectations. Similarly, Lasaten et al. (2021) found that low motivation to pursue higher posts often correlates with limited mentoring and encouragement from school heads.

The DepEd national framework for teacher leadership and career progression emphasizes the importance of coaching and leadership shadowing programs to help teachers envision themselves in higher roles. DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017 (PPST) also underscores that teacher-leadership development should be proactive and personalized, recognizing that not all leadership must be positional—some are transformational even without promotion.

The insight from FGD-P8 emphasizes that potential is not enough—teachers must also be inspired and supported to realize that leadership is not reserved for the few but accessible to the willing. School heads must actively cultivate ambition by recognizing potential, celebrating small wins, and providing career guidance that breaks the false dichotomy between "teaching" and "leading."

A recurring challenge in the empowerment of teacher-leaders is the fear of making mistakes, particularly when it involves decision-making responsibilities. Even when teachers possess sufficient experience and insights, their self-doubt can override their willingness to lead. Leadership hesitation is often rooted not in incompetence but in fear—fear of judgment, fear of blame, and fear of failure. Without a culture that promotes shared accountability and supports risk-taking, such fears tend to deepen and paralyze initiative.

Fgd-p3 pointed out: "Lack of confidence to take a bigger step, especially during decision making. Mahadlok kay basin maoy basolon kung mapalpak." This reflection from FGD-P3 highlights a critical psychological barrier to teacher leadership: the reluctance to make decisions independently due to fear of personal accountability in the face of potential failure. The fear of being blamed creates a self-imposed limit on growth, where teachers hesitate not because of a lack of skills, but because of a lack of confidence in handling consequences.

Pascual (2020) noted that in the Philippine school system, decision-making is often viewed as the domain of school heads, and teachers feel exposed when expected to make judgments that carry weight. This feeling is intensified by school environments that lack psychological safety, where mistakes are punished rather than treated as learning opportunities.

DepEd advocates for building a culture of shared leadership and collaborative governance. As emphasized in DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2020 (Results-based Performance Management System), promoting collegiality and risk-sharing helps reduce the fear of being solely accountable for outcomes, thereby fostering teacher confidence in leadership.

FGD-P3's insight illustrates that leadership development must include emotional and psychological support structures. School heads should model accountability without blame, mentor teachers in decision-making strategies, and create a space where mistakes are seen as part of growth, not as grounds for criticism. By doing so, teachers gain the courage to take bigger steps and embrace their potential as leaders.

Low self-efficacy is one of the silent barriers to teacher leadership. It does not always stem from incompetence but often from internalized self-doubt, lack of prior experience, and absence of mentoring. Teachers who doubt their capabilities may turn down leadership roles—not because they are incapable, but because they believe they are not yet ready. This lack of confidence slows down the process of capacity-building and leads to a passive culture where initiative is left only to a few.

Participant Ind-P1 also shared: "Naa silay resistance to accept tasks kay lage dili daw kabalo." The participant's statement reflects a common mindset among teachers who shy away from leadership roles due to feelings of unpreparedness. The phrase "dili daw kabalo" directly reveals the teacher's belief that leadership requires a set of skills they do not yet possess. This self-perception of inadequacy prevents them from trying, even when opportunities are presented.

Villena and Garcia (2022) observed that in many Filipino schools, teachers' fear of leadership responsibilities stems from the absence of coaching and gradual exposure to leadership tasks, which leaves them uncertain about what is expected. Without scaffolding or mentoring from school heads, many remain reluctant to lead. To combat this, DepEd's NEAP initiatives and leadership development programs promote coaching, peer mentoring, and guided task assignments to build leadership confidence gradually. As outlined in the PPST, domain 7 underscores the importance of professional growth through collaboration and engagement in leadership roles, recommending incremental opportunities rather than abrupt delegation.

Ind-P1's statement underscores the need to deconstruct the myth that leadership requires perfection or mastery before action. School heads must recognize these silent insecurities and design leadership development efforts that start small—like leading a group activity or organizing a school event—with ample support. In doing so, teachers gradually realize their potential and grow into leadership roles with confidence and purpose.

Teachers are at the heart of school improvement, yet many potential leaders remain on the sidelines—not because of disinterest, but due to a lingering sense of inadequacy. This low self-efficacy may not be visible outright but reveals itself in the reluctance to take initiative or to speak up in leadership spaces. Cultivating teacher-leadership requires more than training; it requires a rebuilding of confidence, a culture of affirmation, and clear pathways for professional growth.

As mentioned by participant Ind-P5, "They are not confident. Some teachers do not feel equipped to lead or may lack the necessary skills and experience." The participant points to internal limitations—not a lack of potential but a lack of belief in one's capability. The phrase "do not feel equipped" highlights that the hesitation comes not from actual inability but from perceived incompetence, a hallmark of low self-efficacy.

In the local context, Caringal and Lumabi (2021) reported that some Filipino teachers avoid leadership opportunities due to fears of being judged or making mistakes, rooted in previous negative experiences or absence of leadership exposure. These factors contribute to a fixed mindset, where teachers see leadership as something reserved only for the "naturally capable."

In response, DepEd's PDF emphasizes the importance of progressive leadership roles—starting from classroom-level leadership to involvement in school-based management and decision-making. DepEd also promotes the mentoring and coaching program, which helps less confident teachers learn leadership skills gradually, supported by experienced school heads or master teachers.

The insights from Ind-P5 underscore the need to shift from a compliance-driven leadership model to a growth-oriented, inclusive leadership culture. By creating supportive environments where mistakes are viewed as part of the process and by equipping teachers with hands-on experiences, school heads can help teachers rebuild their self-perception. A confident teacher-leader does not emerge overnight but is developed through sustained encouragement, guided opportunities, and trust in their potential.

One of the major hindrances to empowering teacher-leadership is the internal struggle many teachers face regarding their competence. Despite having the capability, some educators find themselves paralyzed by fear—specifically, the fear of failure, blame, or making the wrong decision. This lack of self-efficacy prevents them from fully embracing leadership roles, even when opportunities arise. The following statement reflects this internal constraint that continues to limit their professional growth.

Participant Ind-P4 shared: "No one is brave enough to stand for the decisions made because of the thinking that things might not work." This participant's insight illustrates a common scenario in schools where decision-making becomes a source of anxiety. Teachers may fear that any mistake or unsuccessful outcome might lead to blame or judgment from colleagues, parents, or school heads. This aligns with Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, which asserts that individuals with low confidence in their abilities tend to avoid challenging tasks and decision-making responsibilities. Similarly, Klassen et al. (2014) emphasized that teachers with low self-efficacy often refrain from taking on leadership roles, particularly when there is a perceived risk of failure or public scrutiny.

In the Philippine educational context, DepEd emphasizes the value of teacher empowerment in the PPST, particularly in domain 4: curriculum and planning and domain 7: personal growth and professional development. These domains advocate for reflective practice and independent decision-making. However, when teachers internalize a fear-based mindset, these standards become difficult to meet, making it critical for school leaders to create environments that foster psychological safety.

DepEd's SBM practices also underscore participative leadership and shared accountability. Yet, the persistent fear of being held solely responsible in cases of failure hinders teachers from taking initiative. Thus, the need for targeted capacity-building, mentorship, and an affirming culture becomes essential to address the psychological barriers to teacher-leadership. This insight reflects that empowerment is not just a matter of giving opportunities—it requires intentional strategies to dismantle fear, build confidence, and cultivate a culture where mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities, not grounds for blame.

One's journey into leadership often begins with a sense of self-worth and perceived capability. However, for many teachers—especially those who are new in the field—this sense of competence is often shaky. Insecure comparisons, fear of judgment, and a perceived lack of preparedness are common emotional hurdles. These internal battles contribute to the hesitation in stepping up as leaders, even when they show great potential. The following participant narrative captures this critical emotional reality:

Participant Ind-P7 explained that, "There are new teachers, and they have their feelings of insecurities. They think they are not as good as others." This reflection highlights the struggle many new teachers face as they enter professional communities with more seasoned colleagues. They often engage in unfavorable self-comparisons, which reinforce a fragile professional identity and lead to self-imposed limitations.

According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007), teacher self-efficacy—especially in early years—has a profound influence on classroom performance and willingness to take leadership initiatives. When teachers feel inferior, they are less likely to assert themselves or accept responsibility beyond their immediate tasks.

Moreover, literature from Richards et al. (2016) found that early-career teachers often lack confidence in their professional judgment and are easily discouraged by perceived underperformance. Without adequate affirmation and mentoring, this insecurity may evolve into a long-term barrier against teacher-leadership.

From a local context, the DepEd PPST specifically includes strand 7.1 (professional growth and development), which promotes self-reflection and continuing professional development. Yet the success of these standards hinges on whether teachers feel psychologically safe and supported, particularly in their early years of service. DepEd's teacher induction program (TIP) and LAC sessions are among the mechanisms aimed at addressing this need by fostering collegiality and personal growth among novice teachers.

To counteract feelings of inferiority, school leaders must ensure that early-career teachers are not only provided with technical training but also mentored in building self-confidence and professional identity. By creating spaces where teachers can safely share, reflect, and grow, the system strengthens its pool of future leaders from the ground up.

The process of becoming a teacher-leader is not always linear. It often begins with resistance, hesitation, and doubt. Yet with consistent encouragement and affirmation, teachers may gradually come to realize their potential and embrace leadership roles. This transformation emphasizes the critical role of school heads in shaping the mindset of teachers through supportive interventions. The following insight captures this gradual journey of self-belief:

According to participant Ind-P8, "Akong na-experienced is sometimes a refusal to do the task in leading gained positivity over time with motivation." This statement reflects the dynamic nature of self-efficacy. While initial refusal reveals the presence of self-doubt, the eventual shift towards acceptance demonstrates how motivational strategies—when sustained—can lead to growth in self-confidence.

Recent literature echoes this idea. In a study by Donohoo et al. (2018), it was found that collective teacher efficacy—where school culture supports mutual encouragement—has a more substantial effect on student achievement than any other school-based factor. Hence, fostering a climate of motivational support among teachers benefits not only their leadership capacity but also classroom outcomes.

Locally, DepEd's LDF underscores the importance of coaching, mentoring, and job-embedded learning to empower teachers (DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017). Initiatives such as LACs, instructional leadership training, and the National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP) upskilling programs create supportive platforms where hesitant teachers gradually build courage and clarity in taking on leadership roles. Therefore, the participant's shift from refusal to positivity illustrates how motivation—rooted in trust, encouragement, and shared responsibility—can reignite belief in one's leadership potential. It affirms that self-efficacy, though fragile at the start, can be nurtured with the right leadership culture and intentional empowerment strategies.

3. Capacity Intervention Strategies

Theme 1: Leadership Capacity Innovation

As the demands of 21st-century learning continue to evolve, school leaders must spearhead innovation that enhances teaching and learning. Leadership innovation in education involves equipping teachers not just with content and pedagogy, but also with the capacity to adapt, experiment, and lead change. School heads play a key role in facilitating training programs that promote creative instructional methods, global competitiveness, and learner-centered innovation.

In a rapidly changing educational landscape, school leaders must not only manage their institutions but also become visionaries who lead innovation, model adaptive thinking, and cultivate future-ready teachers.

This theme reveals how school heads recognize the crucial role of diversified leadership training in strengthening teachers' competencies and inspiring growth-oriented mindsets. The participants highlighted the importance of multi-faceted leadership development, including instructional, transformational, personality-based, spiritual, and innovation-centered training.

In this light, the statements gathered from school heads underscore the growing recognition of innovative leadership training as a vehicle for teacher empowerment, school transformation, and learner success.

In the ever-evolving educational landscape, school heads must not only manage but also innovate in building the leadership capacities of teachers. Empowering teachers as instructional and organizational leaders calls for more than delegation—it demands intentional strategies that promote initiative, adaptability, and creative thinking. Leadership innovation involves recognizing unique talents, providing platforms for teachers to lead in various capacities, and redefining the roles of educators beyond the confines of the classroom. The following narratives illustrate how school leaders are reimagining leadership development among teachers.

Participant Ind-P3 shared: "Adoptive leadership training. This is to learn to facilitate, train, and encourage teachers to take ownership of their own growth and development."

Moreover, Participant Ind-P1 added, "I think we need training on Teaching Innovations. All teachers want to

produce learners who are competitive across all countries. The field of work is very competitive. Even ang learning sa mga bata but if you have innovative teachers, mas dali ang learning sa mga bata."

These insights shed light on the need for adaptive and facilitative leadership development—one that transcends managerial tasks and instead focuses on cultivating teacher agency and professional autonomy. The respondent recognizes that school heads must not merely supervise but also serve as coaches and enablers of teacher leadership, fostering an environment where teachers are active participants in their growth.

The statements reflect a growing demand for teaching innovations that respond to global standards. The participant expresses the view that equipping teachers with innovative strategies can significantly enhance student learning and global readiness. In an era where economies and educational systems are rapidly evolving, educational leadership must move toward building transformative and innovative learning environments.

According to Fullan (2016), innovation in leadership entails creating cultures of collaborative experimentation where teachers are encouraged to try new strategies and reflect on their impact. Leadership that supports innovation does not rely solely on supervision but fosters a culture of professional curiosity, adaptability, and learner-focused improvement.

In the Philippine context, the Department of Education's Sulong EduKalidad program prioritizes teaching innovations as part of its reform agenda. Moreover, DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017, which introduces the PPST, explicitly outlines "innovation" as a key indicator under domain 4 (curriculum and planning) and domain 7 (personal growth and professional development). Teachers are expected to explore new teaching strategies and use data to improve learning outcomes — supported by leaders who understand and champion innovation.

Furthermore, the PPSSH, particularly under domain 4 (instructional leadership), requires school leaders to enable teachers to apply evidence-based innovations to make instruction more responsive to learners' needs and future challenges. By investing in innovation-driven training, school leaders ensure that teachers are not only globally competitive but are also capable of fostering future-ready learners. At the heart of effective school management is instructional leadership—a critical function of school heads that directly influences teaching quality and student outcomes. This role goes beyond administrative duties; it involves guiding teachers, fostering professional growth, and ensuring that instructional practices align with curriculum standards and learner needs. As instructional leaders, school heads serve as catalysts for academic excellence by setting clear goals, monitoring classroom instruction, and providing timely support to teachers. The following insights highlight how school heads enact and navigate their instructional leadership responsibilities.

As stated by Participant Ind-P8, "Instructional leadership training... This is to learn how to conduct meaningful observations and provide constructive feedback to teachers."

This response reflects the growing recognition that instructional leadership goes beyond compliance monitoring—it must empower teachers through data-informed, formative feedback. Research by Neumerski

(2019) emphasized that leadership should be rooted in coaching and professional inquiry, helping teachers critically reflect on their instructional practices. Similarly, Leithwood et al. (2020) asserted that impactful school leaders focus on improving classroom instruction through sustained support, not just managerial oversight.

This aligns with DepEd's LAC policy (DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016) and the RPMS-PPST framework, which advocates for instructional coaching as a core leadership function. According to DepEd Order No. 2, s. 2015, leaders must conduct evidence-based observations and provide feedback that encourages reflective practice and promotes learner-centered teaching.

Furthermore, Robinson et al. (2017) found that leaders who prioritize instructional feedback—rather than merely enforcing rules—positively impact both teacher effectiveness and student achievement. School heads, therefore, need capacity-building programs that train them in providing constructive, differentiated feedback that leads to action and growth. By investing in instructional leadership training, school leaders fulfill a dual role: guiding teachers toward excellence and cultivating a school-wide culture of learning, feedback, and innovation.

As the educational landscape becomes increasingly collaborative, school leadership must evolve from hierarchical decision-making toward shared and facilitative practices. Empowering teacher-leaders does not only involve delegation but also creating inclusive platforms where teachers feel heard, valued, and actively involved in the school's direction. Facilitative leadership promotes participatory dialogue, professional trust, and a culture of innovation by enhancing team collaboration and mutual accountability. To achieve this, school heads must be equipped with the proper training to facilitate—not just manage—teacher growth and collective school improvement.

Actively mentioning, Participant FGD-P3 said, "Then facilitative leadership training. This is to acquire skills in facilitating collaborative processes in teachers' meetings, professional learnings, mga team meetings ni siya." The participant's statement affirms the need for school leaders to become facilitators of learning and collaboration. This reflects a shift from traditional authoritative leadership toward more transformative and participative leadership styles. According to Wenner and Campbell (2017), effective facilitative leadership fosters professional dialogue, enables shared problem-solving, and cultivates teacher agency within school teams. These skills are essential in establishing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that drive collective instructional improvement.

In the Philippine context, DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016 institutionalized LACs, which thrive on facilitative leadership to promote peer-led learning and reflective practice among teachers. Facilitative leadership is also embedded in the PPSSH, particularly domain 2: instructional leadership, which highlights the importance of leading collaborative processes and fostering professional development.

Furthermore, research by Leithwood et al. (2020) confirmed that facilitative leadership enhances trust, collaboration, and school innovation, especially when leaders co-create goals and facilitate dialogue rather than impose directives. By engaging in facilitative leadership training, school heads not only gain technical skills in managing meetings but also build a school culture rooted in shared leadership and empowerment.

To continuously uplift school effectiveness and teacher empowerment, school heads must actively pursue innovative leadership development. One such approach is transformational leadership, which emphasizes vision-setting, motivation, and capacity-building. When leaders themselves are equipped to inspire and model innovation, it sets a powerful example that encourages teachers to embrace reform and instructional creativity.

Participant FGD-P2 shared: "Then, transformational leadership training. This is to enhance the ability to inspire and motivate teachers to embrace change and motivation. Tsada kaayo ni siya. Kani nga trainings kay fit sa teachers to embrace change and innovate sa ilang pagtudlo."

This participant emphasizes the importance of transformational leadership as a critical component in shaping a school culture receptive to change and instructional innovation. According to Nguyen et al. (2020), transformational leaders build commitment to organizational goals by creating a compelling vision, inspiring

others, and modeling desired changes. Such leadership is crucial in today's education system, where adaptive and proactive responses to evolving learning needs are increasingly demanded.

Aligned with this, the DepEd NEAP includes transformational leadership training modules under its School Leadership Excellence Development (SLED) program. These trainings aim to develop leaders who can build trust, articulate vision, and lead innovation, especially during educational transitions such as the shift to blended learning or new curriculum frameworks.

Moreover, Day and Sammons (2016) emphasized that transformational leadership enhances teacher motivation and professional commitment, primarily when leaders act as role models and provide intellectual stimulation. This fosters a climate where teachers feel supported and are more willing to innovate their pedagogy. It also aligns with PPSSH domain 1 (leading strategically), which promotes visionary and change-responsive leadership.

In sum, transformational leadership training empowers school heads not only to manage change but to ignite it meaningfully, motivating their teachers to innovate in ways that improve student outcomes and professional growth.

As school leaders take on greater responsibilities in mentoring and coaching teachers, it becomes essential for them to acquire skills in adult learning principles and coaching techniques. These tools equip leaders not only to assess performance but also to develop constructive, goal-driven feedback systems that respect the adult learner's need for autonomy and mutual respect.

According to Participant FGD-P4, "… adult learning and coaching training. This is to learn techniques in providing constructive feedback and setting goals, constructive dili destructive." This statement reflects the recognition that adult learners, such as teachers, require feedback that is developmental rather than punitive. Coaching that centers on trust, clarity, and collaboration is more likely to foster professional growth. According to Killion et al. (2020), adult learning frameworks emphasize respect for the learner's experiences, self-direction, and immediate applicability of learning—principles that are foundational in effective instructional coaching.

The emphasis on "constructive, not destructive" feedback also echoes research by Knight (2018), who asserted that coaching must focus on partnership and goal setting, where both the coach and the teacher co-construct plans for improvement. These coaching models empower teachers to reflect on their practices without fear of judgment, which in turn nurtures leadership potential.

Aligned with this, the DepEd's LAC framework encourages school leaders to adopt peer coaching and reflective learning circles anchored in adult learning principles. Additionally, DepEd Order No. 12, s. 2020 (on NEAP-recognized CPD programs) includes coaching and mentoring as a core leadership competency, emphasizing the importance of equipping school heads with adult learning strategies.

Further, the PPSSH under domain 5 (developing others) underscores the role of the school leader in "using coaching and mentoring to support the professional growth of teachers." Effective coaching, therefore, is not just about instruction—it is about enabling empowered leadership from within.

In cultivating empowered and forward-thinking teacher-leaders, innovative leadership must extend beyond pedagogical strategies and include holistic competencies such as financial literacy. When teachers are equipped with financial management skills, they are more stable, confident, and focused — traits essential for those taking on leadership responsibilities. School leaders play a strategic role in initiating capacity-building programs that respond to both personal and professional development needs of teachers.

Participant Ind-P4 emphasized, "I think also that our teachers need training on financial management, just like the other teachers. It's a need because we know that all of us have financial concerns." The participant's insight reveals a pragmatic but often overlooked area of teacher development: financial literacy. Financial stress and lack of budgeting knowledge can hinder a teacher's ability to lead effectively or focus on instructional

improvement. Teachers who understand how to manage personal finances are more likely to develop self-discipline, long-term planning, and confidence—traits that are transferable to leadership roles.

This opinion aligns with Schwabsky and Sagy (2020), who argued that financial wellness is critical to professional stability and psychological well-being, particularly for educators expected to take on leadership roles. Without financial clarity, teachers may shy away from additional responsibilities or leadership opportunities due to stress and perceived limitations.

In the Philippine context, DepEd Order No. 048, s. 2017 promotes teacher welfare and well-being by recognizing that financial education contributes to a healthier workforce. DepEd has also collaborated with institutions like Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) and the Department of Finance to conduct financial literacy training for public school teachers, acknowledging its role in teacher empowerment and risk management.

Moreover, under the PPST, domain 7 on personal growth and professional development, encourages continuous self-improvement, which includes life-skills such as financial literacy that ultimately support leadership readiness and resilience. Empowering teachers through financial management training strengthens their leadership capacity not only by reducing distractions but by enhancing their ability to plan, lead, and model responsible behavior to peers and students alike.

Theme 2: Holistic and Values-Based Trainings

In shaping empowered and resilient teacher-leaders, the school heads emphasized a dimension often overlooked in technical training programs—the human core of education. The collective voice of the participants points to the need for holistic development, encompassing emotional intelligence, behavioral understanding, value formation, spiritual anchoring, and even financial wellness. These insights affirm that teaching is not merely a profession but a vocation requiring a grounded sense of self, emotional maturity, and moral integrity.

Participants articulated the importance of addressing the emotional, ethical, spiritual, and practical dimensions of teaching in their professional development. This theme reveals that beyond instructional or technical skills, teachers need training that nurtures the whole person—including their capacity to manage emotions, make ethical decisions, and live out values that define the integrity of their profession. These trainings not only uplift the teacher's well-being but also enhance their professional relationships with learners, colleagues, and stakeholders.

The calls for training in emotional intelligence, empathy development, and behavioral management reflect a growing recognition that effective teaching and leadership are deeply rooted in emotional maturity and interpersonal awareness. Teachers who are emotionally grounded are more likely to foster supportive classrooms, manage conflicts constructively, and lead with compassion.

Moreover, the emphasis on emotional and ethical leadership resonates with the work of scholars like Goleman (2006), who posited that emotional intelligence is foundational for effective leadership. In the school context, fostering emotionally and ethically strong teachers leads to more resilient, responsive, and reflective leadership at all levels.

One's journey into leadership often begins with a sense of self-worth and perceived capability. However, for many teachers—especially those who are new in the field—this sense of competence is often shaky. Insecure comparisons, fear of judgment, and a perceived lack of preparedness are common emotional hurdles. These internal battles contribute to the hesitation in stepping up as leaders, even when they show great potential. The following participant narrative captures this critical emotional reality:

An innovative approach to leadership development must address not only instructional and managerial competencies but also the emotional and behavioral dimensions of teaching. As schools evolve into more dynamic and collaborative environments, the emotional resilience and interpersonal awareness of teacher-leaders become essential for sustained impact. Emotional intelligence, empathy, and behavioral regulation are

foundational in building respectful relationships with learners, peers, and stakeholders, creating a psychologically safe and productive school culture.

Participant Ind-P3 shared:"When it comes to training, siguro, dealing with behavioral issues among teachers. Teachers

need to be emotionally stable so they can deal with others well, including the learners, colleagues and stakeholders."

Another statement related was from participant Ind-P8, who said: "Kuan lang, emotional intelligence and empathy development. Ganahan ko aning mga touching nga mga trainings kay makatandog na sa personal issues sa matag teacher and whenwe are personally positive, and we are also positive in our workplace."

Moreover, Participant FGD-P8 affirmed that:"Emotional intelligence and empathy development trainings ang among need dinhe sa school kay dapat balance gyud atong intellectual ug emotional management."

The three narratives converge on the critical need for training programs that address emotional stability, empathy, and behavioral self-regulation. These elements are not only essential for conflict resolution and positive discipline but also serve as key indicators of a teacher's readiness for leadership roles.

This collective voice from the field aligns with DepEd's PDF (2020), which emphasizes the development of both technical competencies and non-cognitive domains, such as emotional intelligence and values-based leadership. The RPMS-PPST also anchors several indicators in domains like positive use of self, interpersonal relationships, and emotional maturity, acknowledging that leadership success is deeply intertwined with emotional and behavioral competencies.

One of the cornerstones of effective leadership development lies in the ability to navigate and manage diverse interpersonal relationships within the school environment. Participants in this study consistently emphasized the value of trainings that develop the capacity of teacher-leaders to handle behavioral complexities among staff, which, if unaddressed, can impede collaboration and trust in the workplace.

According to Ind-P3: "Mas tsada pod ang training dealing with behavioral issues kay aron maprocess ang different behaviors sa mga maestra." This statement reflects the participant's recognition of the behavioral challenges within the school community and the need for leadership development programs that provide strategies for understanding, managing, and responding to those dynamics with empathy and professionalism. Effective teacher-leaders are expected not only to instruct but also to lead teams composed of individuals with varying personalities, attitudes, and emotional needs.

The Department of Education, through its advocacy for school-based capacity-building programs, has highlighted the significance of social and emotional competencies as essential aspects of teacher leadership. NEAP trainings often include conflict resolution, interpersonal communication, and emotional regulation modules. These are designed to foster positive staff relations and ensure a nurturing school climate, consistent with DepEd's school mental health programs and wellness initiatives.

In research, Brackett et al. (2016) found that school leaders who are emotionally intelligent and behaviorally aware foster healthier staff dynamics, reduce professional burnout, and improve organizational outcomes. Similarly, Collie et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of leader support in buffering workplace stress, especially when dealing with difficult personalities or professional tension among colleagues. Moreover, Kraft et al. (2016) stressed that when teachers feel heard, understood, and treated with fairness by their leaders— particularly during conflict or behavioral concerns—they are more likely to engage in collective goals and professional growth. Thus, equipping teacher-leaders with behavioral management training not only addresses interpersonal challenges but also promotes emotional safety, collegial respect, and trust, all of which are critical for sustainable school improvement and teacher empowerment.

At the heart of authentic and effective teacher leadership lies a well-formed self, rooted in self-awareness, ethical conviction, and spiritual grounding. Participants in this study emphasized the need for capacity-

building programs that go beyond technical expertise and instead delve into the inner dimensions of the teacher as a leader. Leadership, they noted, must begin with internal transformation, which then radiates outward to inspire and influence others. This reflects a growing recognition in educational leadership literature that self-formation is not only relevant but necessary in cultivating truly transformative leaders in the school community.

As Ind-P2 emphasized: "Siguro, it is the training on formation development. Gusto nako mas maila and masabtan sa mga teachers ang individual strengths and weaknesses nila so when they are transformed, they become transformative leaders, too.

Additionally, Ind-P7 said: "It is also good to have these transformative spiritual trainings where teachers are given the opportunity to evaluate their spiritual level and faith relative to their workplace."

FGD-P5 explained: "Karon nga panahon, need gyud pod nato ang spiritual and behavioral training para sa mgateachers kay murag nahanap na gyud ang atong spiritual aspect."

These responses reflect the call for formation-based programs that emphasize personal integrity, reflective practice, and values-driven leadership. Within the Department of Education's HRDF, the importance of character, values, and spirituality is affirmed, particularly under its promotion of holistic teacher development. DepEd also recognizes the importance of transformative leadership in its school-based management strategies, where school heads and teacher-leaders are expected to inspire vision and values among staff.

Scholars such as Shields (2016) emphasized that transformative leadership begins with self-transformation—requiring leaders to understand their inner motivations and their ethical stance. Leithwood et al. (2019) further affirmed that moral and ethical dimensions are crucial in sustaining meaningful change, especially in challenging school contexts. Meanwhile, Branson and Gross (2014) argued that values-based and reflective leadership improves trust and relational depth among teachers and stakeholders, which is vital in sustaining reforms.

Incorporating spiritual formation in leadership training also resonates with the views of Day and Gu (2019), who asserted that personal purpose and moral commitment help leaders remain resilient and grounded amid professional pressures. Teachers who are anchored in their beliefs, values, and identities are more likely to exercise influence with authenticity, courage, and compassion.

In summary, the participants strongly advocate for leadership development programs that cultivate the inner life of the teacher-leader. This self-formation process—rooted in reflection, spirituality, and values—becomes the cornerstone of truly transformative leadership in schools.

A critical dimension of building leadership capacity among teachers is anchoring their professional roles to enduring values. In an era where schools are confronted by rapid societal shifts and diverse learner needs, the moral compass of educators remains a vital element in leadership practice. Participants in this study pointed out that leadership training should not only focus on skills but also on instilling and reinforcing life values that guide ethical decision-making and responsible leadership.

Ind-P1 emphasized, "I want training on human development ug formational training nga magtouch sa basic life values." This response underscores the desire for leadership development programs that nurture the inner life of teachers—not merely in terms of self-awareness, but through the intentional formation of values that support, compassionate, and purpose-driven leadership. Such training provides teachers with a moral framework to navigate complex school environments and foster inclusive, learner-centered classrooms.

Aligned with this, the Department of Education (DepEd) advocates for the values formation program integrated across various learning areas, recognizing that leadership anchored in values has a lasting impact. DepEd's NEAP also encourages leadership modules that promote the "Makatao, Makakalikasan, Makabansa, Maka-Diyos" principles, ensuring that teacher-leaders reflect Filipino core values in decision-making and behavior.

Recent literature supports this direction. Lumpkin and Achen (2018) argued that values-driven leadership fosters trust, unity, and motivation among teams, particularly when leaders model integrity, humility, and respect. Likewise, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) highlighted the ethical dimensions of leadership as essential in shaping equitable and responsive schools, particularly in diverse communities.

Moreover, Zhu et al. (2020) affirmed that when leaders are trained to uphold values such as justice, empathy, and accountability, they are more likely to cultivate inclusive and motivating school cultures. In the Philippine context, this aligns with DepEd Order No. 42, s—2017, which reinforces the importance of ethical and professional standards in enhancing teacher professionalism and moral grounding.

In conclusion, embedding values, education, and life formation in teacher leadership training ensures that leadership is not only competent but also compassionate, ethical, and principled. This approach empowers teacher-leaders to guide with both wisdom and heart, shaping not just schools, but also the moral character of future generations.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that school heads empower teacher-leadership through strategic delegation, relational support, and values-based leadership practices. By assigning roles aligned with teachers' strengths, providing affirmation and mentoring, and modeling professionalism, school heads cultivate a culture of trust, collaboration, and shared responsibility. These practices allow teachers to develop confidence and initiative, positioning them as active contributors to both instructional and organizational improvement.

However, the study also affirms that empowerment efforts are constrained by internal and external challenges such as teachers' lack of confidence, limited leadership training, heavy workloads, and restrictive school structures. Addressing these issues requires creating psychologically safe school environments and strengthening continuous capacity-building initiatives. Leadership development programs, structured mentoring, and values-driven training are essential components to sustain empowered teacher-leaders and enhance overall school effectiveness.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it is recommended that school heads strengthen strategic delegation, mentoring, and recognition practices that build trust and promote shared decision-making to sustain teacher-leadership. The Schools Division Office should provide support programs that address teacher confidence, workload, and time limitations, while school heads may enhance collaboration and resilience through LAC sessions and reflective meetings. Continuous professional development focusing on leadership skills, mentoring, emotional intelligence, and values-based formation is essential to further build teacher-leadership capacity. The Department of Education and school governance councils are encouraged to integrate teacher-leadership empowerment into school improvement and leadership development plans. Finally, future researchers may explore teacher-leadership empowerment in broader contexts or through different research designs to strengthen and expand the current study's insights.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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