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Article

Lived Experience of New School Administrators: Sociological, Socio-Religious, and Philosophical Insights from Public Elementary Schools in Biñan City

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Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences of new school administrators in public elementary schools within the City Schools Division of Biñan City, situating their leadership within sociological, socio-religious, and philosophical contexts of Philippine public education. It sought to describe how novice principals transitioned from classroom teaching to school leadership, navigating challenges and coping strategies while integrating values formation, perspectives from religious education, and community expectations shaped by local faith traditions. Guided by a phenomenological approach, the study involved newly appointed school heads who had served for less than five years. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed thematically by identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, and clustering these into themes. The findings revealed that new school administrators experienced a combination of excitement and apprehension as they assumed leadership roles. Beyond the typical administrative demands, they navigated expectations to model ethical behavior, promote values formation, and sustain harmonious relationships, reflecting theological-spiritual dimensions of moral leadership embedded in socio-religious norms. They faced key challenges, including managing time and workload, gaining acceptance from senior teachers, and balancing administrative and instructional responsibilities alongside their perceived role as moral leaders in the school community. Despite these difficulties, they demonstrated resilience by seeking guidance from mentors, engaging in professional development, and fostering collaboration among teachers, while also grounding their leadership practices in shared values and community-oriented principles. The study concluded that leadership in the Philippine public school context is not only a professional undertaking but also a moral, sociological, and philosophically reflective journey of learning, values integration, and service. The findings highlight the importance of mentoring and sustained professional support that integrates ethical leadership and values-based formation to strengthen leadership development among novice school heads.

Keywords: *Lived experiences, Moral leadership, Philosophical inquiry, Sociology of religion, Values education*

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Introduction

Educating people has always been vital to building a better and more progressive society. Schools play central roles in this process, and effective school leadership is widely recognized as a key factor in sustaining quality education. At the heart of every school is the principal, whose leadership provides direction, supports teaching and learning, and nurtures a positive and productive school environment. In the Philippine context, school leadership is not only administrative and instructional in nature but is also deeply shaped by socio-cultural and socio-religious values. Principals are often expected to model ethical behavior, promote values formation, and respond to community expectations influenced by faith traditions. Their lived experiences are therefore shaped not only by institutional demands but also by expectations to uphold moral and, at times, faith-informed values embedded in the school and community culture. In the contemporary educational landscape, principals are expected not only to manage daily operations but also to act as instructional leaders, mentors, and moral stewards who guide schools toward continuous improvement.

In recent years, the education system has experienced continuous change, expanding the scope and complexity of school leadership. Policy reforms, curriculum innovations, accountability requirements, and increasing stakeholder expectations have reshaped school operations and leadership practices. These expectations are further influenced by community norms, where schools are viewed as institutions that reinforce discipline, respect, and moral values. In this sense, schools function as social institutions that transmit cultural and value systems, positioning school leaders as key agents in shaping and sustaining community identity. As a result, principals must balance administrative tasks with instructional supervision while responding to the varied needs of teachers, learners, parents, and the wider community. These conditions have intensified the demands of the principalship, particularly for newly appointed administrators who must establish credibility not only as managers but also as value-oriented leaders.

International literature highlights that school leadership is carried out in dynamic contexts that require adaptability, resilience, and ongoing professional learning. Reyes-Guerra et al. (2021) emphasized that school leaders encounter increased workloads and shifting institutional priorities. Medford and Brown (2022) similarly noted that newly appointed administrators often experience a transition period marked by adjustment to new roles, expectations, and organizational cultures. These studies indicate that entry into school leadership is not a linear process but involves continuous learning, personal adjustment, and the development of coping

strategies. However, these experiences are not shaped in isolation; rather, they are influenced by broader social and cultural structures that define expectations of leadership, including moral and community-based norms.

Within the Philippine context, school principals are tasked with a wide range of responsibilities, including instructional supervision, curriculum implementation, teacher development, financial management, policy compliance, and community engagement. These responsibilities are often carried out in close coordination with parents and local stakeholders, whose expectations are influenced by cultural and religious beliefs about education and character formation. Ongoing reforms within the Department of Education have further shaped these responsibilities and heightened accountability expectations. Matilla (2023) highlighted that school leaders must navigate complex demands related to resource management, policy interpretation, and reporting. Dela Cruz (2022) similarly observed that newly appointed school heads undergo a learning process as they adjust to their leadership roles, particularly when transitioning from classroom teaching into administrative positions. In doing so, they also navigate implicit expectations to embody moral authority and uphold values that are often rooted in community and faith-based traditions.

The appointment of school principals in the Philippines has traditionally been guided by qualification standards issued by the Department of Education. Under the previous policy framework, particularly DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2007, entitled The Revised Guidelines on the Selection, Promotion, and Designation of School Heads, passing the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) was a mandatory requirement for initial appointments. The NQESH ensured that aspiring school leaders possessed the minimum leadership and management competencies required for school administration. Candidates were also required to meet educational, experiential, and competency-based requirements aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads, as reinforced through subsequent DepEd memoranda including DepEd Memorandum No. 013, s. 2024. While these standards ensured eligibility, they did not eliminate the challenges associated with assuming the role of a school principal for the first time, particularly in meeting both institutional expectations and socially embedded demands related to leadership and values formation.

Despite clear policies and qualification requirements, much of the existing literature on educational leadership focuses on experienced or long-serving principals. There remains limited attention to the lived experiences of newly appointed school administrators, particularly in how they navigate their transition into leadership roles and cope with emerging demands. This gap is especially significant in contexts where

teachers, including those previously assigned to high schools, are appointed as elementary school principals if there are no vacancies at the secondary level. Such reassignment can make the transition more challenging, as these teachers must adapt to new school environments, manage younger learners, and perform administrative responsibilities that differ from their previous teaching experience, while also aligning with the values-oriented expectations of elementary school communities.

However, prior teaching experience also serves as a valuable resource for these newly appointed principals. Their classroom background equips them with insights into effective teaching strategies, student behavior management, and curriculum implementation. This foundation allows them to provide instructional support to teachers, make informed decisions, and foster a learning-centered environment. Moreover, their prior engagement with learners supports their role in promoting values formation and cultivating a school culture grounded in respect, discipline, and shared moral principles, helping them navigate the demands of school leadership more effectively.

This situation is evident in the City Schools Division of Biñan City, where teachers who passed the NQESH were designated as school heads to address leadership needs in public elementary schools. Findings of the study indicated that newly appointed principals experience a period of transition characterized by role adjustment, increased workload, and heightened accountability. Alongside these, they also navigate expectations to lead with integrity, maintain harmonious relationships, and uphold the values upheld by the school and community. To manage these challenges, school administrators employ various coping strategies such as seeking mentorship, engaging in professional collaboration, prioritizing tasks, and relying on reflective practice to strengthen their leadership capacity.

Drawing from professional experiences in the teaching field and supported by the results of this study, newly appointed school administrators were shown to actively develop strategies to adapt to their new roles. Their experiences highlighted the importance of institutional support, continuous professional development, and structured mentoring in helping school leaders navigate the complexities of school administration, including the integration of ethical leadership and values-based practices.

These considerations served as the foundation of the study. Understanding the transition experiences and coping strategies of newly appointed school administrators is essential in informing leadership preparation programs, professional development initiatives, and support mechanisms within the Department of Education. Furthermore, this study contributes to the sociology of religion by illustrating how

socio-religious values and community-based moral expectations subtly shape leadership practices, decision-making processes, and the lived experiences of school administrators in public education settings. Anchored in the phenomenological design, this study foregrounds the lived experiences of newly appointed public elementary school administrators in Biñan City, emphasizing how institutional demands and socio-religious expectations converge to shape their leadership journey. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of newly appointed public elementary school administrators in the City Schools Division of Biñan City, with the aim of generating insights that can contribute to strengthening school leadership practice and support systems.

Methodology

Research design

A phenomenological research design was employed in this study because the primary aim was to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of newly promoted elementary school principals as they navigated leadership in their assigned schools. This qualitative approach is particularly suitable because it allows the researcher to capture the richness, complexity, and meaning of experiences that cannot be fully quantified or assessed through surveys or other quantitative methods. It is especially relevant in examining how leadership experiences are shaped not only by institutional roles but also by socio-cultural and socio-religious contexts that influence expectations of moral leadership, values formation, and community engagement. Consistent with the study's abstract, the phenomenological design was employed to authentically capture the essence of administrators' lived experiences, situating their narratives within broader socio-cultural and socio-religious structures that define expectations of leadership.

Phenomenology focuses on understanding experiences from the perspective of those who live them. Moustakas (1994) and Neubauer et al. (2019) emphasized that phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence and meaning of individual experiences, while Max van Manen (1990) highlighted that it requires a thorough investigation of the participants' lived realities to reveal the essential structures of a phenomenon. Ramirez (2017) further noted that understanding a phenomenon involves reflecting on both the participants' and the researcher's perspectives to provide a more comprehensive interpretation of the lived experience. In this study, such an approach enables the exploration of how administrators interpret and respond to expectations that are not only organizational but also socially and morally constructed within their school communities.

Specifically, this study employed psychological phenomenology as described by John W. Creswell (2007). It concentrates on describing individual experiences to understand their meaning and significance. This design is justified in the context of

newly appointed principals because their transition into leadership involves deep personal, professional, and contextual factors—such as adapting to new administrative roles, managing younger learners, and balancing multiple responsibilities—which can only be meaningfully *explored* through descriptive accounts of their lived experiences. These experiences also include navigating implicit expectations related to ethical conduct, community values, and, in some cases, faith-informed practices that shape school culture and leadership behavior. By employing phenomenology, the study ensures that the findings authentically reflect the perspectives of the participants and provide meaningful insights into the complexities of assuming school leadership for the first time. Moreover, this approach allows the study to situate individual experiences within broader social structures, offering insights into how values and belief systems influence leadership practices, thereby contributing to sociological and socio-religious understandings of educational leadership.

Co-researchers

This study considered Moustakas' (1994) view of phenomenological research, which regards participants as co-researchers who play an essential role in uncovering the essence of the phenomenon. In this context, the co-researchers were treated as active contributors, as the meaning and understanding of the lived experience primarily emerged from their narratives. Their accounts not only reflected personal and professional transitions but also revealed how their experiences were shaped by broader socio-cultural and socio-religious contexts that influence expectations of leadership, moral conduct, and community engagement in public schools.

The primary data for this study were derived from the interview responses of new school administrators in the City Schools Division of Biñan City from 2021 up to the present. These narratives provided insights into how administrators navigate their roles within schools that function as social institutions, where leadership practices are influenced by organizational demands as well as community-based values and, in some cases, faith-informed expectations.

Data collection techniques

The data used in this study were gathered through face-to-face interviews with the co-researchers. After the research protocol was validated, the researcher began identifying, communicating with, and establishing rapport with the participants. According to Creswell (2007), this step is essential for obtaining sufficient and reliable data. Formal consent to conduct the study was also sought from the co-researchers and was personally delivered prior to the interviews. The letter confirmed their voluntary participation and granted permission to record the sessions. It also emphasized that their involvement in the investigation was entirely voluntary and based on their willingness to share lived experiences. Only five co-researchers provided consent and

agreed to participate as primary participants in the study. They were then asked to indicate their preferred dates for the interview sessions.

After obtaining consent, the researcher proceeded with the interviews. The co-researchers were encouraged to respond based on their lived experiences and were given the freedom to openly share their perspectives, insights, and narratives. During the interviews, the researcher paid close attention to their expressions, reactions, and gestures, as these non-verbal cues contributed to a deeper understanding of their experiences. Particular attention was also given to how participants articulated their roles in relation to community expectations, values formation, and moral leadership, as these elements are often shaped by socio-cultural and socio-religious contexts within Philippine public schools.

In addition, the researcher consciously practiced *bracketing* by setting aside personal experiences, judgments, and biases to avoid influencing the narratives shared by the participants. Moustakas (1994) suggests that after each interview, researchers should engage in self-reflective meditation or analysis. This process enabled the researcher to recognize that every statement and story shared by the co-researchers was equally meaningful and valuable in gaining a deeper understanding of the essence of their lived experiences. Through this reflective process, the researcher was also able to situate individual accounts within broader social and cultural contexts, recognizing how leadership experiences are shaped not only by institutional demands but also by embedded values systems and community norms.

Data analysis

This study followed the qualitative phenomenological framework of Moustakas (1994), as elaborated by Creswell (2007), to systematically explore the lived experiences of the co-researchers. To minimize bias, bracketing (*epoche*) was applied, wherein the researcher set aside personal assumptions and prior experiences, ensuring that all participant statements were treated with equal value. Reflective meditation was also employed to deepen understanding and maintain openness to the co-researchers' perspectives. This process enabled the researcher to remain attentive not only to individual experiences but also to how these experiences are shaped by broader socio-cultural and socio-religious contexts influencing leadership practices, moral expectations, and community engagement.

The analysis followed several steps. First, verbatim transcripts were carefully examined, and significant statements were highlighted to form self-reflective narratives, with Filipino responses translated into English where necessary. Next, a second level of reflection was conducted to reduce inconsistencies and emphasize unique "living descriptions" that revealed the essence of the experiences. During this stage, attention was given to how participants articulated their roles in relation to values formation, ethical decision-making, and community expectations, which are often embedded in culturally and, at times, faith-informed perspectives. These

statements were then organized into clusters of meaning or thematic reflections, while vague or repetitive data was excluded.

Textual and structural descriptions were developed from these themes, allowing for a deeper understanding of both what the co-researchers experienced and how they experienced it within their specific contexts. This dual analysis facilitated the connection between individual narratives and broader social structures, particularly the role of schools as institutions that transmit values and shape community identity. The process culminated in schematic or eidetic insights that synthesized participants' thoughts and feelings. Finally, a symbolic representation and creative synthesis were constructed to capture the overall essence and shared meanings of their lived experiences, including how leadership is enacted within a framework of institutional responsibilities and socially embedded moral expectations.

To enhance credibility and validity, the findings were discussed and verified through follow-up interviews with the co-researchers and through peer validation, ensuring that interpretations accurately reflected their lived experiences. This validation process also ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the participants' perspectives while acknowledging the influence of values systems and community norms on their leadership experiences, thereby strengthening the study's contribution to both educational leadership and sociological inquiry.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Profile of the Co-researchers

Co-researcher	Age	Years in Teaching	Years as a Principal	Rank	Highest Educational Attainment
1	36	12	2	Principal I	Doctor's Degree
2	38	13	2	Principal I	Master's Degree
3	43	22	3	Principal I	Master's Degree
4	53	28	3	Principal I	Master's Degree
5	39	18	3	Principal I	Master's Degree

Table 2. Profile of the Co-researchers

Theme	Description	Key Reflections / Insights
A. Purpose-Driven Leadership	Describes how novice school principals anchor their leadership practices on a clear sense of mission, values, and commitment to educational service and moral responsibility.	Principals emphasized the importance of aligning school goals with the institution's mission as a way to provide direction, unify stakeholders, and foster a shared sense of responsibility, while also viewing leadership as a service-oriented journey grounded in foresight and strategic planning for sustainable school development.
B. System Building	Highlights how school principals establish and manage organizational systems while balancing instructional and administrative responsibilities within the school context.	Principals recognized the importance of establishing clear systems and processes, where effective delegation of responsibilities empowers teachers, ensures the smooth functioning of school operations, and strengthens a culture of trust, collaboration, and accountability within the school community.
C. Teacher Empowerment	Reflects how principals promote collaboration, mentorship, and shared leadership to strengthen teacher participation and professional growth.	Principals emphasized the importance of providing guidance, fostering collaboration, and recognizing accomplishments as key strategies in strengthening teachers' instructional capacity and cultivating a supportive and dynamic learning environment.
D. Inclusivity and Transparency	Illustrates how school leaders foster open communication, fairness, and community-oriented leadership shaped by sociological and cultural expectations.	Principals valued inclusivity and transparency as essential practices that build trust, minimize misunderstandings, strengthen unity, and promote collective responsibility, ensuring that all stakeholders feel valued, respected, and heard within the school community.

E. Personal and Professional Growth	Captures how novice principals develop resilience and leadership competence through mentorship, reflection, and continuous professional learning.	Principals experienced growth in self-confidence, adaptability, and empathy, as their engagement in leadership initiatives and mentoring roles fosters continuous self-reflection and professional development that positively benefits both their leadership practice and the wider school community.

Schematic/Eidetic Insights on Co-Researchers' Transition to Being School Administrators and Their Key Learnings

The following are the schematic/eidetic insights derived from the co-researchers' lived experiences as new school administrators, highlighting the meaningful lessons and reflections they have gained throughout their leadership journey.

1. Vision-driven Leadership

The lived experiences of novice school principals reveal that vision-driven leadership serves as a foundational element in their transition to school leadership. Having a clear institutional vision provided direction, coherence, and stability in their decision-making processes, enabling them to align school goals with institutional mandates while fostering unity among teachers, learners, and stakeholders (Walden University, 2023; Dowd, 2019).

Beyond its organizational function, vision-driven leadership was interpreted as a moral and values-oriented commitment to service. The principals emphasized that leadership requires integrity, foresight, and responsibility in guiding the school community. In the Philippine public school context, this reflects socio-religious and ethical expectations placed upon school leaders as stewards of academic and character formation.

The principals also underscored the importance of strategic foresight and adaptability in addressing both immediate and long-term needs. Leadership, therefore, was not only reactive but anticipatory in nature, requiring consistent planning and evaluation (Chan & Hallinger, 2023; Bush, 2022). As Principal A shared, "Leadership, for me, is about responsibility, empathy, and growth." These experiences reflect leadership as both a strategic and moral endeavor.

2. System building

System building emerged as a critical adaptive strategy among novice principals in managing the complexity of school administration. Participants

emphasized the importance of establishing clear procedures, organizational structures, and task delegation systems to ensure operational efficiency and continuity (Geoffrey, 2018; Buckner, 2023).

This practice enabled principals to distribute responsibilities effectively, reduce administrative overload, and promote accountability among school personnel. As systems became more defined, teachers gained clarity in their roles, resulting in improved coordination and reduced operational uncertainty.

Furthermore, system building fostered collaboration and institutional sustainability, ensuring that school processes remained stable beyond individual leadership tenure (Madhuri, 2020; Walden University, 2023). Principal B noted that "everything should have a system… so the school runs smoothly even when I'm not around." These findings indicate that system building functions as both an administrative necessity and a mechanism for sustaining institutional stability.

3. Teacher Empowerment

Teacher empowerment was identified as a central leadership strategy that supports instructional development and organizational growth. Novice principals highlighted mentoring, collaborative planning, and constructive feedback as key practices in strengthening teacher capacity (Husaini & Fitria, 2019; Sebastian, Allensworth, & Huang, 2021).

Empowerment was also expressed through opportunities for innovation, participation in decision-making, and recognition of teacher contributions. These practices fostered professional ownership, motivation, and a culture of shared responsibility within schools.

As Principal A stated, "Providing guidance and constructive feedback helps teachers grow professionally and ensures that our instructional goals are met." Meanwhile, Principal B emphasized that allowing teachers to lead initiatives enhances their sense of ownership and engagement. These findings demonstrate that teacher empowerment is a relational and developmental dimension of leadership grounded in collaborative practice.

4. Inclusivity and Transparency

Inclusivity and transparency emerged as essential practices in building trust, cohesion, and collaborative school cultures. Novice principals emphasized the importance of involving teachers and stakeholders in decision-making processes to foster participation and shared ownership (Husaini & Fitria, 2019; Walden University, 2023).

Transparent communication of policies, challenges, and goals contributed to reduced misunderstandings and increased institutional trust. These practices also enhanced cooperation and strengthened collective responsibility within the school community.

Principal C stated, "Transparency builds trust. When people understand why decisions are made, they are more willing to cooperate and support school initiatives." These findings align with Sebastian, Allensworth, and Huang (2021) which emphasized that participatory leadership strengthens school effectiveness through relational trust and shared accountability.

5. Personal and Professional Growth.

The study revealed that leadership significantly contributes to the personal and professional development of novice school principals. Participants reported increased self-confidence, resilience, empathy, and adaptability as they navigated complex leadership roles (Adams & Muthiah, 2019; Arrieta & Ancho, 2020).

Professional growth was evident in their enhanced capacity for strategic planning, instructional supervision, and organizational management. These competencies were developed through lived experience, mentorship, and continuous reflection (Chan & Hallinger, 2023; Bush, 2022; Lasky, 2021).

Principal C shared that leadership strengthened both patience and empathy, while Principal B highlighted improvements in organizational competence. These experiences demonstrate that leadership development is a continuous and transformative process shaped by experience, reflection, and contextual demands.

Symbolic Representation

The table below best represents and summarizes the co-researchers' thoughts and reflections on their entire experience/journey in transitioning from being classroom teachers to school administrators.

Table 3. Co-Researchers' Thoughts and Reflections

Co-researchers	***Symbols***	***Meaning***
Principal A	Sunflower 	Like a sunflower turning toward the sun, the principal remains steadfast and positive despite the weight of new responsibilities. This optimism sustains both teachers and learners, radiating encouragement and stability even during uncertain times. The sunflower symbolizes an unwavering belief that every challenge serves as an opportunity for growth, guiding the principal toward stronger, more responsive, and more reflective leadership.

Principal B	Banyan Tree 	This principal embodies strength and rootedness. The banyan tree, with its extensive network of roots and branches, represents their ability to anchor the school while extending support to every stakeholder. They value relationships and view leadership as a form of nurturing—ensuring that teachers, parents, and learners grow within a supportive and stable environment shaped by their guidance. Their grounding in classroom teaching keeps them firmly connected to everyday school realities, even as they extend their responsibilities into broader administrative and leadership roles.
Principal C	Butterfly 	Transitioning from teacher to school head was this principal's metamorphosis. Like a butterfly emerging from its cocoon, they embraced the discomfort of change and discovered new strengths within themselves. The butterfly symbolizes their ability to adapt to new school cultures, embrace continuous learning, and lead transformation through compassion and self-awareness.
Principal D	Flame 	This principal leads with a burning sense of purpose. The flame represents their passion to improve the school system, empower teachers, and ensure that learners thrive. Even when faced with exhaustion and resistance, their dedication continues to ignite motivation

		among their staff. Their leadership is guided by conviction — a fire that lights the way for others.
Principal E	River 	This principal's journey mirrors that of a river — flowing through different terrains, sometimes encountering rocks, yet always moving forward. The river symbolizes adaptability and reflection. They understand that leadership, like water, requires both persistence and flexibility. They listen, observe, and adjust — learning from every experience to sustain harmony and progress in their school community.

Creative Synthesis

Leadership is more than managing tasks and making decisions; it is an art shaped by vision, resilience, and the ability to inspire others. In this study, the lived experiences of new school principals revealed how purpose, system building, teacher empowerment, inclusivity, and personal growth intersect to create meaningful and lasting leadership. These experiences also reflect the ongoing formation of values—where integrity, compassion, humility, and responsibility are continuously shaped through real-world challenges and reflective practice.

From a sociological lens, the principals' journeys illustrate how leadership is not an isolated role but a socially constructed identity shaped within relationships, institutions, and communities. As they transition from classroom teachers to school heads, they negotiate new expectations, redefine their professional roles, and engage with complex social systems involving teachers, learners, parents, and stakeholders. Their leadership practices reflect how social structures influence behavior, while at the same time, how leaders themselves reshape school culture through empowerment, collaboration, and inclusivity.

From a religious and spiritual perspective, their narratives echo the idea of vocation and stewardship. Leadership becomes more than a position—it becomes a calling to serve others with humility, patience, and compassion. Their experiences of struggle, growth, and perseverance reflect spiritual formation, where challenges are not merely obstacles but opportunities for deeper purpose and moral refinement. In this sense, leadership becomes an expression of service rooted in higher meaning and ethical responsibility.

To capture the essence of these insights, I explored the unique symbols each principal identified with—the sunflower, the banyan tree, the butterfly, the flame, and the river—each representing their strengths, challenges, and approaches to guiding their schools.

"Seeds of Leadership"

A sunflower turns toward the light,
Steadfast through the morning and night.
With hope as their compass, bright and true,
They guide their school in all they do.
Purpose-driven, their vision takes flight,
Turning challenges into radiant insight.
A banyan tree stands firm and wide,
Roots intertwined, branches stretched with pride.
Strength in systems, nurturing the whole,
Empowering teachers, fostering the soul.
Within its shade, a social order grows,
Where trust and shared responsibility flows.
A butterfly flutters, wings freshly unfurled,
Embracing change, transforming their world.
From teacher to leader, identity redefined,
Through social roles and meaning intertwined.
In values formed through struggle and grace,
They learn to lead in a wider space.
A flame dances, fierce and bright,
Igniting hearts with unwavering light.
A calling felt, like a sacred fire,
Guided by purpose and moral desire.
Through service rooted in compassion and care,
They lift others through burdens they bear.
A river flows, winding and free,
Through rocks, through valleys, toward the sea.
Faith in motion, steady and deep,
Lessons of life they quietly keep.
In every turn, both struggle and grace,
A spiritual journey shapes their pace.
Together, they teach what the study revealed:
That leadership blooms where hearts are healed.
Through values formed in lived experience,
And social ties shaping resilience,
With purpose, service, and vision sincere—
A school thrives where meaning is clear

Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the experiences of classroom teachers who transitioned into school administrators, highlighting the various situations they encountered throughout their professional journey. It presents the interconnected nature of their lived experiences, including the positive influences that shaped their leadership perspectives, the challenges and struggles they faced, the coping mechanisms they employed, and the unique experiences that contributed to their professional growth. Collectively, these elements influenced their development and played a significant role in shaping them into effective and competent school administrators.

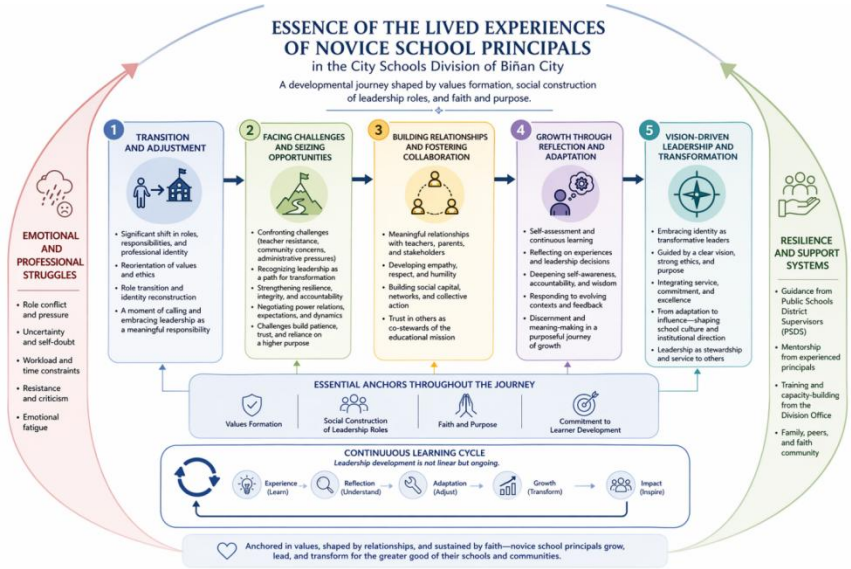


Figure 1. Essence of the Lived Experiences of Novice School Principals in the City Schools Division of Binan City

Design of the Framework

This framework, entitled *Essence of the Lived Experiences of Novice School Principals in the City Schools Division of Biñan City*, illustrates the developmental journey of novice school principals as they transition from teaching roles to educational leadership within the division. It captures the interconnected stages and recurring processes that shape their growth, challenges, and transformation as instructional and administrative leaders. Viewed holistically, this framework also reflects the continuous formation of values, the social construction of leadership roles, and the influence of faith and purpose in guiding professional practice.

The first stage, transition and adjustment, represents the initial phase in which newly appointed principals experience a significant shift in roles, responsibilities, and professional identity. From a values formation perspective, this stage involves the reorientation of personal and professional ethics as they align individual beliefs with leadership responsibilities. Sociologically, it reflects role transition and identity reconstruction as they move from classroom-based interaction to institutional

leadership within a broader organizational structure. From a faith perspective, this stage can be seen as a moment of calling, where leadership is embraced as a meaningful responsibility entrusted to them.

The second stage, facing challenges and seizing opportunities, highlights how novice principals confront difficulties such as teacher resistance, community engagement concerns, and administrative pressures. Despite these challenges, they begin to recognize leadership as an avenue for meaningful transformation. Values such as resilience, integrity, and accountability are strengthened through lived experience. Sociologically, this stage reflects the negotiation of power relations, institutional expectations, and community dynamics. In terms of faith, challenges become formative experiences that build patience, trust, and reliance on a higher sense of purpose. Resilience and support systems—such as guidance from Public Schools District Supervisors (PSDS), mentorship from experienced principals, and training from the Division Office—become essential anchors in sustaining their motivation and confidence.

The third stage, building relationships and fostering collaboration, emphasizes the central role of interpersonal relationships in effective school leadership. Values such as empathy, respect, and humility are developed through meaningful interaction with teachers, parents, and stakeholders. Sociologically, this stage highlights the importance of social capital, networks, and collective action in achieving organizational goals. From a faith perspective, collaboration reflects trust in others as co-stewards of educational mission, fostering unity and shared responsibility for learner development.

The fourth stage, growth through reflection and adaptation, signifies a period of self-assessment and continuous learning. Principals reflect on their experiences, evaluate leadership decisions, and adjust practices for improvement. This process deepens values of self-awareness, accountability, and wisdom. Sociologically, it demonstrates how leaders respond to evolving institutional norms and reshape their leadership strategies based on social feedback and context. Faith, in this stage, is expressed through discernment and meaning-making, where experiences—both successes and struggles—are understood as part of a purposeful journey of growth.

The final stage, vision-driven leadership and transformation, represents the culmination of their developmental journey. At this point, novice principals embrace their identity as transformative leaders guided by a clear vision, strong ethical grounding, and a deep sense of purpose. Values such as service, commitment, and excellence become fully integrated into their leadership practice. Sociologically, they move from adaptation to active influence, shaping school culture and institutional direction. From a faith perspective, leadership becomes a form of stewardship—an expression of service to others grounded in purpose and responsibility for the greater good.

Surrounding the entire framework are two overarching forces: emotional and professional struggles, and resilience and support systems, which illustrate the

dynamic tension that continuously shapes leadership experiences. At the same time, the continuous learning cycle emphasizes that leadership development is not linear but ongoing. Each experience contributes to new insights, reinforcing that effective leadership is a lifelong process of learning, adapting, and evolving—anchored in values formation, shaped by social interaction, and sustained by faith and purpose.

Conclusion

This study concluded that the lived experiences of novice school administrators in public elementary schools within the City Schools Division of Biñan City are deeply shaped by the intersecting sociological, socio-religious, and philosophical contexts of Philippine public education. Their transition from classroom teaching to school leadership is not merely a professional shift but a complex and transformative process that integrates moral responsibility, values formation, and community expectations grounded in local faith traditions.

Findings revealed that novice principals navigate leadership with a mixture of excitement and apprehension as they adjust to expanded roles that require both administrative competence and moral stewardship. Their experiences demonstrate that school leadership extends beyond managerial tasks, as they are also expected to model ethical behavior, sustain harmonious relationships, and uphold values formation within the school community. These expectations reflect the socio-religious dimensions of leadership embedded in the Philippine educational context.

The study further concluded that novice administrators encounter significant challenges such as managing time and workload, gaining acceptance from senior teachers, and balancing instructional and administrative responsibilities. Despite these difficulties, they demonstrate resilience through mentorship-seeking, continuous professional development, and collaborative engagement with stakeholders. These coping strategies highlight leadership as a relational and value-driven process shaped by shared beliefs, cultural norms, and communal expectations.

Ultimately, the study affirms that leadership in Philippine public schools is a moral, sociological, and philosophical journey of continuous learning, service, and values integration. It emphasizes that the development of novice school heads requires not only technical preparation but also sustained mentoring and professional support systems that strengthen ethical leadership, nurture personal growth, and reinforce values-based formation within the educational community.

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