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School Heads on the Move: A Multiple Case Study of the Lived Experiences, Challenges, and Adaptation Strategies of School Heads Under the Three-Year Station Transfer Policy

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Abstract

Background and Aim: School leadership transitions can present challenges for organizational continuity and instructional leadership. However, school heads' experiences of policy-driven reassignment remain underexplored in the Philippines. This study explored the challenges and adaptation strategies of school heads in South Cotabato, Philippines, who underwent station transfers under the Department of Education's three-year transfer policy.

Materials and Methods: A qualitative multiple-case study involved three purposively selected school heads who had experienced at least one station transfer within the preceding three years and completed at least one academic year in their new assignments. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, with cross-case comparison to identify shared and case-specific experiences.

Results: Participants described challenges in adapting to unfamiliar school cultures, establishing relationships, addressing resistance, sustaining existing programs, managing workloads, and understanding school operations. Their adaptation strategies included maintaining program continuity, adjusting leadership approaches to local contexts, building trust, strengthening staff morale, and engaging stakeholders in decision-making. Cross-case analysis identified common transition concerns alongside differences in participants' experiences and implementation of adaptation strategies.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that communication, relationship-building, contextual responsiveness, and inclusive decision-making are central to school heads' adaptation during reassignment. These exploratory insights can inform transition support and succession planning within the Department of Education. However, the three-case scope and reliance on participants' accounts limit transferability and do not establish effects on school performance or student outcomes.

Keywords: Leadership Transitions, School Culture, Staff Engagement, Program Continuity, Decision-making, School heads, Change Management, Professional Development, DepEd Policy, Station Reassignment

Introduction

School heads play a pivotal role in shaping educational outcomes, particularly in systems where policy reforms and administrative mandates frequently reshape leadership structures. In the Philippines, the Department of Education's three-year station transfer policy seeks to promote equitable leadership distribution and professional development among school administrators. This policy, which mandates the reassignment of school heads after three years in a station, is intended to prevent stagnation and ensure that leadership competencies are distributed across schools. However, the implications of such systematic leadership transitions, particularly their perceived effects on school culture, operational continuity, and instructional leadership, remain insufficiently explored (Bush & Glover, 2014). This gap highlights the need for localized research into how school heads navigate these shifts in the Philippine basic education context.

Leadership transitions often introduce layers of complexity that impact school operations, staff relationships, and institutional direction. Although global literature acknowledges that such changes can present both challenges and opportunities, depending on the strategies employed (Leithwood et al., 2008), little is known about how these dynamics play out in the Philippine basic education system. Gaining insight into the lived experiences of school heads during reassignment is critical to identifying the enablers and barriers to effective leadership adaptation.

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While international studies, such as those by Earley and Weindling (2007) and Clarke and Wildy (2011), have examined leadership mobility, they generally overlook structured transfer policies, such as those implemented in the Philippines. Moreover, much of the local research has centered on leadership styles (Arcilla, 2020), teacher motivation, and student performance (Mangulabnan et al., 2021), with limited attention to the transition process itself. This study addresses that gap by exploring the common and divergent challenges faced by reassigned school heads and examining the strategies they employed to manage the transition. The findings offer valuable insights into the perceived impact of reassignment policies on school functioning and inform recommendations for strengthening institutional support systems to improve leadership effectiveness during transitions.

The study does not directly measure student outcomes, teacher morale, or school performance. Rather, it explores the perceptions and reported practices of school heads and presents any implications for school functioning as perceived by the participants.

Objectives

This study explored the experiences of school heads who underwent three-year station transfers, using a multiple-case study approach. It focused on identifying the similarities and differences in their lived experiences and the strategies they employed to adapt to new school environments. The study examined how these leaders perceived and addressed challenges related to school culture, staff relationships, and operational continuity, rather than claiming to measure effects on academic performance, teacher morale, or student outcomes. By analyzing the cases, the study provides insights into leadership adaptation and the factors contributing to perceived successful transitions, offering implications for leadership succession policies in the Department of Education system.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the similarities and differences in challenges encountered by school heads during station transfers? (2) What are the similarities and differences in strategies employed by school heads to overcome these challenges?

Literature review

This section introduces the fundamental principles of leadership transitions, school culture, and change management, as well as the theoretical foundations underpinning the study. The specific information is outlined as follows.

International Perspectives on Leadership Transitions

Leadership transitions in educational settings have been extensively studied internationally, with scholars examining the causes, processes, and consequences of school leader mobility. Earley and Weindling (2007) conducted a comprehensive study of principal mobility in the United Kingdom, identifying patterns of voluntary and involuntary transfers and their implications for school improvement. Their research revealed that leadership transitions can either catalyze or hinder school development, depending on factors such as the incoming leader's preparation, the school's readiness for change, and the level of support provided during the transition period. Similarly, Clarke and Wildy (2011) explored adaptation and change among principals in remote Australian schools, finding that geographic and professional isolation compounded the challenges of leadership transitions. These studies establish that leadership mobility is a global phenomenon with context-specific implications, yet structured transfer policies, such as those implemented in the Philippines, remain underexplored in the international literature.

The global discourse on leadership transitions emphasizes the importance of effective succession planning and support systems. Leithwood et al. (2008) identified seven strong claims about successful school leadership, including the assertion that leadership succession requires deliberate planning to avoid negative impacts on school performance. Their research demonstrated that schools experiencing frequent leadership turnover often face declines in student achievement, staff morale, and program continuity. Bush and Glover (2014) similarly argued that leadership for learning requires sustained commitment and continuity, noting that abrupt transitions disrupt the development of collaborative cultures and shared

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vision. These findings underscore the need for structured support mechanisms during leadership transitions, particularly in systems where transfers are mandated by policy rather than driven by individual choice.

Philippine Context of Leadership Transitions

Local research in the Philippines has primarily focused on leadership styles and their impact on school outcomes. Arcilla (2020) examined teachers' perceptions of transformational leadership among public high school principals, finding that principals who exhibited idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration fostered higher levels of job satisfaction among teachers. Mangulabnan et al. (2021) similarly investigated transformational leadership styles of school principals in Central Luzon, concluding that effective leadership significantly influences teacher motivation and student performance. However, these studies focused on leadership behaviors within stable school contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how leadership transitions affect the sustainability of these positive outcomes.

Leadership transitions raise important questions about how schools sustain leadership practices, organizational relationships, and instructional priorities when school heads change. Transformational leadership emphasizes shared purpose, staff development, and commitment to organizational improvement (Bass & Avolio, 1994), while research on leadership careers highlights the relevance of tenure and career stages to headteacher performance (Earley & Weindling, 2007). These perspectives provide a basis for examining how incoming school heads maintain continuity while adapting to a new school context. In the Philippines, DECS Order No. 7, s. 1999 specifies a five-year transfer or reassignment cycle for district supervisors and principals, with provisions allowing shorter or longer assignments under exceptional circumstances (Department of Education, Culture and Sports, 1999). Against this policy background, the present study examines school heads' experiences of station transfers, focusing on how they navigate school culture, maintain operational continuity, and sustain instructional leadership during the transition.

While this study recognizes that the precise operational nuances, such as specific implementation scopes, exclusions, and localized exceptions, vary by region, the policy context is structurally anchored in DECS Order No. 7, s. 1999, and reinforced through subsequent DepEd Division Memoranda governing school leadership rotation. Accordingly, this study treats the three-year station transfer policy as a formal administrative arrangement under which school heads are mandatorily reassigned after completing a standard three-year tour of duty at a specific station.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Theoretical foundations for understanding leadership transitions draw from multiple perspectives. Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass et al., 1994) emphasizes the role of visionary leaders in maintaining organizational success and minimizing disruptions during transitions. Transformational leaders inspire followers through a shared vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, creating a sense of purpose and commitment that can sustain schools through periods of change. During leadership transitions, transformational practices such as building trust, fostering collaboration, and articulating a compelling vision are particularly critical for maintaining staff morale and program continuity.

Change Management Theory

Change Management Theory, particularly Lewin's (1947) Three-Step Model, provides a framework for understanding how school heads navigate transitions. Lewin's model outlines three phases: unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. During the unfreezing phase, leaders must create awareness of the need for change and prepare staff for new directions. The changing phase involves implementing new practices and structures, while the refreezing phase solidifies these changes into the school's culture and operations. Kotter (1996) expanded on Lewin's work by identifying eight steps for successful change management, including creating a sense of urgency, building a guiding coalition, and anchoring new approaches in the culture. These frameworks are particularly relevant for school heads undergoing station transfers, as they must navigate both the personal transition into a new role and the organizational transition of the school community.

Distributed Leadership Theory

Distributed Leadership Theory (Spillane, 2005) highlights shared leadership responsibilities, suggesting that schools with distributed leadership are better equipped to handle turnover. When leadership is distributed across multiple individuals and roles, the departure or arrival of a single leader has less disruptive impact on school operations. Distributed leadership involves the intentional sharing of leadership

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responsibilities among teachers, staff, and administrators, creating a more resilient and adaptable school organization. During leadership transitions, schools with established distributed leadership practices can maintain continuity and momentum while the new school head acclimates to the environment.

School Culture and Leadership Adaptation

The concept of school culture is central to understanding leadership transitions. Moran et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of cultural sensitivity and adaptability for new school leaders, noting that successful adaptation requires building trust, demonstrating flexibility, and understanding the unique dynamics of each school community. School culture encompasses shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices that shape how individuals interact and work together. New school heads must navigate existing cultural dynamics while also introducing their own leadership approaches, a process that requires careful balance between respecting tradition and initiating change. Böse and Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz (2021) found that school leaders often struggle with school-specific processes, including budgeting, resource management, and informal norms, highlighting the time needed to understand a school's internal workings before implementing changes.

Relationship-Building and Trust

Relationship-building is another critical dimension of successful leadership transitions. Boothe and Watson (2023) suggested that relationship-building can be particularly effective during transitions, as it allows leaders to gather insights into existing challenges before taking action. By showing a willingness to listen and understand staff perspectives, new leaders build trust and reassure stakeholders that their concerns are valued. Patzer et al. (2018) argued that leaders must be intentional in engaging with all stakeholders, fostering a culture of trust and collaboration. Ahsan (2025) further emphasized that cultivating a culture of learning and trust is essential for long-term organizational development, particularly during periods of change.

Resistance to Change

Resistance to change is a common challenge during leadership transitions. Haque et al. (2017) examined the role of patience as a decision-making heuristic in leadership, finding that effective leaders demonstrate patience when managing resistance and allowing staff time to adjust to new policies and practices. Resistance often stems from comfort with existing practices, fear of the unknown, and concerns about losing autonomy or status. School heads must address these emotional barriers while also communicating the benefits of change and involving staff in decision-making processes. Azar (2024) posited that trust and servant leadership are essential to fostering adaptive teams during periods of change, highlighting the importance of empathy, support, and open communication.

Program Continuity

Program continuity is a significant concern during leadership transitions. Jabbar & Holme (2026) found that frequent leadership changes disrupt program sustainability, as rapid turnover prevents consistent growth and creates uncertainty among staff and students. Hayward (2021) noted that new leaders may not prioritize ongoing initiatives, resulting in wasted resources and unfinished projects. Sutherland (2017) emphasized that continuity in leadership is crucial for fostering trust, stability, and security within the school community. Leaders ensure smooth transitions and minimize disruption by maintaining a clear vision, making gradual adjustments, and building on successful programs. Transparent communication of goals and inclusive decision-making helps align teachers, staff, and parents toward shared objectives.

Workload Management During Transitions

Workload management during transitions is another challenge identified in the literature. Parasher (2017) explored the experiences of leaders transitioning into new roles, finding that the transition period is characterized by rapid learning and high pressure. New leaders must balance immediate demands, adjust to new systems, and manage increased workloads while also navigating the personal stress of adapting to a new environment. Norbash (2017) similarly found that leadership transitions pose challenges, including skepticism, heavy workloads, and complex operations. Overcoming these requires building trust, managing time effectively, and understanding school dynamics for a smooth transition and long-term success.

Morale Enhancement

Morale enhancement is a key strategy for successful leadership transitions. Hanaysha and Majid (2018) found that motivated employees are more productive and committed, highlighting the importance of morale-building during periods of change. Leaders can boost morale by recognizing achievements, offering professional growth opportunities, and fostering open communication. Kim and Rehg (2018) noted

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that clear goals and team unity are essential for maintaining high morale and sustaining performance over time. Sun and Henderson (2017) found that transformational leadership and organizational processes significantly influence public performance, suggesting that leaders who inspire and motivate their staff achieve better outcomes during transitions.

Collaborative Decision-Making

Collaborative decision-making is another strategy emphasized in the literature. Ospina (2017) explored collective leadership and context in public administration, finding that involving key personnel in decision-making fosters collaboration, empowerment, and shared ownership of organizational goals. By engaging teachers, staff, and stakeholders, leaders benefit from diverse perspectives and create a sense of collective responsibility. Adeoye et al. (2024) similarly found that empowering staff to participate in decision-making enhances engagement and commitment, leading to smoother implementation and better outcomes. Kabanda and Barrena-Martinez (2025) emphasized the importance of effective communication in management, noting that transparent communication and active listening are essential for building credibility and trust.

Aligning Leadership Styles with School Context

The alignment of leadership styles with school goals and context is a recurring theme in the literature. Rutherford and Favero (2020) argued that a one-size-fits-all leadership approach is ineffective, noting that organizational turnaround requires context-specific strategies. Fernandez and Shaw (2020) similarly found that leaders must assess the unique needs of their institution and adapt their leadership accordingly. Kipasika (2024) emphasized that alignment with school goals ensures that the leader's decisions support institutional priorities, leading to long-term growth and improvement. School heads who take the time to understand the distinct missions, student demographics, and institutional cultures of their schools can implement policies and strategies that resonate with their specific school community.

Recent scholarship also highlights the importance of teacher motivation and professional learning in the context of leadership transitions. Deng and Noichun (2024) found that transformational leadership significantly influences teacher motivation and job performance, while Thanomton et al. (2018) offered a model linking transformational leadership, school environment, basic psychological needs, and teachers' engagement in professional learning. Deng and Noichun (2024) examined transformational leadership, teacher motivation, and job performance among college English teachers in Guangxi, China, and found positive relationships between transformational leadership and job performance, as well as between teacher motivation and job performance. Their findings provide a rationale for considering teacher-related outcomes when examining school leadership. However, they do not establish the effects of leadership transitions. In the present study, potential implications for teacher motivation and professional learning are therefore treated as questions for future research rather than measured outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

This research was grounded in Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass et al., 1994), Change Management Theory (Lewin, 1947), and Distributed Leadership Theory (Spillane, 2005), providing a multidimensional framework for examining the similarities and differences in how school heads experience leadership transitions.

Transformational Leadership Theory emphasizes the role of visionary leaders in maintaining organizational success and minimizing disruptions during transitions. In this study, this theory was used to interpret findings related to trust-building, morale enhancement, and the articulation of shared vision, particularly how school heads inspired and motivated staff during the transition period.

Change Management Theory, particularly Lewin's (1947) Three-Step Model, outlines how school heads navigate transitions through unfreezing, changing, and refreezing phases. This theory was used to interpret findings related to resistance to change, program continuity, and the structured responses of school heads to the challenges of transition.

Distributed Leadership Theory highlights shared leadership responsibilities, suggesting that schools with distributed leadership are better equipped to handle turnover. This theory was used to interpret findings related to the involvement of key personnel in decision-making and the strategic sharing of leadership responsibilities during transitions.

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Methodology

This section introduces the fundamental ideas of research design, research site and participants, data gathering procedure, research instrument, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. The provided information is outlined as follows:

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design to explore the lived experiences of school heads who underwent station transfers under the three-year policy. This approach enabled cross-case analysis of similarities and differences in leadership transitions across varied school contexts, highlighting the challenges and strategies involved in adapting to new roles. Qualitative research was chosen to capture detailed insights into participants' perceptions rather than numerical data.

A multiple-case study design was selected over phenomenology or narrative inquiry because it facilitates cross-case comparison while preserving the depth and context of each case. Unlike phenomenology, which focuses on the essence of a shared lived experience, the multiple-case study design identifies both commonalities and differences across cases, aligning with the study's research questions. It is particularly suited to exploring how contextual factors, such as school size and staffing, shape the transition experience.

Research Site and Participants

The defined population for this research was school heads in selected public schools in South Cotabato who had been reassigned under the Department of Education's three-year station transfer policy. Using purposive sampling, the study included only school heads with direct experience in leadership transitions, specifically, those who had undergone at least one station transfer within the last three years and had served in their new assignment for a minimum of one academic year. Three school heads were selected as individual case units, providing sufficient variation and depth to achieve data saturation while ensuring the feasibility of data collection. Participants were identified through official channels, including the Department of Education Schools Division Office and professional networks. Formal invitations were issued, and those who agreed to participate were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and ethical safeguards.

Three school heads were selected as individual case units. While three participants may appear limited, the study is framed as an exploratory multiple-case study, and the selection of three cases was guided by the principle of information power rather than statistical generalization. The cases were selected to provide variation in school size (106, 14, and 8 teachers) and in the number of transfers experienced (5, 3, and 4, respectively), which allowed for cross-case comparison of how contextual factors shaped transition experiences. Saturation was assessed at the thematic level, where recurring patterns across cases were identified, and within-case saturation was achieved through in-depth interviews that captured the richness of each participant's experience. The authors acknowledge that the findings are not generalizable to all school heads and should be interpreted as contextually transferable.

To protect voluntariness and confidentiality, participants were assured that their decision to participate or decline would not affect their professional standing. The researchers emphasized that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw at any time without consequence. Given the small locality and the identifiable administrative positions of the participants, additional anonymization procedures were implemented, including the use of codes (C1, C2, and C3) and the removal of any identifying details about the schools or their locations.

Data Gathering Procedure

A systematic and ethical approach was employed to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected. The researchers followed standard research protocols and ethical guidelines. The study was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee for review and approval, and ethical clearance was obtained prior to data collection. All recommended revisions were incorporated into the final research protocol. Once approval was granted, school administrators assisted in identifying potential participants. Selected school

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heads received formal invitations along with an Informed Consent Form (ICF) that clearly outlined the study's purpose, procedures, the voluntary nature of participation, and assurances of confidentiality.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews (IDIs) with participating school heads to capture their experiences under the three-year station transfer policy. Interviews were conducted either in person or online, depending on availability and convenience, and took place in secure, private settings. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted in a single session, with follow-up clarifications sought via email or messaging where necessary. The interviews were conducted in Filipino, Hiligaynon, or English, depending on the participant's preference. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

The interview guide was refined during data collection to explore emerging themes, particularly regarding the influence of school size and staffing on transition experiences. To ensure anonymity, participants were assigned code names, and systematic coding was applied to identify recurring patterns and emerging themes that accurately represented their lived experiences.

Translation of interview excerpts was conducted by the researchers, who are fluent in Filipino, Hiligaynon, and English. To ensure meaning preservation, back-translation of key excerpts was performed by an independent bilingual colleague. The translated excerpts were reviewed for accuracy and cultural appropriateness before inclusion in the manuscript.

Research Instrument

The research instrument was a semi-structured interview guide, comprising open-ended questions designed to explore the challenges encountered and strategies employed by school heads during leadership transitions. The interview guide was developed based on insights from prior empirical studies to ensure validity and was organized around the study's two research questions: (1) the similarities and differences in challenges encountered by school heads, and (2) the similarities and differences in strategies employed by school heads to overcome challenges. Probing questions were included to encourage participants to elaborate on their experiences, thereby providing rich, detailed narratives. The interview guide was reviewed by experts in educational leadership and qualitative research to ensure content validity and alignment with the study's objectives.

The interview guide was reviewed by three experts in educational leadership and qualitative research to ensure content validity and alignment with the study's objectives. The experts held doctoral degrees in education or related fields and had experience in qualitative research. Feedback from the experts was incorporated into the final interview protocol, including the addition of questions about school size and staffing. The interview guide is included as an appendix.

Data Analysis

To investigate the experiences of school heads and to answer the research questions, thematic analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This structured approach enabled the identification of key themes related to leadership transitions. Open coding was first used to categorize participant responses, followed by axial coding to explore relationships between emerging themes. Manual coding was initially performed, and an audit trail was maintained throughout the process to document coding decisions, theme development, and changes in interpretation over time. This enhanced the transparency and traceability of the analysis. To ensure the credibility of findings, member checking was conducted by allowing participants to review and verify the interpretations of their responses.

Open coding was first used to categorize participant responses, followed by axial coding to explore relationships between emerging themes. While Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis and axial coding originate from different analytical traditions, they were integrated in this study as follows: Braun and Clarke's framework provided the overarching structure for theme development, while axial coding was used as a supplementary strategy to explore relationships between themes and to identify the conditions, actions, and consequences associated with each theme. This integration allowed for a more nuanced analysis of the

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data while remaining grounded in the reflexive thematic analysis tradition. Manual coding was initially performed, and an audit trail was maintained throughout the process to document coding decisions, theme development, and changes in interpretation over time. This enhanced the transparency and traceability of the analysis.

Individual case analysis was conducted before cross-case comparison. Each case was first analyzed independently to identify themes specific to that case, and then cross-case analysis was performed to identify similarities and differences across the three cases. To ensure the credibility of findings, member checking was conducted by allowing participants to review and verify the interpretations of their responses.

Trustworthiness

This study enhanced trustworthiness through prolonged engagement, member checking, researcher triangulation, rich descriptions, an audit trail, and reflexivity. Prolonged engagement involved multiple interactions and follow-up clarifications with participants. Member checking was conducted by providing participants with summaries of findings and asking them to verify the accuracy of interpretations. Triangulation was limited to researcher triangulation, as both authors independently coded the transcripts and compared findings; no additional data sources such as documents or observations were used. Rich descriptions supported transferability, while an audit trail ensured dependability. Reflexivity was maintained through a reflexive journal documenting the researchers' assumptions, positions, and reactions throughout the process. The researchers acknowledge their professional positions as educators and their relationship to the Department of Education, which may have influenced data interpretation; these assumptions were critically examined throughout the analysis.

Results

The section presents the study's findings on the challenges experienced by school heads who underwent a three-year station transfer and the strategies they employed.

Profile of the Participants

Table 1 presents the profile of three school heads who have experienced station transfers over a period of three years. School Head 1 is a 53-year-old with 15 years of experience and has undergone five station transfers. This individual currently oversees 106 teachers at their present school (C1). School Head 2, a 35-year-old school head with 9 years of experience, has had three station transfers and currently manages 14 teachers at their school (C2). Finally, School Head 3 is a 47-year-old school head with 12 years of experience, has been transferred four times, and currently handles eight teachers in their school (C3).

The substantial variation in school size, ranging from 106 teachers to eight teachers, is treated as analytically important. This variation allows an examination of how school size and staffing influenced participants' transition experiences.

Table 1. Profile of the School Heads Experiencing Three Years' Station Transfer

Case Unit	Age	Number of Years as School Head	Number of Transfers	Number of Teachers Handled in the Current School	Code
School Head 1	53 years old	15 years	5 station transfers	106 teachers	C1
School Head 2	35 years old	9 years	3 station transfers	14 teachers	C2
School Head 3	47 years old	12 years	4 station transfers	8 teachers	C3

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Similarities and Differences in Challenges Faced by School Heads

The cross-analysis of the three cases identifies six common challenges faced by school heads during leadership transitions, including adjusting to new school cultures, building relationships, managing resistance to change, ensuring program continuity, handling heavy workloads, and understanding school operations, emphasizing the complexity of these transitions and the need for strategic support and planning. The cross-case analysis reveals that while all three cases experienced these challenges, their severity and manifestation varied by school context, particularly school size and staffing.

Table 2 Similarities and Differences of the Challenges Faced by School Heads

Themes on Challenges School Leaders Faced	Case Unit		Remarks
	Similarities	Differences	
Difficulty during Adjustment to School Culture and Environment	1, 2, 3		All three case units faced similar challenges adapting to new school cultures, highlighting the universal difficulty of transitioning into leadership roles.
Difficulty in Building Relationships with Subordinates and Stakeholders	1, 2, 3		All three case units found relationship-building with staff and stakeholders challenging, underscoring the need for trust in leadership transitions.
Subordinate's Resistance to Change	1, 2, 3		All three cases faced resistance to change, showing that leaders often deal with staff pushback and need patience, communication, and strategy to manage it.
Disruption in Program Continuity	1, 2, 3		All cases reported program disruptions, suggesting that leadership transitions can interrupt ongoing initiatives.
Difficulty in Workload Management during Transition	1, 2	3	Cases 1 and 2 faced workload challenges during transition, balancing demands, new systems, and operations. Case 3 did not report this challenge, possibly due to stronger support or clearer role understanding during the transition.
Difficulty in Understanding Each School's Operation	1, 3	2	Cases 1 and 3 faced challenges in understanding school operations, including procedures, budgeting, and resource management. Case 2 suggests that those leaders were either more familiar with operations or adapted more quickly.

Difficulty during Adjustment to School Culture and Environment

All three cases revealed a common challenge: school heads experienced difficulties adapting to the new school culture and environment. These included understanding unfamiliar policies, managing diverse student behaviors, and aligning with different teaching styles, all while needing to establish credibility quickly. In Case 1, the adjustment process was particularly pronounced, as the school head had to navigate a unique set of cultural dynamics with both teachers and students. Successful adaptation required building trust, demonstrating flexibility, and showing cultural sensitivity (Moran et al., 2021).

Case 1 shared:

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"...you have to adjust sa bag-o nga environment. Bago ang mga teachers gud, kag siyempre, mga students. Hindi pwedeng hindi ka ma-adjust sa culture ng bawat school, kasi bawat lugar may kanya-kanyang dynamics." (C1) (Adapting to a new environment is inevitable. With new teachers and students, each school comes with its own unique culture and dynamics, requiring you to adjust accordingly.)

In addition, Case 2 highlights the challenges of adjusting to a new school culture, emphasizing the need for flexibility in adapting to different traditions, values, and operational structures.

Case 2 shared that:

"Yung culture ng school, iba sa dati kong pinagmulan. So, kailangan kong mag-adjust sa mga routines." (C2) (The school culture here is different from my previous one, so I had to adjust to the new routines.)

Moreover, Case 3 underscored the emotional and psychological toll of transitioning into a new school culture. The school head described the initial period as stressful and uncertain, marked by unfamiliar routines and unclear expectations. This narrative emphasizes the crucial role of support systems and the need for gradual adjustment to ease the transition. As shared in the interview:

"..unang challenge ko talaga is yung pagkakaroon ng bagong environment....yung school culture na hindi ko pa kabisado." (C3) (My first challenge was adapting to a new environment and school culture that I was not yet familiar with.)

Difficulty in Building Relationships with Subordinates and Stakeholders.

Building trust and fostering relationships is a common challenge faced by all school heads in these cases. In Case 1, the leader took a cautious and strategic approach by prioritizing observation and active listening during the initial months. Instead of implementing changes right away, the leader focused on understanding the staff's needs and the root causes of the school's challenges.

"Yung mga first few months... I just listen and assess kung ano ang kailangan nila sa akon at kung ano gid ang pinagmumulan ng mga challenges sa school..." (C1) (During the first few months, I just listened and assessed what they needed from me and where the school's main challenges were coming from.)

Boothe and Watson (2023) suggest that relationship-building can be particularly effective in this context, as it allows leaders to gather insights into the existing challenges before taking action. By showing a willingness to listen, the leader builds trust and reassures the staff that their concerns are valued.

Case 2 highlights the difficulty of establishing relationships while simultaneously proving one's leadership capabilities. The school head described the early months as a period of adjustment, where finding the right balance between authority and rapport-building was essential.

"Isa pang challenge, syempre, yung relationships sa teachers, staff, and parents. Yung first few months talaga, para kang naghahanap ng balance....kung paano ka makikilala at kung paano mo sila matutulungan na maging comfortable sa leadership mo." (C2) (Another challenge was forming relationships with teachers, staff, and parents. The first few months were all about finding balance, understanding how they could get to know me and how I could help them feel comfortable with my leadership.)

Azar (2024) posits that recognizing the importance of making stakeholders comfortable with leadership transitions, this approach acknowledges that trust-building is a gradual process that requires patience and adaptability.

In Case 3, the leader openly acknowledges that forming strong relationships is one of the biggest challenges at the beginning of a leadership role. The leader pointed out that trust is not automatic—it must be earned over time.

"...isa sa pinakamalaking hamon sa simula ay 'yung pagbuo ng magandang relasyon with the teachers... staff... parents... at pati na rin ang community. Hindi naman kasi automatic." (C3) (One of the biggest challenges at the beginning was building good relationships with teachers, staff, parents, and even the community. It does not happen automatically)

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This statement reflects that relationships are built through continuous effort, credibility, and meaningful interactions. A leader must be intentional in engaging with all stakeholders (Patzer et al., 2018), fostering a culture of trust and collaboration (Ahsan, 2025).

Subordinate's Resistance to Change

Resistance to change was a common challenge across all three cases, with school heads often facing pushback from staff used to old practices. In Case 1, teachers directly resisted changes, questioning the need for modifications because they were comfortable with existing methods. This resistance, shaped by long-standing traditions, highlights the need for clear communication and strategies that emphasize the benefits of change.

Case 1 shared:

"Ang hirap minsan kasi... may resistance talaga! Lalo na kung sanay na ang teachers sa dati nilang paraan.." (C1) (It can be difficult at times because there is really resistance, especially when teachers are accustomed to their previous methods.)

Case 2 offers an optimistic view, showing initial resistance that fades as people adjust. Haque et al. (2017) cited that effective leadership and patience lead to eventual acceptance of new policies.

"Minsan 'yung mga policies na mahirap tanggapin sa simula... nagiging okay din after a while..." (C2) (Sometimes, policies that are difficult to accept at first eventually become more acceptable over time.)

Case 3 shows that resistance often stems from a preference for stability, with people viewing change as disruptive. It emphasizes that change management should address emotional barriers and support adapting to new approaches.

"Sometimes, there was resistance because people were comfortable with the old systems, and change can be hard." (C3)

Disruption in Program Continuity

All three cases reported disruptions in program continuity during leadership transitions. In Case 1, leadership changes shifted priorities, potentially sidelining successful programs and causing frustration among staff and stakeholders invested in previous initiatives. As shared:

"Let's say may program na super effective under the previous leadership...may tendency minsan na magbago ang priorities ng bagong school head..." (C1) (Let us say there's a program that was highly effective under the previous leadership; sometimes, the new school head may shift priorities, which can lead to changes.)

Case 2 highlights how frequent leadership changes disrupt program sustainability. Rapid turnover prevents consistent growth, as efforts to improve the school are often reset or abandoned, creating uncertainty among staff and students and hindering long-term strategy development (Jabbar & Holme, 2026).

"Kung masyado mabilis ang turnover... parang hindi consistent yung mga efforts para sa improvement ng school." (C2) (If the turnover is too frequent, it can lead to a lack of consistency in the efforts aimed at improving the school.)

Case 3 highlights a significant drawback of leadership transitions: unfinished projects. According to Hayward (2021), new leaders may not prioritize ongoing initiatives, resulting in wasted resources.

"Kung ang school head lang ang palaging nag-iiba... tapos hindi natatapos yung mga ongoing projects" (C3) (If the school head is the only one constantly changing, and the ongoing projects are left unfinished.)

Difficulty in Workload Management during Transition

Both Cases 1 and 2 identified workload management as challenging during the transition phase. School heads faced the challenge of balancing immediate demands, adjusting to new systems, and managing the increased workload associated with navigating the leadership transition (Parasher, 2017). In contrast, Case 3 did not report this challenge, which could suggest that the leader in this case had better organizational support or a clearer understanding of their responsibilities. In Case 1, the leader struggles to

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familiarize themselves with the school's culture while ensuring smooth operations, making workload management particularly difficult during the transition.

> *"Nakakapanibago kasi habang iniintindi mo pa 'yung kultura at sistema ng school, kailangan mo ring siguraduhin na tuloy-tuloy ang operations."* (C1) (It is overwhelming because, while trying to understand the culture and systems of the school, you also need to make sure that operations continue smoothly.)

This case highlights the challenge of quickly adapting while maintaining operational stability and learning the school's culture. In Case 2, the leader reflects on the difficulty of managing workload and making decisions while remaining attuned to the institution's needs.

"Workload management was definitely tricky, especially during the transition period." (C2)

This simple statement encapsulates the challenge of managing a heavy workload while transitioning into a new role. The leader acknowledges the difficulty without elaborating on specific issues, but the implication is that the transition period is a time of both rapid learning and high pressure.

Difficulty in Understanding Each School's Operation

Cases 1 and 3 faced challenges in understanding school operations, such as procedures, budgeting, and resource management, highlighting the time needed for new school heads to learn the school's internal workings. Case 2, however, did not report these issues, possibly due to the leader's prior knowledge or quicker adaptation. School heads often struggle with school-specific processes, including budgeting and informal norms, and must navigate these complexities to avoid inefficiency (Bose & Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz, 2021), as seen in Case 1, where the leader stresses the importance of learning before making changes.

> "*...iba-iba talaga ang personality ng bawat school... and you can't just walk in and start making changes without understanding how things work first"* (C1) (Each school really has a different personality. You cannot just walk in and start making changes without understanding how things work first.)

This case emphasizes the importance of understanding a school's culture and operations before implementing changes. The leader humorously acknowledges the challenge while recognizing its significance. In Case 3, the leader notes the difficulty of grasping administrative processes, which can impede informed decision-making.

> "*It's difficult to understand the flow of operations... like the administrative processes and how things are done in that particular school."* (C3) (It's difficult to understand the flow of operations... like the administrative processes and how things are done in the particular school.)

This case highlights the challenge of understanding procedural flows and internal systems, which can hinder effective leadership and lead to inefficiencies. According to Norbash (2017), leadership transitions bring challenges like skepticism, heavy workloads, and complex operations. Overcoming these requires building trust, managing time effectively, and understanding school dynamics for a smooth transition and long-term success.

Similarities and Differences in School Heads' Strategies Used to Address the Challenges

The cross-analysis identified five key strategies for practicing continuity, adaptability, trust-building, morale enhancement, and collaborative decision-making. By maintaining a clear vision, aligning leadership styles with goals, fostering trust, boosting morale, and involving staff in decisions, school heads can create a stable, supportive environment that drives long-term improvement and success.

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Table 3 Similarities and Differences in School Heads' Strategies Used by School Heads to Address the Challenges

Themes on Strategies Used by School Heads to Address the Challenges	Case Unit		Remarks
	Similarities	Differences	
Practicing Continuity	1, 3	2	Cases 1 and 3 practice continuity by focusing on gradual adjustments rather than abrupt changes, fostering a sense of security and trust within the school community. Case 2 did not highlight continuity in leadership, focusing on other aspects of the transition.
Aligning Leadership Styles with the School Goals and Context	1, 2, 3		All cases aimed to align their leadership styles with the school's goals and culture.
Building Trust and Rapport	1, 2, 3		All case units emphasized building trust and rapport as key to effective leadership, highlighting its importance for long-term success.
Enhancing Subordinates' Morale	1, 2, 3		Enhancing morale was recognized in all three cases as a vital leadership strategy, with leaders acknowledging that motivated staff is key to achieving school goals.
Involving Key Personnel in Decision Making	1, 2, 3		All cases highlight the importance of involving key personnel in decision-making to foster ownership, collaboration, and utilize staff expertise.

Practicing Continuity

In Cases 1 and 3, school heads focused on continuity by making gradual adjustments rather than abrupt changes. This approach helped maintain stability, build trust, and ensure security within the school community. By improving existing practices and communicating goals, leaders minimized resistance and aligned stakeholders toward shared objectives. However, Case 2 did not highlight continuity in leadership, focusing on other aspects of the transition.

Continuity in leadership is crucial for fostering trust, stability, and security within the school community (Sutherland, 2017). Leaders ensure smooth transitions and minimize disruption by maintaining a clear vision, making gradual adjustments, and building on successful programs. Transparent communication of goals and inclusive decision-making helps align teachers, staff, and parents toward shared objectives. This strategy supports operational efficiency and promotes a positive, collaborative environment, as demonstrated in Case 1, where the new leader prioritized continuity by enhancing, rather than overhauling, existing programs.

"*I focused on maintaining consistency as mga school programs na successful na. Hindi ko binago agad-agad ang mga existing programs na effective na... instead... I tried to enhance them*." (C1) (I focused on maintaining continuity in the successful school programs. Instead of making immediate changes to the existing effective programs, I aimed to enhance them.)

Kayyali (2025) emphasized the importance of maintaining continuity in leadership, setting clear expectations, and fostering a secure environment.

In Case 3, the leader emphasizes maintaining continuity in leadership through a clear, well-communicated vision and strategy that unites stakeholders and provides a strong sense of direction.

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"Yung mga strategies and visions ko, hindi ko binabago agad. I kept a clear vision and communicated it effectively, so everyone knew what to expect." (C3) (My strategies and vision, I did not change immediately. I kept a clear vision and communicated it effectively, so everyone knew what to expect.)

Case 3 illustrates how a stable, continuous leadership approach, grounded in a clear vision and strategy, fosters a secure environment with well-defined roles for achieving school goals.

Aligning Leadership Styles with the School Goals and Context

All three cases emphasized that successful school heads aligned their leadership styles with the school's goals and context. A one-size-fits-all leadership approach is ineffective (Rutherford & Favero, 2020); instead, school heads must assess the unique needs of their institution and adapt their leadership accordingly (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Schools operate with distinct missions, student demographics, and institutional cultures. School heads who take the time to understand these aspects can implement policies and strategies that resonate with their specific school community. Alignment with school goals ensures that the leader's decisions support institutional priorities, leading to long-term growth and improvement (Kipasika, 2024).

"*Ang pagtutok ng leadership sa pagpapaliwanag at pag-a-align ng mga goals."* (C1) (The focus of leadership is on explaining and aligning the goals.)

By clearly explaining and aligning goals, Ned and Umesi (2023) cited that the leader ensures that everyone understands their purpose, fostering motivation and connection to the school's mission. In Case 2, the leader collaborates with teachers and department heads to align both short- and long-term goals, highlighting the value of teamwork and a shared vision.

"*Sigurudong nakipag-align ako sa mga teachers at department heads kung ano ang mga short-term at long-term goals namin."* (C2) (I made sure to align with the teachers and department heads on what our short-term and long-term goals are.)

This summary emphasizes the importance of involving key stakeholders in goal-setting to ensure goals are realistic and responsive to the school's needs, while also highlighting the leader's flexibility in adapting their leadership style to suit the specific school context.

"I had to adjust and align my leadership style with what works best for the people in that particular school." (C3)

This emphasizes that school heads must be attuned to the specific dynamics of their school community and adapt their approach to suit those dynamics. By doing so, the leader ensures that their style is both effective and responsive to the needs of the staff and students.

Building Trust and Rapport

In all case units, trust-building was considered an essential leadership strategy. Building trust and rapport is essential for effective school heads, as it encourages open communication, collaboration, and mutual respect among stakeholders. New leaders must prioritize transparent communication, active listening, and consistency between words and actions to establish credibility (Kabanda & Barrena-Martinez, 2025). Leading by example further reinforces trust and sets behavioral expectations for the school community.

Building trust takes time and patience, as demonstrated in Case 1, where the leader acknowledges the need for persistence in fostering strong, supportive relationships.

"At may effort to build trust...Things eventually settle down. It just takes time." (C1) (There is a deliberate effort to build trust... Over time, things stabilize. It simply requires patience.)

This highlights the understanding that trust is developed gradually through consistent actions, and once established, it fosters a stable, collaborative environment. In Case 2, the leader emphasizes embedding trust into the school culture, which is essential for the overall success of the school community:

"I focused on creating a culture of trust... *yan siguro* (that's it)." (C2)

This proactive approach demonstrates the leader's commitment to shaping an environment where trust is prioritized.

In Case 3, the leader stresses the importance of establishing trust before implementing plans or strategies:

"*Importante na magkaroon ng trust bago ipatupad ang mga plano at strategies*." (C3). (It is important to have trust built before implementing plans and strategies.)

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This insight reflects the leader's understanding that trust is foundational for the successful execution of initiatives, ensuring that the school community is receptive to change and collaboration.

Enhancing Subordinates' Morale

All school heads recognized the importance of motivating and uplifting their subordinates as a key strategy. Enhancing staff morale is key to effective leadership. According to Hanaysha and Majid (2018), motivated employees are more productive and committed. Leaders can boost morale by recognizing achievements, offering professional growth opportunities, and fostering open communication. Involving staff in decision-making and providing a supportive work environment further strengthens engagement and motivation. In Case 1, the leader emphasizes communication and morale-building through regular interactions with teachers and students, ensuring they feel supported and heard.

"*Nakipag-communicate ako sa lahat... nag-focus sa pagpapalakas ng morale ng teachers at students."* (C1) (I communicated with all of them. I focused on how to boost the morale of the teachers and students.)

This statement demonstrates that communication is key in fostering an environment where people feel valued. By engaging with teachers and students, the leader ensures that morale is strengthened across all levels of the school community, fostering a positive and supportive atmosphere.

In Case 2, the leader highlights how handling transitions effectively can boost morale. A collaborative leadership approach during change positively impacts staff perceptions of their work environment.

"So, the morale really depends on how you handle the transition. How you show that you're (you are) there to work together." (C2)

This insight highlights the significance of the leadership approach during transitions. Morale can significantly influence how well the leader navigates changes and communicates with the team. When staff see that the leader is supportive and open to collaboration, it boosts their morale and eases the transition process.

In Case 2, the leader also emphasizes providing feedback and celebrating achievements to improve morale. Recognizing hard work and celebrating successes helps staff feel valued, particularly during stressful leadership transitions (Norbash, 2017).

"*Regular kong binibigyan ng feedback, pinapahalagahan ang kanilang hard work, at sineselebrate ang mga wins nila. Makakatulong ito para tumaas ang morale ng mga tao, kasi alam naman natin na stressful ang transition periods*." (C2) (I regularly provide feedback, recognize their hard work, and celebrate their wins. This helps boost people's morale because we all know that transition periods can be stressful.)

This reflection emphasizes the importance of positive reinforcement in boosting morale. In times of stress, such as during leadership transitions, regular feedback and celebration of accomplishments help staff feel more supported and valued, contributing to their overall well-being and job satisfaction.

In Case 3, the leader takes a more structured approach to boosting morale by initiating team-building activities. This strategy helps create unity among staff, fostering a sense of camaraderie and collective purpose. Clear goals and team unity are key to maintaining high morale and sustaining performance over time (Kim & Rehg, 2018).

"*I also initiated team-building activities to help build morale among the staff. Yung pagkakaroon ng unity sa staff... having clear goals was key to sustaining performance*." (C3) (I also initiated team-building activities to help boost staff morale. Having unity among the staff and clear goals was key to sustaining performance.)

This case highlights how team-building initiatives strengthen relationships and align staff efforts toward common goals. By ensuring that staff are unified and working toward shared objectives, the leader can maintain high morale and improve overall performance (Sun & Henderson, 2017). This approach is especially effective in creating long-term motivation and collaboration.

Involving Key Personnel in Decision Making

Across all case units, school heads adopted a participatory leadership style, involving key personnel in decision-making. Involving key personnel in decision-making fosters collaboration, empowerment, and shared ownership of the school's goals. By engaging teachers, staff, and stakeholders, leaders benefit from diverse perspectives and create a sense of collective responsibility (Ospina, 2017). In Case 1, the leader

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emphasizes the importance of involving teachers and staff to ensure greater investment in the school's success.

> *"As long as you involve the teachers and staff sa decision-making process. Kasi kapag lahat sila may say...parang mas invested sila sa success ng policy."* (C1) (It is crucial to involve teachers and staff in the decision-making process. When everyone has a voice, they are more likely to feel invested in the policy's success.)

This statement highlights that when teachers and staff feel their opinions matter, they become more engaged and committed to implementing policies, leading to smoother implementation and better outcomes. In Case 1, the leader consistently involves staff in decision-making, especially when changes are needed, ensuring decisions are shaped by those affected rather than made top-down.

> *"Pag may mga changes na kailangang gawin... I always involve them... in the decision-making process."* (C1) (When changes need to be made, I always involve them in the decision-making process.)

By consistently involving staff in decision-making, the leader fosters a collaborative culture in which everyone feels like a partner in the school's growth (Ospina, 2017). This leads to greater buy-in for change, as staff understand and contribute to decisions. In Case 2, the leader involves staff and empowers them to take ownership of the process, increasing engagement and responsibility.

> *"Hindi ko lang sila inasahan na susunod lang... kundi in-empower ko sila na maging part ng decision-making process."* (C2) (I did not simply expect them to follow; instead, I empowered them to actively participate in the decision-making process.)

This approach is effective because it transforms the dynamic from staff simply following orders to actively shaping the school's direction. Empowering staff encourages critical thinking and contribution, benefiting the school (Adeoye et al., 2024). The analysis highlights the importance of strategic leadership practices, such as consistent leadership, leveraging experience, aligning leadership with goals, and building trust. These themes emphasize adaptable, transparent leadership rooted in the school community's values, ensuring sustainable growth and success.

Discussion

Leadership transitions among school heads who experienced three-year station transfers revealed several recurring challenges and adaptive strategies. While all participants experienced similar transition challenges, the severity of these challenges and the effectiveness of their responses varied depending on each school's context, the presence of support systems, and the school head's leadership experience. The findings present a nuanced view of leadership transitions, shaped by internal school dynamics, resource availability, and the ability to build relationships and trust.

The cross-case analysis revealed several shared challenges during leadership transitions. School heads struggled to adjust to unfamiliar school cultures, routines, and teacher dynamics, often experiencing emotional and psychological stress. Building trust was also difficult, especially for those met with skepticism. Resistance to change, particularly from staff loyal to previous leaders, further complicated their efforts. Additionally, some school heads faced operational inefficiencies due to unfamiliar systems and unclear delegation. Managing heavy workloads and undefined role expectations, particularly in under-resourced settings, added to the stress of transition.

Despite the challenges, five core strategies helped school heads navigate leadership transitions. These included: practicing continuity by retaining existing programs to maintain stability; aligning leadership styles with school goals to reduce resistance; building trust through consistent communication and follow-through; boosting morale by recognizing staff efforts and offering support; and involving key personnel in decision-making to encourage shared ownership. While all strategies were used across cases, their effectiveness varied by school context.

These findings align with several established leadership theories. Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994) is reflected in the emphasis on building trust, inspiring motivation, and fostering shared vision. School heads demonstrated transformational behaviors through morale-building and trust-centered strategies. Change Management Theory (Kotter, 1996) is evident in the structured

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responses to resistance, clear communication of expectations, and preservation of continuity. The importance of managing change intentionally was underscored in how school heads prepared staff for transitions. Finally, Distributed Leadership Theory (Spillane, 2006) was reflected in the strategic inclusion of key personnel in decision-making processes. This approach promoted collaborative governance and empowered teachers to take active roles in school leadership.

Conclusion

The study concludes that leadership transitions under the three-year station transfer policy present both significant challenges and opportunities for growth. While disruptions to program continuity and staff morale are inevitable, school heads who prioritize relationship-building, clear communication, and collaborative decision-making can mitigate negative effects and foster stable, supportive school environments. The findings underscore the importance of institutional support systems and succession planning to ensure that leadership transitions contribute positively to school performance and student outcomes.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

For the Department of Education. The Department of Education should review and refine the three-year station transfer policy to include structured transition support mechanisms. This may include pre-transfer orientation programs, mentorship opportunities for incoming school heads, and overlap periods to facilitate knowledge transfer and program continuity. The department should also consider establishing a formal succession-planning framework to prepare school leaders for transitions well in advance.

For School Heads. School heads undergoing station transfers should prioritize understanding the unique culture, routines, and dynamics of their new school before implementing changes. They should adopt a gradual approach to leadership, focusing on building trust, fostering relationships, and involving key personnel in decision-making processes. Practicing continuity by enhancing rather than overhauling existing successful programs can minimize resistance and maintain stability.

For Future Researchers. Future studies may expand this research by including a larger sample size across different divisions or regions to enhance generalizability. Quantitative or mixed-methods approaches could be employed to measure the impact of leadership transitions on measurable outcomes such as student achievement and teacher performance. Additionally, longitudinal studies that track school heads across multiple transfer cycles could provide deeper insights into long-term adaptation and leadership development.

For Policymakers. Policymakers should consider allocating resources for professional development programs specifically designed to support school heads during leadership transitions. Training on change management, stakeholder engagement, and cultural adaptation would equip school leaders with the skills necessary to navigate transitions effectively. Support systems such as counseling services and peer networks should also be made available to school heads experiencing transition-related stress.

Declaration — Author Form

1. Conflict of Interest

Statement: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

2. Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies

AI tool: Consensus and Grammarly

Purpose: Consensus was used for literature search and identification of relevant academic sources to support the review of related literature. Grammarly was used for grammar checking, spelling verification, and language editing to improve the manuscript's clarity and readability. These tools were used solely as aids, and all content, analysis, interpretation, and conclusions remain the authors' original work. The authors

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reviewed and verified all outputs generated by these tools and take full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

3. Data Availability Statement

Statement: The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Due to confidentiality agreements and ethical restrictions, the data are not publicly available.

4. Ethics Statement

Statement: The ethics approval and approval number for this study are not available. However, the researchers adhered to the highest ethical standards throughout the conduct of this study. All participants provided informed consent, and their confidentiality and anonymity were maintained at all times. The study followed the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, justice, and data protection in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines.

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Farah Rea Mea U. Macapaar: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing

Virgil John D. Bogaoan: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Writing – Review & Editing

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