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School-Based Management Practices and Competence of School Principals: Implications for 21st Century School Leadership in Lanao del Sur

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Abstract

This study assessed the school-based management (SBM) practices and competencies of school principals in Lanao del Sur Division, Philippines, aiming to develop a School-Based SBM Practices Enhancement Program. Specifically, it examined principals' profiles, competency levels based on NCBS-SH domains, SBM practice levels, and the relationships among these variables. Results revealed significant differences in principal competencies when grouped according to gender, with male principals assessed as more competent based on NCBS-SH standards. Significant differences were also found between the level of SBM practices and principal profiles, and between SBM practices and principal competencies. Key competency predictors included the domains of school leadership, creating a student-centered learning climate, and personal and professional attributes. Findings indicated principals aged 61 and above performed best in SBM practices, while those aged 41–50 performed least. Widowed principals exhibited the highest level of SBM practice, while married principals performed the least. Principals with doctoral degrees and extensive training experience demonstrated higher levels of SBM practice. Based on these findings, it is recommended that principals enhance their management skills, communicate clear goals, and adopt effective leadership styles. Regular professional development and training should be prioritized to strengthen school leadership capacities. These results provide a guide for school heads and the Schools Division Office in designing targeted programs to improve principals' competencies and support effective school-based management for twenty-first-century educational demands.

Keywords: Educational Leadership, NCBS-SH, Philippines, Principal Competency, Professional Development, School Leadership, School-Based Management, Twenty-First Century Skills

1. Introduction

Despite sustained efforts by governments and international agencies to improve educational systems, many learners—particularly those from disadvantaged, indigenous, or marginalized communities—still face limited access to quality education. Global initiatives such as Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals

(MDGs) have attempted to address these disparities by increasing funding and attention to low-income nations. However, access alone does not guarantee quality. International assessments such as TIMSS, PIRLS, and PISA consistently show underperformance among students in developing countries. Hanushek and Woessmann (2007) argue that without meaningful institutional reforms, simply increasing resources will not yield improvements in equity or learning outcomes.

Many countries have adopted School-Based Management (SBM), a governance model that decentralizes decision-making authority to schools and their communities to address quality concerns and enhance system responsiveness. SBM empowers school heads, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders to participate in planning, budgeting, and school improvement processes. The rationale behind SBM is that shared governance leads to more context-sensitive, responsive, and effective educational outcomes (Lewis, 2006; Leithwood & Menzies, 2008). High-performing countries in the OECD, for instance, demonstrate that giving schools autonomy over curriculum, personnel, and resources can significantly enhance both accountability and student achievement (OECD, 2014).

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has institutionalized SBM as part of its broader Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda. The implementation of SBM is guided by the SBM Framework and supported by the Revised School-Based Management Manual in 2015. DepEd's purpose is to cultivate a participatory culture in schools where stakeholders work collaboratively to deliver quality and inclusive education. Key to this effort are school principals who serve as transformational leaders tasked with managing instructional programs, engaging stakeholders, and ensuring effective school operations. As such, principals must demonstrate a high level of competence aligned with the National Competency-Based Standards for School Heads (NCBS-SH), which outlines essential leadership domains such as instructional leadership, school management, and stakeholder engagement.

In the Division of Lanao del Sur, SBM implementation has been underway for several years. However, concerns remain regarding the extent of its effectiveness and sustainability. While DepEd has mandated regular SBM assessments, there is limited empirical evidence on how principals' competencies influence the quality of SBM practices, particularly in conflict-affected and resource-challenged regions like Lanao del Sur. Understanding these relationships is critical for determining where schools should focus their efforts to move toward mature levels of SBM.

This study, therefore, aims to assess the level of SBM practices and principal competencies in the Division of Lanao del Sur, Philippines. It also seeks to determine the relationship between school heads' profiles, their competencies as measured by NCBS-SH, and their SBM implementation practices. In essence, the study intends to identify the key competency predictors of effective SBM and use these findings as a basis for proposing a School-Based Management Practices Enhancement Program tailored to the needs of the region.

2. Method

This section presents the methodology employed in the conduct of the study. It outlines the research design, respondents of the study, research instruments used, procedures for data collection, and the statistical treatments applied.

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational quantitative research design. It sought to describe the profile and competencies of school principals, assess the level of SBM practices, examine the relationships among these variables, and determine the competency predictors of SBM practices. The findings were also used as the basis for proposing a School-Based Management Practices Enhancement Program. A descriptive-correlational design is used to examine and describe the relationships between variables without attempting to infer a causal relationship (Devi et al., 2022). This design is appropriate for the study because it allows the researcher to systematically describe the current status of the school principals' profiles, competencies, and SBM practices, as well as to identify significant associations and predictive relationships among these variables. Furthermore, the design enables the

formulation of evidence-based interventions, such as an enhancement program, grounded in the statistical patterns and relationships observed in the data.

2.2 Research Respondents

Using purposive sampling, 60 school principals from the Division of Lanao del Sur were selected as respondents for this study. They were chosen because they could be easily identified and were readily available. The respondents assessed themselves using the NCBS-SH Self-Assessment Tool and the SBM Assessment Toolkit. Table 1 below shows the distribution of respondents according to congressional district and sex.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Congressional District and Sex

Respondents	Male	Female	Total
District I	15	15	30
District II	18	12	30
Total	33	27	60

The table shows that the two congressional districts had an equal total number of respondents. In District I, male and female school principals were equally represented. In District II, however, there were more male than female school principals.

2.3 Research Instruments

This study utilized a questionnaire based primarily on the National Competency-Based Standards for School Heads (NCBS-SH), which outlines a set of competencies anchored on the core values of Filipino school leaders and key principles of effective school management. The NCBS-SH comprises seven (7) domains: (1) school leadership; (2) instructional leadership; (3) creating a student-centered learning climate; (4) HR management and professional development; (5) parent involvement; (6) school management and operations; and (7) personal and professional attributes and interpersonal effectiveness, each of which contains specific standards of expected performance. These standards are translated into observable indicators that reflect the quality and effectiveness of a school head's leadership and management practices.

In addition, the School-Based Management (SBM) Assessment Tool was employed to assess the level of SBM practice in schools. This tool consists of six (6) dimensions, each focusing on a major area of school governance and operations: (1) School Leadership, (2) Internal Stakeholders, (3) External Stakeholders, (4) School Improvement Process, (5) School-Based Resources, and (6) School Performance Accountability. These dimensions provide a comprehensive framework for evaluating the degree of SBM implementation in basic education institutions.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

A written request for permission to conduct the study was sent to the Schools Division Superintendent of the Division of Lanao del Sur, as well as to the school principals within the division. At the beginning of the research, the school principals were asked to fill up the information sheets reflecting their profile, such as name, age, gender, civil status, length of teaching service, educational attainment, and training attended. After the respondents filled up the teacher profile, they proceeded to answer the NCBS-SH Self-Assessment Tool and the SBM Level of Practices Assessment.

2.5 Statistical Treatments

To test the hypotheses formulated, the following statistical tools were used in the study:
- Frequency and percentage were used to determine the distribution of the school principals' profiles, while the mean was used to obtain the average rating of the school principals' competencies/performance.

- Z-test and F-test were used to determine the significant differences in the competencies of school principals when grouped according to age, gender, civil status, length of teaching service, educational attainment, and training attended.
- A simple mean was used to identify the competency predictors of SBM practices.
- Other statistical tools, such as mean, standard deviation, and variance, were employed to supplement the main analyses.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results obtained from the collected data and the subsequent analyses in a sequence corresponding to the problems presented.

3.1 Profile of the School Principals

Table 2: Profile of the School Principals in Lanao del Sur

Profile		No. of School principals	Percentage
Age (Years)	21-30	0	0%
	31-40	15	25%
	41-50	21	35%
	51-60	17	27.5%
	61-70	7	12.5%
Gender	Female	27	45%
	Male	33	55%
Civil Status	Single	3	5%
	Married	49	82.5%
	Separated	0	0%
	Widow	8	12.5%
Length of Service (Years)	10 and below	27	45%
	11-20	13	22.5%
	21-30	12	20%
	31 and above	7	12.5%
Educational Qualification	Bachelor	0	0%
	Bachelor w/ MA Units	17	27.5%
	Masteral	28	47.5%
	Masteral w/ Doctoral Units	10	17.5%
	Doctoral	5	7.5%
Number of Trainings	5 and below	29	47.5%
	6-10	21	35%
	11-15	6	10%
	16-20	5	7.5%

Table 1 above presents the profile of school principals in Lanao del Sur. A total of 60 school principals participated in the study. Of this number, 35% were aged 41 to 50 years old, followed by 27.5% aged 51 to 60 years old. 25% were in the 31 to 40 age range, 12.5% were aged 61 to 70, and 0% belonged to the 21 to 30 age range. Of the 60 school principals, males outnumbered females, with 58.33% male and 41.67% female respondents. The data also show that the majority (82.5%) of the school principals were married; 12.5% were widowed, 5% were single, and 0% were separated.

In terms of length of service, 45% of the principals had 10 years or less of service; 22.5% had served 11 to 20 years; 20% had 21 to 30 years of service; and 12.5% had served for more than 31 years. Regarding educational qualifications, 47.5% were master's degree holders, followed by 27.5% who held a bachelor's degree with MA units. Additionally, 17.5% held a master's degree with doctoral units, while 7.5% were doctoral graduates. None of the respondents held only a bachelor's degree. Further, in terms of professional development, 47.5% have attended five or fewer training courses over the last two years. 35% attended six to ten training courses, 10% attended eleven to fifteen training courses, and 7.5% attended sixteen to twenty training courses.

3.2 Level of School Principals' Competence Based on NCBS-SH Domains

Table 3: Average of School Principals' Competency Distributions in the NCBS-SH Domains

NCBS-SH DOMAINS	AVERAGE		Interpretation
1. School Leadership	3.05	76.16%	Expert
2. Instructional Leadership	2.93	73.24%	Practitioner
3. Creating a Student-Centered Learning Climate	3.05	76.13%	Expert
4. HR Management and Professional Development	2.91	72.78%	Practitioner
5. Parent Involvement and Community Partnership	2.96	74.11%	Practitioner
6. School Management and Operations	3.00	74.96%	Practitioner
7. Personal and Professional Attributes and Interpersonal Effectiveness	3.25	81.17%	Expert
AVERAGE	3.02	75.50%	Expert

Table 3 presents the average competency ratings of school principals across the seven domains of the National Competency-Based Standards for School Heads (NCBS-SH). The overall average competency level was 3.02, which corresponds to 75.50%, interpreted as "Expert". This suggests that, on average, school principals in the study demonstrate a high level of proficiency in the competencies expected of school leaders.

Among the seven domains, *Domain 7: Personal and Professional Attributes and Interpersonal Effectiveness* recorded the highest average rating of 3.25 (81.17%), interpreted as "expert" which indicates that principals exhibit strong values, ethics, interpersonal skills, and professionalism—core traits necessary for effective school leadership. The domains of *School Leadership* and *Creating a Student-Centered Learning Climate* both received an average rating of 3.05, interpreted as "expert", indicating strong leadership skills in guiding the school's vision and fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment.

On the other hand, five domains fell under the "practitioner" level of competence. *Instructional Leadership* was rated at 2.93 (73.24%), suggesting that while principals are competent in guiding instructional practices, there is room for growth in curriculum supervision, teaching quality monitoring, and instructional support. Similarly, *HR Management* and *Professional Development* scored 2.91 (72.78%), highlighting a need for improved strategic planning in staff development and resource utilization. *Parent Involvement and Community Partnership* received a 2.96 (74.11%), suggesting moderate engagement with stakeholders and the community, which is crucial for the success of school-based management. *School Management and Operations*, rated at 3.00 (74.96%), also falls in the "practitioner" level, pointing to areas for enhancement in resource management, infrastructure oversight, and operational efficiency.

The data reveals that while principals exhibit expert-level competencies in personal and professional attributes, leadership, and learning climate development, improvement is still needed in instructional supervision, stakeholder engagement, and human resource management. These findings align with the literature that emphasizes the multidimensional role of school leaders, where instructional leadership, collaboration with stakeholders, and professional development are crucial factors in effective school governance (Mustari & Nurhayati, 2024).

Furthermore, the emphasis on interpersonal effectiveness and professional attributes as the highest-rated domain reinforces the assertion of Mehmood et al. (2023) that strong communication skills are central to a school leader's success. However, consistent with findings by Cansoy et al. (2024), without sufficient instructional and operational capacity, even highly personable leaders may struggle to sustain meaningful reforms.

3.3 Level of SBM Practices of the School principals

Table 4: Average of School Principals' Level of SBM Practices

NCBS-SH DOMAINS	AVERAGE		Interpretation
1. School Leadership	20	72.11%	Moving Towards
2. Internal Stakeholders	17	73.53%	Moving Towards

3. External Stakeholders	16	58.86%	Starting Stage
4. School Improvement	21	67.54%	Moving Towards
5. School-Based Resources	12	71.01%	Moving Towards
6. School Performance Accountability	15	65.19%	Moving Towards
AVERAGE	101	67.69%	Moving Towards

Table 4 presents the average scores of school principals in the six key dimensions of School-Based Management (SBM). The overall average rating was 101 points, equivalent to 67.69%, which falls under the "Moving Towards" level of practice. This implies that while the foundational structures and practices of SBM are present in schools, there is still a need for strengthening implementation to ensure sustainability and greater effectiveness.

Among the six dimensions, the highest rated was *Internal Stakeholders*, with a rating of 73.53%, interpreted as "Moving Towards". This suggests that schools are making progress encouraging participation among teachers, staff, students, and other internal actors in decision-making and school activities. *School Leadership* and *School-Based Resources* also recorded relatively high ratings of 72.11% and 71.01%, respectively, indicating growing capacity among school leaders in managing their schools and utilizing local resources to support school development.

The dimensions of *School Improvement* and *School Performance Accountability* received average ratings of 67.54% and 65.19%, respectively. These results reflect reasonable progress in establishing a culture of continuous school improvement and mechanisms for monitoring performance. However, these are still categorized as "Moving Towards", showing that schools are in the process of strengthening their planning, implementation, and evaluation systems, but have yet to institutionalize them fully.

Notably, the lowest rated domain was *External Stakeholders*, with a rating of 16 58.86%, which falls under the "Starting Stage". This indicates that partnerships with community members, local government units, non-government organizations, and other external partners are still in their early stages. This limited collaboration with external stakeholders may hinder the sustainability of programs and restrict schools from accessing additional resources and support from the community. As Cabardo (2016) and Lam-an (2023) noted, strengthening these external partnerships is important to developing a supportive environment that can enhance governance, curriculum development, accountability, and resource management within schools.

The overall interpretation of "Moving Towards" suggests that while SBM practices are gradually being adopted and applied by school heads, full institutionalization remains a challenge. These findings are consisted with the studies of researchers who noted that many public schools in developing regions demonstrate moderate implementation levels of SBM due to constraints such as insufficient training opportunities, limited stakeholder engagement, and challenges in resource mobilization (Villanueva & Ortega-Dela Cruz, 2022; Vernez et al., 2012).

3.4 Significant Relationships

Table 5: Significant Differences of the School Principals' Competencies When Grouped According to their Profile

Profile	Computed F Value	Table F Value	Decision
Age	1.0889	1.1644	Not Significant
Gender	0.51084	0.4258	Significant
Civil Status	0.9850	1.9157	Not Significant
Length of Service	1.6592	3.6370	Not Significant
Educational Attainment	4.2343	121.35	Not Significant
Trainings Attended	6.0463	10.1862	Not Significant

Table 5 presents the statistical results on whether there are significant differences in school principals' competencies based on their profile variables. Among the variables considered, *gender* was found to have a statistically significant difference in relation to the principals' competencies, as the computed F value (0.51084) was less than the table F value (0.4258), indicating significance. This finding suggests that gender may influence

how principals demonstrate or develop their professional competencies. It supports existing studies that highlight gender-based leadership differences in terms of leadership styles, with women often exhibiting more democratic, participative, transformational, and interpersonal approaches, while men tend to display assertive, formal, normative, and goal-oriented styles (Eagly et al., 1992, 2003 as cited in Lazaridou, 2024).

On the other hand, *age, civil status, length of service, educational attainment*, and *trainings attended* yielded computed F values that were greater than their respective table F values, leading to a decision of "Not Significant." This implies that there are no statistically significant differences in the competency levels of school principals when grouped according to these profile variables. These findings align with the study of Sawati et al. (2013), which argues that leadership competence may not be solely dependent on demographic background, but rather on specific skills and behaviors.

Table 6: Significant Differences of the Level of SBM Practices When School principals are Grouped According to their Profile

Profile	Computed F Value	Table F Value	Decision
Age	10.3408	4.4127	Significant
Gender	2.2953	2.1298	Significant
Civil Status	6.7240	4.4838	Significant
Length of Service	8.2534	4.1532	Significant
Educational Attainment	50.6035	40.8741	Significant
Trainings Attended	26.1186	11.5792	Significant

Table 6 presents the results examining whether the level of School-Based Management (SBM) practices significantly differs when school principals are grouped according to their profile variables. The computed F values for all six profile variables—*age, gender, civil status, length of service, educational attainment*, and *trainings attended*—were greater than their respective F critical values, indicating statistically significant differences in all categories. The findings suggest that each demographic and professional attribute of school principals influences their implementation of SBM practices to a significant degree. The findings were similar to the study of Vicera & Bentor (2022) which indicated that demographic factors of school heads, including marital status, may affect SBM implementation, with married principals showing higher levels of implementation.

Table 7: Significant Differences Between the School Levels of SBM Practices and School Principals' Competencies

	School principal Competencies	SBM Level of Practice
Mean	63.54027	75.50446
Known Variance	265.42	84.77
Observations	60	60
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Z	-4.04354	
P(Z<=z) one-tail	2.63E-05	
z Critical one-tail	1.644854	
P(Z<=z) two-tail	5.27E-05	
z Critical two-tail	1.959964	
Decision	Significant	

Table 7 presents the results of a z-test for two independent means, examining the significant differences between the School-Based Management (SBM) level of practice and the competency levels of school principals. The computed z-value is -4.0435, which exceeds the critical z-value of 1.6449 (one-tailed) and 1.9600 (two-tailed). The associated p-values for both one-tailed (0.0000263) and two-tailed (0.0000527) tests are substantially lower than the standard significance level of 0.05, thus indicating a statistically significant difference between the two variables. The findings suggest that competent school principals are better equipped with skills and knowledge that enhance their ability to execute School-Based Management, leading to improved governance and school improvement outcomes. Similar to the study of Cabigao (2019) who assessed the professional competencies of school heads and their influence on school outcomes, organizational culture, and principals' performance. The

findings indicated that while leadership competencies did not significantly impact overall school outcomes, they did have a measurable effect on SBM practices.

3.5 Significant Competency Predictors of SBM Practices

The analysis revealed that three domains of school principals' competencies—*School Leadership, Creating a Student-Centered Learning Climate*, *and Personal and Professional Attributes and Interpersonal Effectiveness*—significantly predicted the level of School-Based Management (SBM) practices. These competencies were found to be positively associated with SBM performance, particularly in the SBM dimensions of school leadership, internal Stakeholders, and school-based resources.

The *School Leadership domain* emerged as a key predictor, underscoring the critical role of the principal in shaping the vision, direction, and overall governance of the school. This supports the findings of Punzalan (2024), who asserts that effective school leadership has a strong indirect effect on school improvement through its influence on teachers and school climate. In the context of SBM, the findings support the study of Ramos (2025) who found that leadership and governance scored the highest among SBM dimensions, indicating strong stakeholder participation in decision-making and accountability.

The domain *of Creating a Student-Centered Learning Climate* was also found to significantly influence SBM practices, suggesting that principals who promote inclusive, safe, and engaging learning environments are more likely to implement SBM effectively. As DepEd Koronadal City Division (2012) stated, shared decision-making and stakeholder engagement are crucial for effective school governance.

Moreover, the competency domain *Personal and Professional Attributes and Interpersonal Effectiveness* predicted higher levels of SBM practices, particularly in managing school-based resources and engaging internal stakeholders. This domain includes qualities such as emotional intelligence, ethical leadership, resilience, and effective communication—all of which enhance the principal's ability to build trust, resolve conflicts, and lead change. These findings resonate with the work of Bantolo & Arenga (2021), who emphasized strong interpersonal effectiveness for effective leadership and accountability.

3.6 Proposed School-Based Management Enhancement Program

Based on the findings of this study—particularly the observed gaps in the level of SBM practices and the influence of school leadership competencies—it is imperative to develop an intervention designed to enhance the competencies of school principals in implementing School-Based Management (SBM). In response, a Division-Wide Re-Orientation on School-Based Management Program is proposed.

This training program is aligned with the identified domains of the National Competency-Based Standards for School Heads (NCBS-SH) and is designed to directly address areas with lower proficiency levels, such as instructional leadership, stakeholder engagement, and operational management. The program also aims to reinforce strong areas such as personal and professional attributes and school leadership.

3.6.1 Objectives

The proposed SBM enhancement training seeks to:
1. develop skills in managing school to support student-centered, inquiry-driven management;
2. undertake extensive research on differential learning experiences which will provide the appropriate techniques for effective SBM practices;
3. encourage school principals to work in teams, solve problems, and participate in peer review of their SBM practices;
4. design SBM plans; and
5. engage school principals in hands-on school management and the creation of reliable evaluation tools.

3.6.2 Rationale

School principals are no longer merely sources of knowledge in school management but have become proactive facilitators who promote collaborative knowledge-building among stakeholders. They guide stakeholders to learn in diverse environments, navigate and process a wide array of information resources, and use these resources to solve problems and make informed decisions independently.

Many academic institutions in the country have recognized the need to redefine the role of school principals and have responded by launching professional development programs aimed at training them in School-Based Management (SBM). However, most of these training initiatives are short-term or "crash" programs that primarily focus on compliance literacy and do not sufficiently equip school principals to integrate SBM effectively into day-to-day school operations. Learning about SBM and its components may be relatively straightforward, but mastering its practical implementation is considerably more complex.

The quality of school leadership is widely recognized as a key predictor of school success. Therefore, comprehensive and sustained training for school principals is essential to ensure the effective implementation of SBM practices.

3.6.3 Training Design

The training program will be conducted at Compostela National High School Faculty Development Center, funded through the Division Fund, and will be delivered to all school principals in the Division of Lanao del Sur. The program will cover seven key areas aligned with the NCBS-SH domains as shown in the table below:

Table 8: Proposed SBM Enhancement Training Division-Wide Re-Orientation

Areas Of Concerns	Specific Objectives	Activities	Resources Needed	Expected Output
School Leadership	*Developing & Communicating the Visions, Missions, Goals and objectives	*School principals orientation in school management and activities	-LCD projector -SBM kit	*Enough Knowledge about school management
Instructional Leadership	*Developing Programs and adapting the existing programs *Monitoring the student achievements	*program workshop *Team Building *Retreat/ Recollection	-Lunch/ Snacks -LCD -Certificates -transportation -meals	*Develop a research-based program *Awareness of student progress
Student-Centered Learning Climate	*Creating school environments focused on the needs of the learner * Setting high social & Academic expectations	*recognition of high-performing students *workshop on school activities *Role Playing	-Instructional Materials -LCD -DVD	*Well organized Classroom instructions *Supportive Management
Professional Development	*to develop professional learning community	*Seminar *Workshop	*Hand outs *LCD/DVD	*Building & Promoting Professionalism
Parent Involvement & Community Partnership	*to improve social skills, confidence and communication in	*Team Building *Film Showing of community Activities *Seminar	*Snacks/ Lunch *DVD Player *Props *Materials	*High Interpersonal Skills *High Social Skills

	relating with others			
School Management & Operations	*to develop managing school operations & fiscal management	*Training/ Workshop	*Workshop Materials *-DVD Player	*Strong establishment Of school operations
Personal, Professional & Interpersonal Effectiveness	*To develop commitment *to maintain Harmonious relationships	*Activities on Team Building *Retreat/ Recollection *Enhancement Training	*Handouts *Snacks/ Lunch	*Recognition of individual accountabilities

4. Conclusion

This study investigated the competency levels of school principals in Lanao del Sur based on the National Competency-Based Standards for School Heads (NCBSSH) and assessed their level of School-Based Management (SBM) practice. Findings revealed that the principals exhibited the highest competency in Domain 7: Personal and Professional Attributes and Interpersonal Effectiveness, followed by School Leadership and Creating a Student-Centered Learning Climate, all of which were interpreted as "Expert" levels. Meanwhile, competencies in other domains such as Instructional Leadership, HR Management, and Community Partnerships were generally rated as "Practitioner," indicating room for development.

In terms of SBM practice, school principals were overall categorized as "Moving Towards" full implementation. Notably, the External Stakeholders domain was at the "Starting Stage," suggesting limited engagement with the broader community—a critical element in effective decentralized school management.

Statistical analysis showed significant differences in principals' competencies and SBM practices when grouped according to certain profile variables. Gender was found to significantly influence competency levels, while age, gender, civil status, length of service, educational attainment, and number of trainings attended were all significant factors affecting the level of SBM practice. Additionally, competencies in School Leadership, Creating a Student-Centered Learning Climate, and Personal and Professional Attributes were identified as strong predictors of effective SBM implementation.

In light of these findings, a Division-Wide SBM Enhancement Program was proposed. This program focuses on reorienting and developing the capacity of school heads through targeted training aligned with the identified competency gaps and practice needs. It emphasizes collaborative leadership, evidence-based decision-making, stakeholder engagement, and continuous professional development to ensure sustainable and effective SBM implementation.

Overall, the study underscores the important role of school leaders in driving school improvement through competent, inclusive, and responsive management practices. Investing in their continuous development through context-based training and leadership programs is key to achieving quality education outcomes in decentralized school systems.

Based on the conclusions established in the study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the competencies of school principals and improve the implementation of School-Based Management (SBM). First, school principals should seriously reconsider their mastery of school management. This includes developing and communicating clear goals, making effective use of supervisory time, and selecting leadership methods and management styles that promote efficient and effective SBM. Second, school heads should be consistently updated on new school management methodologies to enhance their skills in implementing school-based programs and projects.

Furthermore, the results of this study should serve as a guide for school principals in designing and preparing relevant programs that support their professional development. Lastly, the Schools Division Office must recognize the urgent need for targeted training and enhancement programs aimed at uplifting the competencies of school principals, especially those who require further attention and support. School heads should also be encouraged to actively pursue continuous professional growth to ensure that they are capable of performing their responsibilities with greater efficiency and effectiveness in their respective areas of concern.

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