Research Article

School Heads' Level of Competence in the Implementation of Inclusive Education

Shirley H. Fabunan[1]*, Esmen M. Cabal[2]

[1]Schools Division of Zambales, Zambales, Philippines
[2]President Ramon Magsaysay State University

ABSTRACT

This study assessed the competence of school heads in implementing inclusive education in the Schools Division of Zambales. Using a descriptive-survey research design, the study involved 32 school heads and 594 teachers from 13 districts. The competence of school heads was evaluated across five dimensions: instructional leadership, managerial leadership, strategic thinking and innovation, stakeholder engagement, and personal excellence. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using statistical tools such as mean, t-test, and ANOVA. The results revealed that school heads were highly competent in all dimensions, as perceived by both groups of respondents. Instructional leadership was characterized by effective collaboration with teachers, analysis of student work, and policy implementation promoting peace and diversity. Managerial leadership highlighted the establishment of systems for collaboration and alignment of staffing with school goals. Strategic thinking and innovation emphasized vision-setting, promoting creativity, and aligning school culture with educational objectives. Stakeholder engagement focused on fostering partnerships and building supportive networks, while personal excellence underscored traits such as resilience, accountability, and emotional intelligence. Despite the high competence ratings, challenges remain in translating inclusive education policies into practice and addressing resource limitations. Significant differences in the perceptions of teachers and school heads were noted, highlighting the need for enhanced communication and collaborative leadership. The study recommends continuous professional development, provision of resources, and strategies to foster resilience among school heads. Strengthening stakeholder engagement and data-driven decision-making are also essential to further improve the implementation of inclusive education and create equitable learning environments.

Keywords*: Inclusive education, competence, school heads, Zambales, Philippines*

Introduction

Inclusive education is a concept that promotes equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Education is a fundamental right for all individuals, and teachers play a crucial role in igniting hope and transformation in the lives of their students. It aims to create an environment where every student feels valued and supported in their learning journey. The successful implementation of inclusive education relies heavily on the competence of school heads (Ainscow, 2020).

Schoolheads play a crucial role in creating an inclusive culture within their schools. They need to have a deep understanding of the principles and practices of inclusive education, as well as the ability to effectively communicate these principles to staff, students, and parents. School heads should also be knowledgeable about different learning needs and disabilities, so they can provide appropriate support and accommodations for all students (Andai, & Mwatela, 2017).

School heads' competence is the most essential element to run the school in a smooth sailing way despite of some hindrances that they might encounter along the way as they are implementing mandates, standards, appropriate knowledge, and skills towards its common direction set by the Department of Education. Principals are considered key actors responsible for operating and directing all administrative functions of schools successfully and effectively. They have significant responsibilities in maintaining the effective internal functioning of school systems, representing the school in the community, and implementing educational policies with precision. Principals also act as role models to improve the ethical and professional growth of teachers and other professional staff.

Inclusive schools involve children with special needs in general classrooms and allow these students to interact and socialize with their peers in general education (Agran, Jackson, Kurth, Ryndak, Burnette, Jameson, & Wehmeyer, 2020; Hussain, 2017), mentioned that inclusive education refers to the use of the inclusion method in education to generate a new type of education characterized by incorporating students with disabilities into classes at regular schools. Notably, all students benefit from significant, challenging, and appropriate educational elements and separated teaching methods that address their unique abilities and needs.

The Philippines has been working on implementing various programs and initiatives to support inclusive education. One such initiative is the "Inclusive Education for All" program, which provides training and support to teachers, parents, and school administrators on how to best meet the needs of all students (Raguindin, Custodio, & Bulusan, 2021).

Furthermore, school heads need to ensure that teachers receive adequate training and professional development opportunities in inclusive education practices. This includes providing resources and support for teachers to adapt their teaching methods and materials to meet the diverse needs of their students.

In addition to promoting inclusivity within the school community, schoolheads also need to collaborate with external stakeholders such as parents, local authorities, and community organizations. This collaboration is essential for creating a supportive network that can provide additional resources and services for students with special needs.

The current study attempted to address these issues in the relevant literature. It addresses the extent of schoolheads competence in the implementation of Inclusive Education in the Schools Division of Zambales.

Theoretical Framework

Trait theory of leadership is seen as inherent that is based on the premise that leaders are born, not made (Harrison & Cohens, 2016). This was according to Stodghill's (1974) and McCall's (1983), believed that a person's ability to lead is something that people are born with and not something that could be developed. It specifies the personality traits that distinguish leaders from non-leaders making them successful leaders with the assumption that those in leadership position would display more of those traits than those in the subordinate positions. As such, leaders tend to show higher traits in terms of self-confidence, assertiveness, decisiveness, trustworthiness, creativity, task

competence, etc (Harrison & Cohens, 2016., Kumar, Adhish, & Deoki, 2015., Guramatunhu & Nyasha, 2017), These personality traits were categorized by Allport into three distinct categories, namely: (1) cardinal traits that shape the leader's actions; (2) central traits are common in most people; and (3) secondary traits that are used by leaders in certain situations.

In the present study, the researchers utilized this theory to serve as the basis for the factors that determine the emulating attributes of leaders so as to determine the attributes that are valued in them.

Method
Research Design
An appropriate method for addressing the aim of the study were descriptive – survey research design to assess the schoolheads competence and inclusive education implementation practices and its challenges. Samosa (2020a) pointed out that descriptive-evaluation research is typically designed to determine the causes or consequences of processes, policies, practices, or programs.

Respondents and Location
The respondents were carefully chosen in accordance with the criteria who were Secondary teachers and schoolheads for the school year 2023-2024. There were two (2) groups of respondents of the research study, the 32 School Heads/Principals; and 594 Teachers. The School Heads/Principals and Teachers are employed in selected Public School in the 13 Districts of DepEd Division of Zambales. Sample size of teachers were determined using Slovin's Fomula in determining sample in scholarly research.

The locale of the study was from Sta. Cruz District to Subic District in the Division of Zambales during the school year 2023-2024.

Research Instrument
The questionnaire was the main instrument of this study to clarify the answers of the respondents. The questionnaire is a list of questions with space provided to be answered by the respondents especially designed to get facts/information which is directly related to the problem. It is one of the important research tools for data collection.

The questionnaire focused on the assessment of the schoolhead level of competence in terms of instructional leadership; managerial leadership; strategic thinking and innovation; stakeholder engagement and personal excellence which consists of fifteen (15) indicators for every variable considered. It was adopted from the SEAMEO INNOTECH (2015). Success Competencies of Southeast Asian School Heads. www.seameo-innotech.org.

Data Gathering Procedure
In gathering the data for this study, the researcher observed the following steps: First, the researcher asked for an endorsement from the School Division Superintendent to formally introduce to Principal and asked permission to conduct the study to selected Secondary schools in the Division of Zambales. The content of the research study was assessed and evaluated until permission was hereby granted provided that no government funds should be used during the conduct of the activity, classes must not be disrupted as indicated in DepED Order No. 9 s. 2005 re: "Instituting Measures to Increase Engaged Time-on-Task and Ensuring Compliance Therewith" and proper coordination with the school principal would be arranged prior to the conduct of the said activity.

The second step was the reading of books and surfing from the internet to get information about the schoolheads different competence and implementation of inclusive education practices. Next was the construction of the self-made questionnaire based on the SEAMEO INNOTECH: Success Competencies of Southern Asian Schoolheads a Learning Guide and the Inclusive Education Framework: A guide for schools on the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs by National Council for Special Education.

The entire procedure of gathering data took about a month, during which the researcher personally distributed and collected the survey questionnaire from the respondents in their respective schools. Finally, the Collation and Tabulation of Data was performed. The researcher then tallied and tabulated the given answers of

the groups of respondents from the four-likert scale before the given data was analyzed using the proper statistical treatment and analysis.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software and MS Excel were used for the computations and interpretations of data. The statistical tools in the analysis and interpretation of data and hypotheses testing include the mean, t-test, Likert scale and ANOVA.

Results and Discussion
School Heads' Level of Competence in the Implementation of Inclusive Education

Instructional Leadership. Table 1 shows the school heads' level of competence in the implementation of inclusive education as to instructional leadership.

The school head-respondents assessed that they were highly competent in collaborating with teachers in analyzing student's work to address learning needs and can implement school policies that promote peace and respect for diversity, as manifested on the highest computed recorded weighted mean value of 4.00 (tied at rank 1.5); while least in their competence of reviewing, enriching, and contextualizing curriculum, programs, and learning resources, had the lowest weighted mean value of 3.69 (rank 10) interpreted as highly competent.

On the other hand, the teacher-respondents assessed that their school heads were highly competent in ensuring that school facilities and learning resources are accessible to all learners, as manifested on the highest computed recorded weighted mean value of 3.55 (rank 1); while least in their assessment that their school heads could ensure that peace education and respect for cultural diversity are embedded in the curriculum, had the lowest weighted mean value of 3.27 (rank 10) interpreted as highly competent.

Overall, both the school heads and teacher-respondents assessed the school heads' level of competence in the implementation of inclusive education as to instructional leadership to be highly competent, as manifested on the computed overall weighted mean values of 3.86 and

3.43, respectively. The findings imply that effective school leaders focus on instruction and people. Through their day-to-day actions, they act in a professional manner and engage in regular self-reflection. They hold themselves and others accountable for student learning and create a safe, welcoming culture within their schools. Promoting peace education and respect for diversity prevents the emergence of conflicts and creates conditions for peace in the world. That is why peace education is very important in the world. Peace education activities promote conflict resolution that promotes peace and values such as respect for human rights, freedom and confidence.

In the findings of Tedla (2012), instructional schoolheads' has clear instructional goals, being resourceful for staff, creating a school culture and climate conducive to learning, communicating the vision and mission of the school, setting high expectations for staff, developing teacher leaders, maintaining positive attitudes toward students, staff, and parents.

Rodrigues and Ávila de Lima (2024) argue that effective school leaders who exhibit strong instructional leadership skills significantly impact school improvement and student achievement. By focusing on instruction, these leaders support teachers in enhancing their teaching practices, thereby fostering an inclusive atmosphere conducive to learning for all students. The study suggests that instructional leadership is integral to successful educational change, affirming the high competence ratings observed in the school heads.

Similarly, Kwan (2020) emphasizes that transformational leadership, which includes a strong instructional component, is essential for promoting a positive school culture and improving student outcomes. Their review of leadership research indicates that school heads who are perceived as highly competent in instructional leadership can inspire and motivate teachers, leading to a more inclusive and effective learning environment. This aligns with the assessment that effective school leaders focus on instruction and people, creating a welcoming and accountable school culture.

Conversely, some studies challenge the view that school heads are universally competent in the implementation of inclusive education. Óskarsdóttir et al. (2020) argue that many school leaders face significant challenges in translating inclusive education policies into practice. Their research indicates that there is often a disconnect between the ideals of inclusive education and the realities of classroom implementation, suggesting that the perceived competence of school heads may be overestimated. DeMatthews et al. (2020) further highlight the difficulties encountered by educators in inclusive settings. Their review of the literature reveals that both teachers and school leaders frequently lack adequate training and resources to effectively support students with disabilities. This suggests that while some school heads may be highly competent, there are systemic issues that hinder the overall effectiveness of inclusive education practices.

From this, an effective instructional leader who can align the strategies to the activities of the school to the school's academic mission as goal-oriented, strong and directive leaders, and also as culture builders that can also to manage the whole responsibility of their managerial roles.

Table 2. School Heads' Level of Competence in the Implementation of Inclusive Education as to Instructional Leadership as Assessed by the Two (2) Groups of Respondents

Instructional Leadership		**School Head-respondents**			**Teacher-respondents**		
The principal/school head can..		**WM**	**DE**	**Rank**	**WM**	**DE**	**Rank**
1	Review, enrich, and contextualize curriculum, programs, and learning resources	3.69	HC	10	3.43	HC	6.5
2	Ensure that teachers consider diversity in planning and delivering differentiated instruction	3.84	HC	6	3.51	HC	3
3	Collaborate with teachers in analyzing student's work to address learning needs	4.00	HC	1.5	3.33	HC	9
4	Provides a comfortable, stimulating learning environment that meets students' holistic development, physical, social-emotional, intellectual, and recreational needs	3.84	HC	6	3.44	HC	5
5	Ensure that school facilities and learning resources are accessible to all learners	3.84	HC	6	3.55	HC	1
6	Implement school policies that promote peace and respect for diversity	4.00	HC	1.5	3.47	HC	4
7	Ensure that peace education and respect for cultural diversity are embedded in the curriculum	3.84	HC	6	3.27	HC	10
8	Develop, implements, monitors, and evaluates an instructional supervisory plan	3.84	HC	6	3.43	HC	6.5
9	Use technology and multiple sources of data to improve supervisory practice	3.84	HC	6	3.52	HC	2
10	Lead a highly effective team that enhances school performance and promotes a professional learning community	3.84	HC	6	3.38	HC	8
	OWM	**3.86**	**HC**		**3.43**	**HC**	

Legend: WM=Weighted Mean   DE=Descriptive Equivalent
   HC=Highly Competent   C=Competent   MC=Moderately Competent   FC-Fairly Competent

Managerial Leadership. The leadership competence of school heads in terms of managerial leadership as assessed by the two (2) groups of respondents is shown in Table 2.

The school head-respondents assessed that they were highly competent in establishing and maintaining management systems that promote learning, collaboration, and communication throughout the school, as manifested on the highest computed recorded weighted mean value of 3.84 (rank 1); while least in their competence in planning and developing research-based professional learning to support the individual needs of staff and collaborating with local, national, regional, and international partners that support education for sustainable development, had the lowest weighted mean value of 3.31 (tied at rank 9.5) interpreted as highly competent.

On the other hand, the teacher-respondents assessed that their school heads were highly competent in aligning staffing decisions with the vision and mission of the school, as manifested on the highest computed recorded weighted mean value of 3.55 (rank 1); while least in their assessment that their school heads could plan and develop research-based professional learning to support the individual needs of staff, had the lowest weighted mean value of 3.24 (rank 10) interpreted as highly competent.

Overall, both the school heads and teacher-respondents assessed the school heads' level of competence in the implementation of inclusive education as to managerial leadership to be highly competent, as manifested on the computed overall weighted mean values of 3.61 and 3.42, respectively. The findings signify that communication skills in leadership are important as they enable them to take responsibility for their team and convey their message in clear, unambiguous terms. With excellent communication, they can set the tone for their workplace and make it easier for their team members to understand their work expectations. Also, developing the school's vision and mission are two of the most important steps toward creating a successful program. Done well, they give clarity and direction for a school. A muddy vision or mission can help lead to continuing conflicts, and a school that has difficulty identifying priorities. School philosophy, vision, mission, and core values are considered in implementing curriculum because they provide a framework for guiding the educational process and ensuring that it aligns with the goals and values of the institution.

It was supported by the claimed of Chalikias et al (2021), that managerial leadership of school head contribution to the effectiveness of teachers' professional development and improved the learning process and school quality which establish the culture and organization necessary for schools to provide school equality and equity teaching and have an indirect, but important, effect on student learning.

It was also adapted the studies of Lathan, (2022) that school heads have ultimately responsibility for the learning environment that set academic goals and empower teachers with the necessary resources to align their classrooms with those aims. From this, School heads collaboratively create a vision and establish a climate for teachers, non-teaching personnel and learners to reach their highest level of achievement that was responsive and proactive in changing schools.

Stronge, and Xu (2021) emphasize the significant impact of leadership on school effectiveness and student outcomes. They argue that successful school heads exhibit strong managerial leadership skills, including clear communication and the ability to articulate a compelling vision and mission. Their research indicates that such leaders are crucial in setting a positive tone and fostering a coherent educational environment, aligning with the assessment of high competence among school heads in managerial leadership. Similarly, Pont (2020) highlights the role of school leadership in shaping the educational process through the development and implementation of a clear vision and mission. Effective leaders, according to Pont, communicate their goals and expectations effectively, which is essential for achieving educational success and maintaining a harmonious school environment. This supports the findings that competent school heads utilize their communication skills to guide their teams and ensure alignment with the school's core values and educational objectives.

Conversely, some studies challenge the notion that school heads are universally competent in managerial leadership within the context of inclusive education. Day et al. (2020) argue that while leadership is critical to school improvement, there are significant variations in the effectiveness of school heads. Their research highlights that many school leaders struggle with the practical aspects of managerial leadership, including communication and the development of a coherent vision and mission, suggesting that the perceived competence of school heads may not be as widespread as indicated. Moreover, Bush (2020) provide a comprehensive analysis of successful school leadership and note that even effective leaders face challenges in consistently maintaining high standards of managerial leadership. Their findings indicate that systemic issues, such as inadequate support and resources, often hinder the ability of school heads to implement their vision and mission effectively. This perspective challenges the high competence ratings by highlighting the practical difficulties and variability in leadership effectiveness in diverse educational settings.

Table 3. School Heads' Level of Competence in the Implementation of Inclusive Education as to Managerial Leadership as Assessed by the Two (2) Groups of Respondents

	Managerial Leadership	**School Head-respondents**			**Teacher-respondents**		
	The principal/school head can..	**WM**	**DE**	**Rank**	**WM**	**DE**	**Rank**
1	Manage budget planning in relation to the overall school improvement plan	3.69	HC	2.5	3.42	HC	7
2	Assess and match facilities and equipment with program needs	3.66	HC	6	3.49	HC	3
3	Establish and maintain management systems that promote learning, collaboration, and communication throughout the school	3.84	HC	1	3.33	HC	9
4	Implement systems and processes to ensure effective operations that support student learning	3.66	HC	6	3.43	HC	6
5	Align staffing decisions with the vision and mission of the school	3.66	HC	6	3.55	HC	1
6	Create a school culture where teachers collaborate, learn from each other, and grow professionally	3.66	HC	6	3.44	HC	4.5
7	Plan and develop research-based professional learning to support the individual needs of staff.	3.31	HC	9.5	3.24	HC	10
8	Ensure that own staff take responsibility for improving their own performance	3.69	HC	2.5	3.44	HC	4.5
9	Demonstrate an understanding of education for sustainable development	3.66	HC	6	3.53	HC	2
10	Collaborate with local, national, regional, and international partners that support education for sustainable development	3.31	HC	9.5	3.37	HC	8
	OWM	**3.61**	**HC**		**3.42**	**HC**	

Legend: WM=Weighted Mean   DE=Descriptive Equivalent
   HC=Highly Competent   C=Competent   MC=Moderately Competent   FC-Fairly Competent

Strategic Thinking and Innovation. Table 3 presents the leadership comptence of school heads in terms of strategic thinking and innovation as assessed by the two (2) groups of respondents.

The school head-respondents assessed that they were highly competent in building a constituency in reviewing, creating and implementing the school's vision, mission, values, and goals, and translate these into agreed objectives and operational plan that promote and sustain school improvement; ensuring that decision-making and implementation strategies are based on a shared vision and understanding of the school culture; and facilitating change and promote innovation consistent with current and future school community needs, as manifested on the highest computed recorded weighted mean value of 3.81 (tied at rank 2); while least in their competence in demonstrating their willingness to act against traditional ways when they impede change and innovation for performance improvement, had the lowest weighted mean value of 3.47 (rank 10) interpreted as highly competent.

On the other hand, the teacher-respondents assessed that their school heads were highly competent in holding self and the school staff accountable for aligning actions and words to the school vision and values, as manifested on the highest computed recorded weighted mean value of 3.54 (rank 1); while least in their assessment that their school heads could resolve problems in early stages of plan implementation and develop realistic alternative solutions, had the lowest weighted mean value of 3.25 (rank 10) interpreted as highly competent.

Overall, both the school heads and teacher-respondents assessed the school heads' level of competence in the implementation of inclusive education as to strategic thinking and innovation to be highly competent, as manifested on the computed overall weighted mean values of 3.67 and 3.42, respectively. The findings imply that school heads have the ability of thinking and applying a vision and mission statement that are crucial elements for any organization. They provide direction, focus, and communication while guiding strategic decision-making and inspiring employees to work towards a common goal. The most important role of the school leader is to make the shared vision compatible with the school culture. Shared vision and coherence in culture make the vision more achievable and thus the school leaders and their employees can pass from vision to action. As leaders, school principals are aware of the teachers' needs in their professional and private lives, they show teachers and students that they care about their employees and students while interacting with them, they are aware of informal groups, and they visit classrooms and establish close ties. School heads acknowledge and assume responsibility and have the obligation to report, explain, and be answerable for their actions, products, decisions, and policies. They create a positive and appropriate learning environment through the management of a school. Their duties include helping deliver the highest standard of education to the students, supporting Teachers and staff and ensuring an overall safe and successful school environment.

The inadequacy of principals' preparation presents a major problem for policy and practice in light of the critical role principals play in school improvement. They argue that research on instructional leadership must address the thinking that underlies the exercise of leadership, not simply describe discrete behaviors of effective leaders. This research is then linked to development efforts in the field. Factors that influence the transfer of knowledge, as well as their applicability to principals' training and development, are discussed. As next describe a computer simulation that addresses both the research on instructional leadership and the instructional challenge of designing leadership training that will transfer from the classroom to the school. Finally, they discussed future research on strategic thinking and school leadership and implications of research for the design and delivery of administrative training and development (Hallinger & McCary, 2020).

According to Leithwood (2021), effective school leaders are those who can envision the future and innovate strategically. Their research indicates that leaders who articulate a clear vision and align it with the school culture can inspire and motivate teachers and students, leading to higher levels of engagement and achievement. The study emphasizes that a shared vision fosters a sense of unity and

purpose, making the goals of the school more attainable and actionable, which supports the assessment of high competence among school heads. Moreover, Wong and Ng (2020) highlight the critical role of strategic thinking in educational leadership. They argue that successful school leaders are those who can think strategically and innovate to meet the evolving needs of their schools. They understand the importance of aligning the school's vision with its culture and are adept at fostering a collaborative environment where teachers and students feel valued and supported. This strategic alignment is essential for driving school improvement and achieving educational goals, corroborating the findings that school heads are competent in these areas.

Despite the positive assessments, some studies suggest that not all school heads exhibit high levels of competence in strategic thinking and innovation. Rincón, and Díaz-Domínguez (2022) argue that while some school leaders demonstrate strategic foresight and innovation, there is considerable variability in these competencies across different contexts. Their research points out that many school leaders struggle with the practical application of vision and mission statements, and often face challenges in aligning these with the school's culture and day-to-day operations. This variability challenges the notion of uniformly high competence among school heads. Similarly, Printy, and Liu (2021) critique the traditional views of school leadership by highlighting the complexities and distributed nature of leadership in schools. Their study reveals that strategic thinking and innovation are not solely dependent on the school head but are distributed across various stakeholders, including teachers and administrative staff. They argue that this distribution of leadership can sometimes lead to inconsistencies and gaps in strategic implementation, suggesting that the perceived competence in strategic thinking may not be as widespread or effective as suggested by the mean values.

Table 3. School Heads' Level of Competence in the Implementation of Inclusive Education as to Strategic Thinking and Innovation as Assessed by the Two (2) Groups of Respondents

	Strategic Thinking and Innovation	**School Head-respondents**			**Teacher-respondents**		
	The principal/school head can..	**WM**	**DE**	**Rank**	**WM**	**DE**	**Rank**
1	Build a constituency in reviewing, creating and implementing the school's vision, mission, values, and goals, and translate these into agreed objectives and operational plan that promote and sustain school improvement	3.81	HC	2	3.42	HC	5.5
2	Ensure that the strategic plan contribute to school effectiveness and continuous improvement of learners' performance	3.62	HC	7.5	3.51	HC	2.5
3	Promote creativity, innovation and the use of technology in the implementation of the plan	3.66	HC	4.5	3.31	HC	9
4	Ensure that decision-making and implementation strategies are based on a shared vision and understanding of the school culture	3.81	HC	2	3.42	HC	5.5
5	Hold self and the school staff accountable for aligning actions and words to the school vision and values	3.62	HC	7.5	3.54	HC	1

Strategic Thinking and Innovation		School Head-respondents			Teacher-respondents		
The principal/school head can..		**WM**	**DE**	**Rank**	**WM**	**DE**	**Rank**
6	Synthesize complex and diverse data, and create systems for engaging stakeholders in data discussions	3.62	HC	7.5	3.45	HC	4
7	Resolve problems in early stages of plan implementation and develop realistic alternative solutions	3.62	HC	7.5	3.25	HC	10
8	Assess local, national and global challenges and trends in education, and their implications for the school	3.66	HC	4.5	3.41	HC	7
9	Facilitate change and promote innovation consistent with current and future school community needs	3.81	HC	2	3.51	HC	2.5
10	Demonstrate a willingness to act against traditional ways when they impede change and innovation for performance improvement	3.47	HC	10	3.36	HC	8
	OWM	**3.67**	**HC**		**3.42**	**HC**	

Legend: WM=Weighted Mean   DE=Descriptive Equivalent

HC=Highly Competent   C=Competent   MC=Moderately Competent   FC-Fairly Competent

Stakeholder Engagement. The leadership competence of school heads in terms of stakeholder engagement as assessed by the two (2) groups of respondents is presented in Table 4.

The school head-respondents assessed that they were highly competent in setting expectations, roles and responsibilities of the school and the community in providing quality education for all; and building and sustaining networks with teachers, students, parents, and the community, as manifested on the highest computed recorded weighted mean value of 3.69 (tied at rank 1.5.

While least in their competence in conducting dialogue which builds unity, understanding, and partnerships with stakeholders, had the lowest weighted mean value of 3.19 (rank 10) interpreted as competent.

On the other hand, the teacher-respondents assessed that their school heads were highly competent in serving as the key link between the school and community to project a positive school image, as manifested on the highest computed recorded weighted mean value of 3.56 (rank 1); while least in their assessment that their school heads could conduct dialogue which builds unity, understanding, and partnerships with stakeholders, had the lowest weighted mean value of 3.25 (rank 10) interpreted as highly competent.

Overall, both the school heads and teacher-respondents assessed the school heads' level of competence in the implementation of inclusive education as to stakeholder engagement to be highly competent, as manifested on the computed overall weighted mean values of 3.49 and 3.42, respectively. The findings suggest that school heads should ensure interactions within their communities that help people connect and exchange skills and ideas to enrich each other. They will help people develop a sense of community and social responsibility that results in strong social ties. Leaders encourage people to be there for each other. A safe and healthy school environment does more than benefit student health; it also improves academic performance and morale. It does more than protect students; it also safeguards teachers and staff. By going out into the community, schools can forge bonds with stakeholders. Teachers can interact with the school neighborhood and local businesses. Sharing your school's vision as you engage with social groups helps instill mutual understanding. Schools through school leaders can identify and implement programs that are developmentally

appropriate and culturally relevant for students. Integrating skill building, modeling, practice, and assessment that improves emotional well-being and school connectedness across all academic areas. In fact, a positive school culture can improve students' ability to learn by creating a positive environment that builds relationships among students and teachers. In schools that have a strong culture, teachers are motivated and engaged when working with students. A learning environment that is positive can lead to greater student achievement. It creates students who are comfortable, confident, who make friends easily, take risks, and aren't afraid to make mistakes. It can also help students to feel more comfortable with their teacher.

The Odhiambo & Hii (2022) findings highlighted the complexity of school leadership practices. Key stakeholders in this study have also provide us with a useful emphasis on core school leadership dimensions, which they associate with effective school outcomes and improvement. These include administration, responsibility to ensure quality teaching and learning and relational leadership. Stakeholders' answers to the question of what makes principals effective and which principal behaviors are most consistent with school effectiveness and improvement provides principals with an important knowledge base for practice.

Beard, and Thomson (2021) highlight the importance of family and community partnerships in the educational process. She argues that when school leaders actively engage with stakeholders, including parents, community members, and local businesses, they create a supportive network that enhances student learning and well-being. This engagement fosters a sense of community and social responsibility, which strengthens social ties and contributes to a positive school culture, supporting the high competence ratings of school heads in

stakeholder engagement. Moreover, Duong et al. (2020) emphasize the role of school leaders in fostering meaningful relationships with families and communities. Their research indicates that effective school leaders who prioritize stakeholder engagement can develop programs that are culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate for students. This approach not only improves emotional well-being and school connectedness but also boosts academic performance and morale among students and staff. Their findings reinforce the idea that school heads who are competent in engaging stakeholders can create a positive and inclusive learning environment.

Despite the positive assessments, some studies suggest that not all school heads exhibit high levels of competence in stakeholder engagement. Flores, and Kyere (2021) argue that while the involvement of families and communities is critical, many school leaders face challenges in effectively engaging all stakeholders. Their research highlights that disparities in communication, cultural differences, and varying levels of parental involvement can hinder the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement efforts, suggesting that the perceived competence may not be as widespread as indicated.

Additionally, Lien et al. (2023) provide a critical perspective on the complexities of stakeholder engagement in diverse school communities. Their study reveals that school heads often struggle with balancing the needs and expectations of different stakeholder groups, which can lead to tensions and conflicts. They argue that the variability in school leaders' ability to navigate these complexities challenges the notion of uniformly high competence in stakeholder engagement. This perspective suggests that while some school heads excel in this area, others may find it difficult to foster the desired level of community involvement and support

Table 4 School Heads' Level of Competence in the Implementation of Inclusive Education as to Stakeholder Engagement as Assessed by the Two (2) Groups of Respondents

	Stakeholder Engagement	School Head-respondents			Teacher-respondents		
	The principal/school head can..	WM	DE	Rank	WM	DE	Rank
1	Set expectations, roles and responsibilities of the school and the community in providing quality education for all	3.69	HC	1.5	3.42	HC	6
2	Engage stakeholders in planning and implementing school programs and projects	3.34	HC	8	3.50	HC	3
3	Reach out to community stakeholders for total involvement in school affairs	3.66	HC	3	3.32	HC	9
4	Build and sustain networks with teachers, students, parents, and the community	3.69	HC	1.5	3.44	HC	5
5	Serve as the key link between the school and community to project a positive school image	3.50	HC	5	3.56	HC	1
6	Create a climate and culture where diverse viewpoints are expected and all stakeholders empathize with other perspectives	3.50	HC	5	3.45	HC	4
7	Conduct dialogue which builds unity, understanding, and partnerships with stakeholders	3.19	C	10	3.25	HC	10
8	Listen empathically and look at issues as opportunities for improving school performance	3.50	HC	5	3.41	HC	7
9	Organize a support mechanism for stakeholders' comments and suggestions to improve the quality of school services and programs	3.31	HC	9	3.51	HC	2
10	Resolve conflict in a direct but constructive manner seeking "win-win" solutions	3.47	HC	7	3.36	HC	8
	OWM	**3.49**	**HC**		**3.42**	**HC**	

Legend: WM=Weighted Mean DE=Descriptive Equivalent
  HC=Highly Competent   C=Competent MC=Moderately Competent   FC-Fairly Compete

Personal Excellence. Table 5 shows the leadership practices of school heads in terms of personal excellence as assessed by the two (2) groups of respondents.

The school head-respondents assessed that they were highly competent in demonstrating a strong belief that all children can learn, as manifested on the highest computed recorded weighted mean value of 4.00 (rank 1); while least in their competence in engaging in physical and mental exercise complemented with a healthy diet and adequate rest, had the lowest weighted mean value of 3.31 (rank 10) interpreted as highly competent.

On the other hand, the teacher-respondents assessed that their school heads were highly competent in demonstrating self-confidence, self-discipline, hope, and resiliency, as manifested on the highest computed recorded weighted mean value of 3.55 (rank 1); while least in their assessment that their school heads could demonstrate the ability to make timely and effective decisions based on prescribed national policies, appropriate tools, and processes, had the lowest weighted mean value of 3.25 (rank 10) interpreted as highly competent.

Overall, both the school heads and teacher-respondents assessed the school heads' level of competence in the implementation of inclusive education as to personal excellence to be highly competent, as manifested on the computed overall weighted mean values of 3.63 and 3.42, respectively. By assuming responsibility, school heads demonstrate a willingness to help others, to listen empathetically, and to make sound decisions. Helping students to develop these character traits is why student leadership is very important in school. Wellbeing and resilience are vital to developing efficient problem-solving skills, building and maintaining interpersonal relationships and realistic goal setting, all of which greatly enhance an individual's ability to perform and contribute meaningfully in daily life. Having resilience helps in achieving long-term success by enabling individuals to stay focused on their goals and objectives, even in the face of adversity. Resilience helps people to remain determined and motivated to accomplish their goals, no matter how difficult the situation may be.

School leadership literature suggests that school effectiveness and ongoing improvement rely on school leaders and principals. Despite significant contributions made by principals towards teaching and learning in schools, there have been few studies that explore principals' perceptions of the factors underpinning their successes and achievements. Drawing on one of Senge's disciplines, personal mastery, this research examines principals' perceptions of some processes that enable their successes. A qualitative research project was undertaken in Singapore using in-depth interviews. Analysis was informed by movement between theoretical dimensions and emerging themes from participants' discussions of their leadership experiences. The findings suggest that personal mastery has a positive influence upon principals and their ability to demonstrate effective school management (Retna, 2021).

Vrontis et al. (2021) highlight the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership, which includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

School heads who demonstrate personal excellence possess these qualities, enabling them to make sound decisions, listen empathetically, and support others effectively. Their research underscores the significance of these traits in educational leadership, aligning with the high competence ratings in personal excellence. Richard (2020) also emphasizes the role of school leaders in building a positive school culture through personal excellence. According to Richard, effective leaders exhibit resilience, responsibility, and empathy, which are essential for building strong interpersonal relationships and maintaining a supportive school environment. These traits are vital for helping students develop similar character traits, contributing to their overall well-being and success. His findings support the view that school heads who demonstrate personal excellence play a crucial role in enhancing student outcomes and school effectiveness.

Notwithstanding the positive assessments, some studies suggest that not all school heads exhibit high levels of competence in personal excellence. Aguilar Yuste (2021) argues that while personal excellence is crucial, many leaders face challenges in maintaining emotional intelligence and resilience under stress. His research indicates that the pressures of school leadership can lead to burnout and reduced empathy, suggesting that the perceived competence in personal excellence may not be consistent across all school heads.

Furthermore, Chen and Walker (2023) provide a critical perspective on the emotional and psychological demands of school leadership. They highlight that the high expectations placed on school heads can result in emotional exhaustion and difficulties in sustaining personal excellence over time. Chen and Walker's (2023) findings suggest that the variability in leaders' ability to manage these demands challenges the notion of uniformly high competence in personal excellence. This perspective indicates that while some school heads excel in this area, others may struggle with the ongoing demands of their roles

Table 5. School Heads' Level of Competence in the Implementation of Inclusive Education as to Personal Excellence as Assessed by the Two (2) Groups of Respondents

Personal Excellence		School Head-respondents			Teacher-respondents		
The principal/school head can..		WM	DE	Rank	WM	DE	Rank
1	Demonstrate a strong belief that all children can learn	4.00	HC	1	3.44	HC	5
2	Set a system of checks and avenues for feedback, and communicate with stakeholders to account for one's work	3.66	HC	4.5	3.51	HC	3
3	Hold oneself accountable for personal and organizational setbacks and share learning points	3.66	HC	4.5	3.32	HC	9
4	Engage in physical and mental exercise complemented with a healthy diet and adequate rest	3.31	HC	10	3.41	HC	7
5	Demonstrate self-confidence, self-discipline, hope, and resiliency	3.47	HC	8	3.55	HC	1
6	Focus attention on critical tasks and manage conflicting demands	3.81	HC	2.5	3.45	HC	4
7	Demonstrate the ability to make timely and effective decisions based on prescribed national policies, appropriate tools, and processes	3.47	HC	8	3.25	HC	10
8	Participate in learning activities sponsored by institutions and organizations that impact education	3.81	HC	2.5	3.43	HC	6
9	Promote multicultural understanding and respect for diversity	3.62	HC	6	3.52	HC	2
10	Demonstrate a high level of emotional intelligence in dealing with others	3.47	HC	8	3.36	HC	8
	OWM	3.63	HC		3.42	HC	

Legend: WM=Weighted Mean   DE=Descriptive Equivalent
HC=Highly Competent C=Competent   MC=Moderately Competent   FC-Fairly Competent

4. Test of Difference in the Assessment of the Two (2) Groups of Respondents on the School Heads Level of Competence

Test of Difference in the Assessment of the Two (2) Groups of Respondents on the School Heads Level of Competence

Table 6 presents the t-test to test difference in the assessment of school heads and teachers on the school heads level of competence in the implementation of inclusive education.

The computed Sig. (0.000) is less than (<) 0.05 Alpha Level of Significance, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there was significant difference in the assessment of school heads and teachers on school heads level of competence in the implementation of inclusive education.

The findings imply on the opposing view of school heads and teachers on the different dimensions of school heads' competence in the implementation of inclusive education in terms of instructional leadership, managerial leadership, strategic thinking and innovation, stakeholder engagement, and personal excellence.

It was also supported by the study of Samosa, Blanquisco, & De Leon, (2023) that schoolheads' competence on the various dimensions, from the perceptions of students, teachers, parents, communities, and their employers was different.

For instance, Wenceslao et.al (2018) agreed that teachers' perceptions of their school leaders' leadership are one of the many variables which affect a school's productivity. Teachers' perception of school leaders' leadership behavior is also positively related to teachers' morale.

From this contended that perceptions about principals as leaders by their teachers indicate an important dimension to evaluate the leaders' capacities. Moreover, the understanding how teachers perceive their principal's leadership capacities has a great significance and provides evidence for improvement of school leadership.

Table 6. T-test to Test Difference in the Assessment of School Heads and Teachers on the School Heads Level of Competence in the Implementation of Inclusive Education

	Respondents	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Level of	School Heads	32	3.65	0.17903	0.03165
Competence	Teachers	594	3.42	0.46468	0.01907

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Level of Competence	Equal variances assumed	19.325	0.000	2.751	624	0.006	0.2270	0.083	0.065	0.389
	Equal variances not assumed			6.144	57.19	0.000	0.2270	0.037	0.153	0.301

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concludes that effective instructional leadership is integral to ensuring that schools promote inclusive education. School heads demonstrated exceptional capabilities in collaborating with teachers, analyzing student work, and implementing school policies that emphasize peace and respect for diversity. These actions align with the global shift toward equity in education, ensuring that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, are given the opportunity to succeed. Managerial leadership further supports this effort by establishing efficient systems that enhance collaboration and communication among stakeholders. The ability of school heads to align their decisions with the school's vision and mission reflects their strategic thinking and innovative approaches. This competency fosters a positive school culture and promotes continuous improvement.

Stakeholder engagement emerged as a critical area where school heads excel, creating a network of support that includes teachers, parents, and the community. This collaboration strengthens the school's capacity to address diverse learning needs and reinforces the importance of community involvement in education. Personal excellence is also a cornerstone of effective leadership. School heads exhibited strong resilience, emotional intelligence, and accountability, which are essential traits for maintaining a conducive learning environment and ensuring the overall well-being of students and staff.

Despite the positive findings, the study also reveals challenges, particularly in translating policies into practice and managing the practical realities of inclusive education. Variability in stakeholder engagement and strategic implementation suggests that systemic barriers

still hinder the full realization of inclusive education goals.

Continuous professional development programs may be provided to school heads to further strengthen their competencies in inclusive education. Training should focus on differentiated instruction, curriculum enrichment, and the use of technology to support diverse learners. School heads may be encouraged to adopt collaborative leadership models that involve teachers, parents, and community stakeholders in decision-making processes. This approach can help address the challenges of stakeholder engagement and foster a shared vision for inclusive education. To support the effective implementation of inclusive education, schools can be equipped with adequate resources, including learning materials, assistive technologies, and infrastructure. These resources will enable school heads and teachers to meet the diverse needs of students. Policy briefs based on these recommendations are likewise suggested.

Acknowledgement

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