

Leading Change: An Examination of the Lived Experiences of Change Management Strategies Among School-Heads in DepEd Region 12

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Abstract

In the face of constant educational reforms and evolving policies, school heads serve as pivotal figures in driving organizational change. However, limited research exists on how school heads develop change management competencies while steering schools through transitions and balancing leadership, stakeholder engagement, and innovation. This phenomenological study explored the role of 15 school heads in navigating change management within DepEd SOCCSKSARGEN Region, emphasizing key leadership competencies and strategies. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Moustakas' modified Stevick-Collaizi-Keen method. Findings revealed that school heads develop adaptability, problem-solving, stakeholder collaboration, teacher empowerment, strategic communication, and innovation to drive educational transformation. Leadership styles significantly influence change implementation, with transformational leadership fostering motivation and innovation, while transactional leadership ensures efficiency through structure and accountability. Additionally, alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is critical, yet financial constraints pose challenges in policy execution. The study highlights the need for continuous leadership development, strategic resource allocation, and program monitoring to sustain meaningful educational reforms. Ethical leadership, resilience, and learner-focused initiatives further enhance school effectiveness, ensuring that change management efforts lead to a dynamic, inclusive, and student-centered learning environment. These findings emphasize the importance of strong leadership capacity and proactive alignment with sustainability goals to foster long-term educational progress.

Keywords: Change Management; Educational Leadership; Leadership Competencies; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Transformational Leadership

I. INTRODUCTION

In the face of constant educational reforms and evolving policies, school heads serve as pivotal figures in driving organizational change. They shape how changes are communicated, adopted, and sustained, and this research provides insights to enhance leadership for educational reforms, support DepEd leadership programs, and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite their crucial role in managing change, limited research exists on how school heads develop their change management competencies in real-world educational contexts, as they steer schools through transitions while balancing leadership behaviors, stakeholder engagement, and innovation in educational settings.

Globally, change management methodologies like those of Kotter and Lewin are widely applied, yet often lack structured implementation (Harrison et al., 2021). Their success relies on contextual adaptability and integration with improvement strategies. Challenges in schools—such as limited teacher involvement, vague decision-making, and lack of leadership training—demand collaboration, trust, and communication (Vlachopoulos, 2021), while pressures from technology and globalization further complicate change (Beycioglu & Kondakci, 2020).

In the Philippines, education has shifted toward student-centered learning due to technological and global influences (Haas, 2016), yet research often overlooks how school leaders manage these transitions. Studies by Kiong (2023) and Coetzee (2023) focus on technology's impact on

students, lacking leadership perspectives. Current reforms like the MATATAG Curriculum pose ongoing challenges (Estrellado, 2023).

Though leadership's role in change is well-documented (Acton, 2020; Baiju & Asha, 2022), deeper qualitative insights are lacking. Local studies (De Luna & Encio, 2023) explore change management but overlook leadership behaviors and communication. Scholars like Aldridge & McLure (2023) and Phillips & Klein (2023) emphasize the need for more context-driven, qualitative research.

This study addresses that gap by examining the lived experiences of school heads in SOCCSKSARGEN, focusing on leadership behaviors, communication strategies, stakeholder engagement, and professional growth. Findings aim to inform DepEd policies, improve leadership training, and support sustainable, inclusive education aligned with the SDGs. Ultimately, it contributes to advancing leadership development and effective change management in schools.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored from different theories on change management strategies, such as Transformational Leadership Theory, Transactional Leadership Theory, and Fullan's Change Theory in Education.

Firstly, the study was viewed through Transformational Leadership Theory by Downton (1973) and Burns (1978). This theory aspires to change existing thoughts, techniques, and goals for better results and the greater good. Beyond that, the transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers and seeks to satisfy higher needs, goals, and desires to change which are crucial factors in implementing change. In this context, the theory helped in exploring how school heads in DepEd SOCCSKSARGEN Region develop change management competencies by inspiring and motivating stakeholders, fostering a shared vision, and implementing strategic leadership behaviors that drive meaningful and sustainable organizational transformation.

Secondly, the study was gleaned on Transactional Leadership Theory. Max Weber (1947). It highlights strictly conforming to the existing structure of an organization and measures success according to that organization's system of rewards and penalties. This theory provided a foundational framework for examining the change management competencies of school heads by emphasizing adherence to organizational structures, reward systems, and external motivators, this theory offered critical insights into how school leaders navigate and implement change within a structured educational bureaucracy, ensuring alignment with institutional goals and performance standards.

Lastly, this study can be seen through the lens of Change Theory in Education by Fullan (2001). This theory presents principles needed for effective change management such as moral purpose, understanding change, building relationships, knowledge building and sharing, and coherence making.

In summary, these theories offered different approaches and focuses, from individual behavior change to organizational alignment and leadership strategies. These could help change leaders based on choosing the most appropriate approach for the given demands of change or if they need to consider other factors since each model or theory works around different focuses, components, or approaches.

These theories were integrated and adapted to provide a comprehensive framework for school leaders to effectively manage and sustain educational change, guiding the methodology of the study and the development of research tools to measure and enhance change management competencies in educational settings.

Statement of the Problem

This study explored the lived experiences of School Heads in developing their change management competencies in SOCCSKSARGEN region. It sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of school heads, and how do they perceive and apply their change management competencies in relation to leadership behaviors, stakeholder engagement, and professional development?
2. How do school heads perceive the impact of their leadership styles on the effectiveness of change initiatives in their schools?
3. How do school heads interpret the insights and implications of their change management competencies for DepEd Administration practices and the advancement of Sustainable Development Goals?

II. METHODOLOGY

This study focused on the change management competencies of school heads in DepEd Region XII, specifically examining their current knowledge, skills, practices, and strategies in areas such as leadership behaviors, perspectives on change, communication strategies, support mechanisms, stakeholder engagement, and professional development. Using a phenomenological approach, the research aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of how school leaders navigate the complexities of change management, highlighting the implications of their experiences in relation to the DepEd administration and Sustainable Development Goals.

The study also explored contextual factors unique to the participants of this study as determined through purposive sampling using the following inclusion criteria: 1) Participant must currently be employed as school head with a title position as a Principal, Head Teacher, or Teacher-in-charge at an elementary or secondary school within DepEd Region XII; 2) Participants should have served as school heads for a minimum of 3 years; 3) Participants should have

experience in implementing or managing significant educational changes or reforms (e.g., implementation of new curricula such as transition to the K-12 program or adoption of the MATATAG curriculum, integration of new teaching technologies, or institutional restructuring); 4) Participant must be referred by a key informant (e.g., regional education officers, divisional heads, previous or present subordinate) as being known for having a unique, distinctive, or extreme leadership style; and 5) Participant must express willingness to participate in an in-depth interview to explore their experiences with change management. The saturation point was used to determine the number of participants. According to Faulkner and Trotter (2017), "Data saturation refers to the point in the research process when no new information is discovered in data analysis, and this redundancy signals to researchers that data collection may cease".

This study utilized a qualitative transcendental phenomenological design. Feldman (2008) emphasized that qualitative research explores subjective experiences, perceptions, and emotions, acknowledging that reality may differ for each participant. Phenomenology, as used in this study, focuses on describing human experiences based on participants' own narratives.

According to Patton (2002), this design seeks to understand the essence of experiences through in-depth analysis of dialogues, recordings, and reflections. Using semi-structured interviews, the researcher examined the lived experiences of school heads in developing their change management competencies. This approach allowed for a rich exploration of participants' feelings, views, and interpretations.

The study's core data were extracted from the themes, insights, and meanings derived from these experiences, highlighting the implications of leadership styles and change management competencies for DepEd administration and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The modified Stevick-Collaizi-Keen Method outlined by Moustaka (1994) was the approach used to conduct the qualitative data collection and analysis. A purposive sampling was used guided by inclusion criteria. The interview protocol and saturation point was observed to determine the number of participants.

The locale of the study was based from the inclusion criteria number 1 which was: Participant must currently be employed as school head with a title position as a Principal, Head Teacher, or Teacher-in-charge at an elementary or secondary school within DepEd Region XII which includes the coverage of DepEd Region XII which encompassed eight schools' divisional offices: Cotabato Province, General Santos City, Kidapawan City, Koronadal City, Sarangani, South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, and Tacurong City. This is to help maintain focus on regional factors affecting change management practices.

An In-depth Interview (IDI) Guide which was designed by the researcher was used gathering the needed data in the study. This tool was reviewed by the members of the Examining Committee which was composed of two (2) parts. The first part centred on the profile of the participants, including their age, length of service as a school head, hometown, assigned schools as school head, position title, and received awards relevant to school leadership. The second part focused on in-depth experiences in developing their change management competencies, insights, and perceptions regarding the implications of their competencies and leadership styles in alignment with DepEd policies and the SDGs.

To begin data collection, the researcher secured approval from the Dean of Sultan Kudarat State University Graduate School, followed by permission from the DepEd Regional Director of Region 12 and the respective Schools Division Superintendents. Once approved, interview schedules were arranged based on the participants' availability.

Each interview followed ethical protocols, which were explained to the participants beforehand. The interviews were recorded and supplemented with handwritten notes. All data were transcribed for analysis. This process was repeated with each participant until data saturation was reached. This study followed the modified Stevick-Collaizi-Keen steps by Moustakas (1994), an approach on thematic analysis to identify the significant themes for the phenomenon in focus. These steps set the direction for the researcher to interpret and make sense of the extracted meanings of the participants' experiences.

After each interview, the researcher transcribed the recordings without assumptions, practicing bracketing to set aside personal bias and focus solely on the school heads' experiences with change management.

Using phenomenological reduction, the researcher applied horizontalization—treating each statement equally—to identify and group significant statements into meaning units. These units from each interview were clustered into themes, which were further categorized into broader emergent themes. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached, where no new insights emerged (Wolcott, 2004; Landau & Drori, 2008).

Next, through imaginative variation, the researcher explored multiple interpretations and perspectives to uncover the underlying structures of the participants' experiences. This led to the development of textural descriptions (what was experienced) and structural descriptions (how it was experienced, including internal strategies, external pressures, and support mechanisms).

The final step was the composite description, integrating both textural and structural narratives to capture the essence of the phenomenon. This synthesis offered a descriptive interpretation of the emergent themes and their implications

for DepEd's administration and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Trustworthiness

Ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research is vital to establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). This study applied rigorous strategies to accurately reflect participants' experiences in developing change management competencies aligned with DepEd policies and the SDGs.

Credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement, member checking, and triangulation. (Suter, 2012; De Wet, 2010).

Confirmability was ensured through transparent analysis and reflexivity. (Ramsey, 2010).

Transferability was achieved by providing detailed context, participant backgrounds, and institutional settings. (Suter, 2012).

Dependability was maintained through a well-documented process, audit trail, reflexive journaling, and consistent use of a structured interview guide and field notes.

By applying these methods, the study upheld the trustworthiness of its findings and contributed meaningful insights into DepEd school leaders' change management competencies.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher followed the ethical standards set by Sultan Kudarat State University's Ethical Committee to safeguard participants' rights and well-being.

Informed Consent was prioritized, ensuring participants understood their role, risks, benefits, and their right to withdraw at any time.

Voluntary Participation followed informed consent, fostering trust and mutual respect. Approval was also obtained from DepEd Region 12's Regional Director and Schools Division Superintendents before data collection.

Data Privacy was strictly maintained. Participants' identities and responses were kept confidential, with all disclosed information handled with care.

Cultural and Gender Sensitivity were observed throughout the study. The researcher respected cultural norms, values, and communication styles, and ensured gender and religious inclusivity, valuing all perspectives equally.

By adhering to these ethical practices, the study upheld participants' dignity, promoted trust, and ensured the research process remained responsible, reliable, and ethically sound.

Researcher's Positionality

As a classroom teacher within the same educational system, the researcher held a unique insider position in relation to the participants who were school heads in higher leadership roles. This positionality shaped the research process, from data collection to interpretation, through a lens

informed by firsthand experience with educational change at the classroom level.

Motivated by a professional interest in change management and its alignment with DepEd policies and the SDGs, the researcher approached the study both as an observer and contributor to school leadership discourse.

The power dynamic between the researcher and participants required a respectful and neutral approach to interviews, ensuring participants could speak candidly without pressure. Shared institutional experiences fostered rapport, while ethical standards like confidentiality and voluntary participation were upheld.

The research took place within the DepEd context, where the researcher's familiarity with policy aided in interpreting how leadership practices reflect broader mandates.

Grounded in a constructivist worldview, the researcher recognized that knowledge is shaped through experience and interaction. Guided by transformational leadership theories, the study emphasized the role of visionary leadership in driving change. Through this lens, the researcher balanced professional insight with scholarly rigor, maintaining a critically reflective stance throughout the study.

Operational Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined based on their operational usage within the research context:

Change is the transition from current practices to improved conditions in DepEd Region 12 schools through policy or structural adjustments.

Change Initiatives are specific efforts led by school heads to enhance school operations and outcomes.

Change Management is the structured process school heads use to implement and sustain organizational changes.

Change Management Competencies are the skills and strategies school heads apply to lead effective and smooth transitions.

Change Management Competencies Development is the continuous learning process school heads undergo to strengthen their ability to manage change.

Change Management Experiences are the real-life accounts of how school heads lead and respond to changes in their institutions.

Leadership Behaviors are the actions school heads take that influence how they lead change in their schools.

Leadership Style Influences describe how a school head's leadership approach affects the change process.

Navigating Change refers to the methods and decisions school heads use to guide their schools through transitions. School Heads are the designated leaders managing and guiding schools in DepEd Region 12.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are global goals used as benchmarks for aligning school changes with broader societal priorities.

Transformational Leader refers to a school head who inspires others to embrace vision-driven changes that improve educational outcomes.

Professional Development is the ongoing training that equips school leaders and staff with skills for effective change and leadership.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Experiences of School Heads in Applying their Change Management Competencies

The study identified ten (10) emergent themes from the experiences of school heads in applying their change management competencies, highlighting various aspects of leadership behavior, professional development, and stakeholder engagement.

As presented in Table 1, these themes are as follows: *addressing problems and challenges; continuous learning and development; embracing stakeholders' collaboration; teachers' empowerment; ensuring efficient communication; introducing and implementing innovations; promotion and recognition; using reflective thinking; leadership roles; and transformative institutions.*

Table 1. Experiences of School Heads in Applying their Change Management Competencies

Emerging Themes
Addressing Problems and Challenges
Continuous Learning and Development
Embracing Stakeholders' Collaboration
Teachers' Empowerment
Ensuring Efficient Communication
Introducing and Implementing Innovations
Promotion and Recognition
Using reflective thinking
Leadership Roles
Transformative Institutions

Addressing Problems and Challenges

Addressing problems and challenges in relation to managing change is a pivotal experience for the participants as school heads in developing or applying change management competencies because it requires leaders to understand the complexities of change, anticipate potential obstacles, and implement effective solutions. This ongoing process refines their decision-making skills, equips them to handle resistance, and strengthens their capacity to lead adaptive and transformative change.

This aligns with Fullan's (2001) Change Theory in Education, which emphasizes the importance of proactive leadership in fostering continuous improvement through adaptive strategies. They are able to effectively address challenges. Furthermore, Transformational Leadership Theory by Downton (1973) and Burns (1978) highlights the

significance of inspiring and motivating others to embrace change.

Continuous Learning and Development

Continuous learning and development are integral in developing or applying change management competencies of school heads. This process enables school heads to adapt to the ever-evolving educational landscape, equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively implement change. By consistently engaging in professional development, they gain insights into emerging educational trends, innovative practices, and updated policies, ensuring that their leadership remains relevant and responsive to the needs of students and teachers.

According to Fullan's Change Theory in Education, building capacity for change is essential for achieving sustainable educational reforms. Moreover, Transformational Leadership Theory underscores the importance of leaders who inspire and empower others. As school heads who model lifelong learning, the participants set a positive example for teachers, encouraging them to pursue their own professional growth.

Embracing Stakeholders' Collaboration

Participants in this study demonstrated a cooperative approach, empowering teachers, parents, and other stakeholders to engage in school decision-making. This approach strengthened teamwork, improved school outcomes, and built a sense of shared responsibility. Through collaborative efforts, school leaders successfully addressed issues, enhanced school performance, and deepened community engagement, reinforcing their role as effective change leaders.

This approach aligns with Fullan's Change Theory in Education, which emphasizes the importance of building collaborative cultures to drive meaningful and sustainable change.

Empowering Teachers

Empowering teachers is a significant experience for school heads in developing their change management competencies. This approach emphasizes the importance of trust, collaboration, and professional growth within the school environment. By empowering teachers, school heads cultivate a culture of shared leadership, where teachers are encouraged to take ownership of their roles, make informed decisions, and lead initiatives that drive school improvement. This empowerment fosters confidence, resilience, and leadership capabilities, contributing to a culture of continuous growth and development.

According to Fullan's Change Theory in Education, meaningful and sustainable change requires building the capacity of all stakeholders, particularly teachers. The Transformational Leadership Theory also supports this approach, emphasizing the importance of inspiring and empowering others to reach their full potential.

Ensuring Efficient Communication

Ensuring efficient communication is a significant experience for school heads in developing or applying change management competencies. Effective communication is essential for achieving change initiatives, as it ensures clarity, alignment, and understanding among all stakeholders. School heads recognize that transparent and strategic communication is vital for driving educational change. Open, friendly dialogue fosters trust and inclusivity, encouraging teachers, parents, and community members to actively participate in decision-making processes.

In the context of Transformational Leadership Theory, school heads consistently promote clear, purposeful, and collaborative communication inspire and empower others. Conversely, Transactional Leadership Theory focuses on clear communication of expectations, rewards, and consequences.

Introducing and implementing innovations

Introducing and implementing innovations was meaningful in the development and implementation of school heads of their change management competencies because it sparked school heads' visionary leadership, strategic planning, and adaptability skills. They believe their approach were effective because they understand that leading change involves not only introducing new ideas but also ensuring their successful integration into the school environment. This process requires overcoming resistance, addressing concerns, and fostering a culture of acceptance and commitment. By navigating these complexities, school heads strengthen their change management competencies, enabling them to drive meaningful and lasting improvements.

This approach aligns with Transformational Leadership Theory, which emphasizes the importance of inspiring and motivating others to embrace change. On the other hand, Transactional Leadership Theory also plays a role in the successful implementation of innovations.

Promotion and Recognition

Promotion and recognition are pivotal in developing school heads' change management competencies. They serve as powerful motivators and reinforce a culture of excellence within the school environment. Receiving awards, recognition, or acknowledgment inspire school leaders to implement changes effectively, reinforcing a culture of excellence. By celebrating the efforts of educators and stakeholders, school heads boost morale, drive commitment, and promote accountability in achieving educational goals.

This approach aligns with Transactional Leadership Theory by Max Weber (1947), which emphasizes the importance of rewards and recognition in motivating individuals to meet established goals. Furthermore, Transformational Leadership Theory underscores the power of inspiration and appreciation in empowering others. The Change Theory in Education emphasizes the significance of

building relationships and capacity to sustain meaningful change.

Using Reflective Thinking

Reflective thinking is a crucial practice for school heads, enabling them to continuously refine their leadership strategies and enhance change management competencies. By critically evaluating their personal experiences, observations, and decision-making approaches, school heads can identify strengths, areas for improvement, and opportunities for growth. This ongoing process deepens their understanding of leadership impact, promotes self-awareness, and aligns personal values with professional responsibilities. Such reflection fosters adaptability and resilience, allowing leaders to learn from successes and setbacks while effectively navigating the complexities of educational change.

This approach aligns with Fullan's Change Theory in Education, which emphasizes adaptive leadership for sustainable improvement, and Transformational Leadership Theory, which highlights the importance of self-awareness and personal growth in inspiring meaningful change.

Leadership Roles

By effectively embodying leadership roles, school heads demonstrate the values, behaviors, and expectations that they wish to cultivate within their schools, reinforcing the importance of professionalism, ethical conduct, and a commitment to high standards. This process not only sets a benchmark for teachers and staff but also inspires them to adopt leadership roles in their respective capacities, promoting a culture of shared leadership.

This practice resonates deeply with Transformational Leadership Theory, which emphasizes the importance of inspiring and motivating others through personal influence and strong values. Moreover, Transactional Leadership Theory and Change Theory in Education further validate the importance of setting role models. Transactional leaders focus on establishing clear expectations and rewarding performance, reinforcing desired behaviors that contribute to school improvement. Meanwhile, Fullan's Change Theory highlights the critical role of leaders in modeling effective practices to drive sustainable change. By setting high standards and demonstrating the desired behaviors, school heads ensure that teachers and staff are equipped to navigate the complexities of educational reform and achieve lasting, meaningful change.

Transformative Institutions

As school heads strive to create educational environments that support student success, enrich learning experiences, and promote holistic development, their leadership efforts drive institutional transformation, ensuring schools remain dynamic and student-centered. This commitment aligns with Transformational Leadership Theory which emphasizes inspiring and empowering

educators to embrace change and pursue innovative practices that elevate teaching and learning. This also reflects Fullan's (2001) Change Theory in Education, which underscores the importance of proactive leadership that adapts to evolving educational needs. Moreover, Transactional Leadership reinforces the importance of setting clear expectations and holding educators accountable for achieving shared goals. By recognizing achievements, reinforcing best practices, and ensuring consistent performance, school heads create an environment of accountability and support.

School Heads' Perception on the Impact of Their Leadership Styles to the Effectiveness of Change Management

The emerging themes on the School Heads' Perception on the Impact of their Leadership Styles to the effectiveness of change management that highlights the influence of their leadership behaviors in initiating change is presented in Table 2. These themes are as follows: *adaptability to diverse leadership; inspiring transformational leadership; efficiency and harmonious relationship; learner-focused innovations; good values and change management; strategic communication; and applying transactional leadership to motivate and mobilize.*

Table 2. School Heads' Perception on the Impact of Their Leadership Styles to the Effectiveness of Change Management

Emerging Theme

Adaptability to Diverse Leadership

Inspiring Transformational Leadership

Efficiency and Harmonious Relationship

Learner-focused Innovations

Good Values and Change Management

Strategic Communication

Applying Transactional Leadership to

Motivate and Mobilize

Adaptability to Diverse Leadership

On the perception of school heads' perception of leadership styles for an effective management of change initiatives, they all agree that adaptability to diverse leadership is a crucial competency. This theme highlights the ability to adjust leadership styles based on the specific needs of the school community, ensuring a balanced approach that fosters collaboration, efficiency, and resilience. The findings of this study suggest that school heads must remain flexible in their leadership strategies to accommodate varying challenges and dynamics within the educational setting.

Transformational leadership styles promote idea-sharing among teachers and students, fostering an environment where innovation and collaboration thrive. At the same time, occasional use of autocratic leadership ensures that urgent

decisions are made efficiently without excessive delays (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Inspiring Transformational Leadership

Inspiring Transformational Leadership emerged as a pivotal theme in the school heads' perceptions of how leadership styles influence change management competencies. By leveraging the principles of Transformational Leadership Theory, school heads drive meaningful and sustainable change, empowering teachers and stakeholders to work collaboratively toward a shared vision. This approach transforms schools into thriving learning communities by cultivating a resilient and innovative culture, fostering continuous improvement, and ultimately enhancing school performance.

Moreover, Fullan's Change Theory in Education supports the idea that meaningful and lasting change emerges from a culture of collaboration and shared vision. Transformational leadership aligns with this theory by fostering strong relationships, trust, and open communication.

Efficiency and Harmonious relationship

Efficiency and Harmonious Relationships emerged as a pivotal theme in the school heads' perceptions of how leadership styles influence change management competencies. This theme underscores the importance of collaborative leadership in fostering positive relationships, streamlining school operations, and enhancing overall efficiency. By aligning leadership practices with principles from Transformational Leadership Theory and Fullan's Change Theory in Education, school heads drive sustainable change and cultivate a cohesive school culture.

Learner-focused Innovations

This emergent theme Learner-focused innovations revealed how school heads prioritizes learners' well-being beyond academics, ensuring their physical, emotional, and social needs are met.

School heads explained that the innovations they initiated were inspired from the learners themselves. Understanding students' needs, strengths, and challenges allows school heads to customize interventions that resonate with their experiences. This learner-driven approach ensures that educational programs are relevant, engaging, and effective in boosting academic performance and personal growth.

Transformational leadership plays a pivotal role in driving these innovations by inspiring and empowering teachers to be proactive, creative, and committed to student success. On the other hand, Transactional leadership also contributes to the effective management of learner-focused innovations, particularly in establishing structure, consistency, and accountability.

Good Values and Change Management

Good values are integral to effective leadership and play a crucial role in shaping a school head's change management competencies. This emergent theme highlights how school

heads perceive leadership styles as significantly influencing their ability to lead change effectively. It reflects the understanding that successful leadership is not solely about authority or position but about embodying dedication, integrity, and an active presence in school operations.

According to Transformational Leadership Theory, effective leaders inspire, motivate, and engage their followers by exemplifying strong moral values, fostering trust, and creating a sense of purpose. School heads who demonstrate good values, such as integrity, dedication, and selflessness, serve as role models for teachers, staff, and students. By consistently upholding these values, school heads influence others to adopt positive behaviors, embrace change, and commit to achieving shared educational goals.

Strategic Communication

Strategic Communication emerged as a critical theme in understanding school heads' perceptions of how their leadership styles impact the effectiveness of change management. This theme highlights the importance of importance of fostering open communication, utilizing feedback constructively, disseminating administrative goals effectively to drive meaningful school improvement, and purposeful communication in driving change and fostering a culture of collaboration and trust within the school community.

Transformational Leadership Theory emphasizes the power of inspirational and transparent communication to engage teachers, staff, and stakeholders in a shared vision. In contrast, Transactional Leadership Theory also focuses on directive and structured communication to ensure compliance with policies and procedures. Fullan's Change Theory in Education further underscores the importance of strategic communication in promoting collaboration, understanding, and ownership of the change process.

Applying Transactional Leadership to Motivate and Mobilize

Applying Transactional Leadership to Motivate and Mobilize emerged as a significant theme in the school heads' perceptions of how leadership styles impact the effectiveness of change management. This theme emphasizes the value of transactional leadership in creating a results-oriented environment that drives performance, accountability, and motivation within the school. School heads recognize that transactional leadership is effective for managing immediate or procedural changes, providing a structured approach to achieving urgent goals and maintaining consistency in school operations.

The application of Transactional Leadership Theory aligns with Fullan's Change Theory in Education by focusing on the importance of consistency, clear expectations, and accountability in implementing short-term changes.

Implication Of Change Management Competencies And Leadership Styles With Deped Administration Practices And Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

As shown in Table 3, the emerging themes on the Implication Of Change Management Competencies And Leadership Styles With DepEd Administration Practices and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are as follows: *Leadership capacity and development; Funding necessity for policy implementation; and Alignment of school programs to SDGs.*

Table 3. Implication Of Change Management Competencies And Leadership Styles With Deped Administration Practices And Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Emerging Theme
Leadership Capacity and Development
Funding necessity for Policy Implementation
Alignment of School Programs to SDGs

Leadership Capacity and Development

The emergent theme Leadership Capacity and Development is essential for sustaining educational progress and fostering competent leadership within schools. School heads recalled that they are encouraging teachers to pursue further studies enhances their professional growth and instructional effectiveness. They also believe that staying informed about DepEd policies, memoranda, and orders is crucial for compliance, credibility, and seamless change execution. Through the culture of continuous improvement, school heads strengthen leadership competencies, align educational practices with DepEd's vision, and contribute to the advancement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education).

A study by Meyer-Looze and Hodge (2022) highlighted that effective school leaders focus on identifying necessary changes to improve student learning, moving beyond mere compliance activities to address achievement gaps. This approach underscores the importance of targeted professional development in building leadership capacity.

Funding Necessity for Policy Implementation

School heads emphasized the Funding Necessity for Policy Implementation. They stressed that this is a critical aspect of ensuring that educational reforms and programs are effectively executed in schools. Adequate financial resources are essential for sustaining initiatives that promote inclusive education, align with national policies, and address the diverse needs of learners.

Allocating resources for Individualized Education Plans (IEP) and ensuring medical check-ups for special needs learners reflect the commitment to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education by providing tailored learning opportunities for all students. Additionally, funding support for the Madrasa and ALIVE (Arabic Language and

Islamic Values Education) programs strengthens SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities, ensuring that Indigenous Peoples (IP) learners and Arabic language students receive equitable educational opportunities. Financial backing for these programs not only enhances accessibility but also promotes culturally responsive teaching and learning.

Walt and Gilson (2018) stressed that control over financial resources allows donors to significantly impact national health policy processes, affecting priority setting and policy outcomes.

Alignment of school programs to SDGs

According to the participants, aligning school innovations and programs with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ensures that educational initiatives contribute to broader global and national development objectives. Schools that integrate SDG-driven strategies address critical issues such as hunger, health, sanitation, and inclusive education, making learning environments more equitable and sustainable. They believe that enhancing nutritional support for students, particularly in the Special Needs Education (SNED) program, aligns with SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) by ensuring that learners receive proper nourishment to support their cognitive and physical development. The DepEd School-Based Feeding Program plays a crucial role in addressing malnutrition among undernourished high school students, maximizing available resources to improve student well-being. Additionally, collaborating with local stakeholders—such as securing a donation for a genderized comfort room demonstrates commitment to SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) by providing proper hygiene facilities for junior high school learners.

Beyond health-focused initiatives, continuous monitoring and evaluation of school programs ensure that implemented changes remain effective, leading to evidence-based improvements that support sustainable and inclusive education (SDG 4).

Aligning innovations with DepEd policies and SDGs enables school heads to lead effective, policy-driven changes that benefit students, teachers, and the community. Adhering to DepEd guidelines also models structured leadership, ensuring legal, monitored, and sustainable educational reforms. Integrating SDGs into school programs promotes global citizenship and prepares students to face modern challenges. Schools support sustainable development by embedding SDG principles in teaching, policies, and activities, fostering inclusive, quality education and equitable access, as emphasized by UNESCO (2017).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study employed a qualitative transcendental phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences

of school heads in developing their change management competencies. Using the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method by Moustakas (1994), the research focused on capturing the essence of participants' experiences through in-depth interviews, transcriptions, and thematic analysis. A purposive sampling method guided by inclusion criteria was used to select school heads from DepEd Region 12, ensuring that participants had relevant leadership experience in implementing educational reforms. Data saturation was observed, with 15 participants included in the study. The analysis followed phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation to identify emergent themes and provide rich descriptions of the participants' experiences. The study aimed to highlight the implications of school heads' leadership styles and change management competencies in alignment with DepEd administration and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The study, covering eight school divisions and focused on regional factors affecting change management. Ethical protocols were strictly followed, ensuring confidentiality and informed consent. Thematic analysis was employed to extract significant statements, categorize meaning units, and develop emergent themes until data saturation was reached. Findings from this study provide a deeper understanding of how school heads navigate change, contributing to more effective leadership practices within DepEd and supporting the continuous improvement of educational management.

This phenomenological exploration underscored the 20 Emergent Themes which were pivotal role to school heads in driving effective change management within the DepEd SOCCSKSARGEN Region. Their competencies, leadership styles, and strategic approaches shape the success of educational transitions, ensuring resilience, collaboration, and innovation.

The findings of this phenomenological study highlight the pivotal role of school heads in navigating change management within DepEd SOCCSKSARGEN. The emergent themes emphasize key competencies such as problem-solving, continuous learning, stakeholder collaboration, teacher empowerment, efficient communication, innovation, recognition, reflective thinking, and transformative leadership. School heads not only manage risks and align reforms strategically, but they also empower educators and foster a culture of professionalism and shared responsibility—turning schools into dynamic, student-centered institutions.

A core insight revealed is their ability to adapt leadership styles to diverse contexts. Transformational leadership nurtures innovation and motivation, while transactional leadership ensures urgent goals are achieved through structure and accountability. This flexibility enhances both collaboration and efficiency in leading school reforms. Strategic communication, grounded in transparency and

engagement, sustains a trusting and involved school community. Furthermore, ethical leadership rooted in commitment, fairness, and empathy promotes a positive school culture that values inclusivity and well-being.

Crucially, this study surfaces unique implications: the necessity of reflective thinking in refining leadership practices, the pragmatic use of transactional leadership to meet pressing objectives, and the importance of funding to bring DepEd policies and innovations to life. The alignment of school programs with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) stands out as a significant shift—placing local educational practices within a global framework. The idea of transformative institutions further elevates the role of schools as drivers of systemic, community-rooted change.

In conclusion, school heads drive meaningful and sustainable reform by integrating adaptive leadership, ethical governance, and innovative, learner-centered strategies. Despite funding constraints, their alignment with legal frameworks and SDG priorities underscores the need for continued leadership development, strategic resource support, and evidence-based planning to ensure impactful and lasting educational transformation.

Recommendations

Based from the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made to improve the implementation and development of school heads' change management strategies in SOCCSKSARGEN Region:

To enhance school leadership and change management, continuous professional development in adaptive leadership, strategic decision-making, and change management is essential, supported by mentorship, coaching, and participation in leadership forums and cross-school collaborations. Schools should empower teachers through leadership roles, decision-making opportunities, and recognition, while fostering stakeholder engagement through structured participation, strong partnerships with parents and LGUs, and transparent communication. Regular feedback, digital platforms, and clear communication methods ensure alignment among stakeholders and reinforce a culture of collaboration and shared accountability.

School heads should adopt research-based innovations, encourage reflective leadership, and allocate resources for new teaching methods and digital learning. A balance of transformational and transactional leadership fosters motivation and accountability, guided by leadership assessments. Schools should also advocate for increased funding, strengthen resource mobilization, and ensure efficient financial monitoring. Integrating SDG principles into school plans, providing related training, and establishing monitoring systems will promote sustainability and

inclusivity. Ethical leadership and data-driven decision-making must guide all reforms to ensure continuous improvement and learner-focused outcomes.

Future researches may explore the impact of financial constraints on policy implementation in schools, examining how school heads navigate resource limitations to align with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Additionally, studies could investigate the role of digital tools in supporting change management, the long-term effects of transformational and transactional leadership styles, and the specific professional development programs that best enhance leadership strategies. Research on stakeholder engagement models, the relationship between ethical leadership and teacher retention, and the use of data-driven decision-making could further inform leadership practices. Lastly, cross-national comparisons of change management strategies could provide valuable insights into global best practices for educational reform, promoting inclusivity and equity across diverse school contexts.

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