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Emerging School Leaders' Levels of Competence in Financial Management, Strategic Partnerships, and Project Implementation: Basis for a Capability Building Program

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ABSTRACT

This study identified the competency needs of emerging school leaders in financial management, strategic partnerships, and project implementation as a basis for developing a capability building program. Using a descriptive research design integrated with a Research and Development (R&D) approach, the study involved 68 emerging school leaders, specifically Head Teachers and newly appointed School Heads with zero to three years of leadership experience in a public schools division in Northern Luzon, Philippines. The researchers gathered data using a competency needs assessment survey aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH). The findings revealed that financial management was identified as a Moderate Training Need, while strategic partnerships and project implementation were identified as Extensive Training Needs. Based on these findings, the STEP UP! (Strengthening and Training Emerging Personnel for Upgraded Performance) Capability-Building Program was developed to address the identified competency gaps. The program subsequently underwent expert validation and pilot implementation. Validation results indicated an overall rating of Very Highly Valid, demonstrating strong alignment with competency needs, professional standards, content requirements, and implementation mechanisms. Evaluation based on Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Model further showed that the program was highly effective, as participants reported positive reactions, increased knowledge and skills, successful application of learning in the workplace, and perceived improvements in leadership performance and school operations. The study concludes that a needs-based and standards-aligned capability-building program can effectively strengthen the competencies of emerging school leaders and contribute to improved school governance, stakeholder engagement, and project implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Education remains a critical driver of economic growth, social development, and human empowerment. Within educational systems, school leadership is widely recognized as one of the most important factors influencing school effectiveness and learner outcomes. Effective school leaders establish strategic direction, cultivate positive organizational cultures, promote accountability, and create enabling conditions for teaching and learning. As educational systems face increasing demands for quality, equity, and responsiveness, the role of school leaders has expanded beyond instructional supervision to encompass complex managerial, organizational, and community-oriented responsibilities (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood *et al.*, 2020).

Research consistently demonstrates that school leadership contributes significantly to educational improvement through its influence on teacher effectiveness, school climate, professional collaboration, and organizational capacity. A recent three-level meta-analysis of 108 studies found that school leadership exerts a significant indirect effect on student outcomes through instructional management, teacher capacity building, and stakeholder engagement (Tan *et al.*, 2024). Similarly, Leithwood *et*

al. (2020) emphasized that successful school leadership strengthens school improvement efforts through strategic resource management, professional learning support, and collaborative decision-making processes. These findings highlight the increasingly strategic nature of school leadership in contemporary educational settings.

Current scholarship further suggests that effective school leaders integrate instructional, transformational, distributed, and strategic leadership approaches to address diverse educational challenges. Rather than relying on a single leadership model, successful leaders adapt their practices to contextual conditions, organizational needs, and stakeholder expectations. Such adaptability requires a balance between instructional expertise and managerial competence, particularly in decentralized and accountability-oriented educational systems (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood *et al.*, 2020; Tan *et al.*, 2024).

Particular attention has been directed toward emerging school leaders who are transitioning from teaching roles to formal leadership positions. Research indicates that newly appointed principals and school administrators frequently encounter challenges related to organizational management, financial stewardship, stakeholder engagement, and school improvement

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planning. Montecinos *et al.* (2022) observed that novice school leaders often experience difficulties navigating the complex operational and strategic dimensions of leadership during their initial years of service. Such challenges underscore the need for continuous leadership development and targeted professional support.

In the Philippines, these leadership demands have become increasingly evident as schools are expected to demonstrate accountability, manage resources effectively, cultivate partnerships, and implement programs that contribute to improved learner outcomes. Recognizing these evolving expectations, the Department of Education institutionalized the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) as the national framework for leadership excellence (Department of Education, 2020). The PPSSH identifies competencies across the domains of Leading Strategically, Managing School Operations and Resources, Focusing on Teaching and Learning, Developing Self and Others, and Building Connections. These standards emphasize that school leaders must possess not only instructional expertise but also strong managerial, financial, and stakeholder-engagement competencies (Department of Education, 2020; Cabigao, 2021).

Among these competencies, financial management remains a critical component of effective school leadership. School leaders are expected to manage budgets, allocate resources strategically, ensure compliance with government regulations, and promote transparency and accountability in the utilization of public funds. Effective financial stewardship contributes to organizational efficiency and supports the successful implementation of school improvement initiatives (Department of Education, 2020). Likewise, strategic partnerships have become increasingly important as schools collaborate with local government units, community organizations, private institutions, and other stakeholders to mobilize resources and enhance educational opportunities. Research has shown that strong school-community partnerships contribute to increased stakeholder participation, resource generation, and improved school outcomes (Leithwood *et al.*, 2020).

Project implementation represents another essential leadership competency. Results-based management reforms require school leaders to effectively plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate programs and projects aligned with institutional goals and policy priorities. Competence in project management, monitoring and evaluation, evidence-based decision-making, and sustainability planning is therefore crucial for achieving desired educational outcomes and sustaining school improvement efforts (Department of Education, 2024). Despite the presence of leadership standards and professional support mechanisms, limited empirical evidence exists regarding the competency levels of emerging school leaders in financial management, strategic partnerships, and project implementation, particularly within local educational contexts. Moreover,

the growing number of newly appointed school leaders resulting from promotions, retirements, and organizational transitions underscores the need to better understand their developmental needs. Assessing these competencies is necessary to identify areas requiring support and to inform the design of responsive professional development interventions.

Therefore, this study sought to determine the competency levels of emerging school leaders in financial management, strategic partnerships, and project implementation. Specifically, it aimed to assess their competencies in these domains and utilize the findings as a basis for developing a context-responsive capability-building program intended to strengthen leadership effectiveness and support continuous professional growth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emerging School Leaders and Leadership Transition

School leadership has become increasingly complex as educational systems face growing demands for accountability, organizational effectiveness, and continuous improvement. Consequently, school leaders are expected to perform multifaceted roles that extend beyond instructional supervision to include organizational management, stakeholder engagement, and strategic decision-making (Hallinger, 2011; Tan *et al.*, 2024). Effective leadership has been linked to school improvement, teacher development, and enhanced student outcomes, underscoring the critical role of school leaders in contemporary educational settings.

Emerging school leaders, commonly described as newly appointed principals, head teachers, and school administrators, often encounter significant challenges as they transition from classroom-based responsibilities to broader leadership functions requiring managerial and organizational competencies. Studies consistently indicate that novice school leaders experience difficulties related to role adjustment, decision-making, relationship building, and leading school improvement initiatives during their early years of service (Jerdborg, 2023; Meyer & Patuawa, 2022; Montecinos *et al.*, 2022). These findings highlight the need for continuous professional support and targeted capability-building interventions to facilitate successful leadership transition and enhance leadership effectiveness.

In addition, recent research underscores that leadership is essential for fostering organizational well-being, growth, and strength. School leaders who show strategic orientation, collaboration, and responsiveness towards school requirements are better positioned to create positive learning environments and improve organizational effectiveness. Given the increasing challenges faced by educational organizations, providing developmental training for school leaders is crucial to strengthening the competencies needed for effective school leadership and continuous organizational improvement. (Ampomah & Osei-Owusu, 2026).

Leadership Competence and the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads

Competence refers to the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that enable individuals to perform effectively within their professional roles. In educational leadership, competence is a critical determinant of a school leader's ability to guide school improvement, achieve organizational goals, and respond to evolving educational demands (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood *et al.*, 2020). Contemporary leadership theories emphasize that effective school leaders integrate instructional, managerial, interpersonal, and strategic competencies to create conditions that support sustainable school improvement.

In the Philippine context, leadership competencies are operationalized through the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), which establish professional expectations across the domains of Leading Strategically, Managing School Operations and Resources, Focusing on Teaching and Learning, Developing Self and Others, and Building Connections (Department of Education, 2020). These standards underscore the expectation that school leaders possess competencies that enable them to manage resources effectively, build productive partnerships, and successfully implement programs and projects. Consequently, competency assessment has become an essential mechanism for identifying development needs and informing professional learning initiatives.

Managerial and Relational Competencies of School Leaders

Among the competencies expected of school leaders, financial management, strategic partnerships, and project implementation are particularly important for achieving organizational effectiveness and school improvement. Financial management competency encompasses budgeting, procurement, resource allocation, financial monitoring, and accountability mechanisms. Effective financial stewardship promotes transparency, accountability, and efficient utilization of resources to support school goals and learner outcomes (Department of Education, 2020). Studies have shown that strong financial management practices contribute significantly to organizational efficiency and effective school operations (Amos *et al.*, 2021; Gaspar *et al.*, 2022).

Strategic partnership competence involves the ability to establish, sustain, and evaluate collaborative relationships with stakeholders, including local government units, community organizations, private institutions, parents, and civil society groups. Stakeholder engagement has been recognized as an important factor in improving decision-making, strengthening accountability, promoting inclusion, and enhancing educational quality (Peng *et al.*, 2024). Effective partnership-building requires competencies in communication, networking, collaboration, and stakeholder management, enabling school leaders to mobilize resources and generate support

for school improvement initiatives.

Similarly, project implementation competency enables school leaders to effectively plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate programs, projects, and activities aligned with institutional goals and policy priorities. Results-based management approaches increasingly require school leaders to demonstrate competencies in planning, monitoring and evaluation, evidence-based decision-making, risk management, and sustainability planning (Department of Education, 2024). Effective project implementation contributes to organizational efficiency and supports the successful realization of school improvement goals.

Competency Assessment as Basis for Capability-Building Programs

Competency assessment has been widely recognized as a critical foundation for professional development and leadership capacity-building. Contemporary leadership development literature suggests that professional learning initiatives are more effective when they are informed by actual competency needs rather than generic training agendas (Leithwood *et al.*, 2020). Competency assessments enable organizations to identify strengths, determine development needs, and design targeted interventions that address specific leadership gaps.

Within educational settings, evidence-based capability-building programs have been shown to strengthen leadership effectiveness by aligning professional learning opportunities with organizational priorities and leadership competency requirements (Montecinos *et al.*, 2022). Such programs support continuous professional growth, enhance leadership performance, and contribute to improved organizational outcomes. Therefore, assessing the competencies of emerging school leaders in financial management, strategic partnerships, and project implementation provides an important basis for developing context-responsive capability-building programs that address their unique developmental needs. Recent educational research further highlights the importance of using the results of empirical research as the foundation for creating responsive frameworks and intervention programs. Programs developed based on identified needs, challenges, and competency gaps are more likely to address real-world situations and produce meaningful outcomes. Using systematically collected evidence, educational organizations will be able to create professional development programs that will meet the requirements of their target audience (Fallaria, 2026).

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the emerging school leaders' levels of competence in financial management, strategic partnerships, and project implementation as basis for the development of a Capability Building Program.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of competence of emerging school

leaders in terms of

- 1.1 financial management;
- 1.2 strategic partnerships; and
- 1.3 project implementation?

2. What program can be developed in enhancing the competence of the emerging school leaders in terms of financial management, strategic partnerships, and project implementation?

3. How valid is the developed program?

4. How effective is the developed program based on the evaluation of the participants?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a descriptive research design integrated with the Research and Development (R&D) approach to determine the levels of competence of emerging school leaders in financial management, strategic partnerships, and project implementation and to develop a Capability-Building Program based on the identified competency needs. The descriptive component was utilized to assess the existing competence levels of emerging school leaders, while the R&D component guided the systematic development, validation, and evaluation of the proposed intervention program. The study was anchored on the principle that effective professional development initiatives should be informed by empirically identified competency gaps and organizational needs.

The study was conducted in a public schools division in Northern Luzon, Philippines. The division supervises public elementary, secondary, and integrated schools situated in both urban and rural communities. The locale was considered appropriate because it provides a diverse leadership environment where emerging school leaders are required to manage resources, establish partnerships, and implement school programs and projects within different organizational contexts.

The participants consisted of emerging school leaders, specifically Head Teachers and newly appointed School Heads or Principals with zero to three years of leadership experience serving in public schools within the division. A census sampling technique was employed during the needs-assessment phase to obtain data from all qualified emerging school leaders. This approach ensured that the identified competency needs accurately reflected the entire population of emerging leaders within the division. For the validation phase, purposive sampling was used to select a panel of expert validators composed of one NEAP-accredited learning facilitator and two distinguished school heads with extensive expertise in educational leadership and professional development. Volunteer school leaders participated in the pilot implementation and evaluation of the proposed Capability-Building Program.

The study was implemented in three major phases: planning, development, and validation and evaluation. During the planning phase, a comprehensive review of related literature and leadership standards was conducted,

and a competency needs assessment was administered to determine the levels of competence of emerging school leaders in financial management, strategic partnerships, and project implementation. The findings from this phase served as the empirical basis for identifying priority competency areas requiring intervention.

The development phase focused on the creation of the Capability-Building Program. The program was designed and organized according to the competency needs identified during the assessment phase and aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH). Learning objectives, session designs, training activities, instructional materials, and assessment procedures were developed to address the identified needs in the three competency domains.

The validation and evaluation phase served as the quality assurance component of the study. The developed Capability-Building Program was subjected to expert validation using established criteria for content and technical quality. Recommendations and comments from the validators were incorporated into the revision of the program. Subsequently, the validated program was pilot implemented among volunteer participants and evaluated based on their perceptions of its relevance, usefulness, and applicability.

Three instruments were utilized during the conduct of the study. The first instrument was the Competency Survey for Emerging School Leaders, which measured competency needs in financial management, strategic partnerships, and project implementation. The instrument consisted of demographic items and competency indicators aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads. Responses were rated using a four-point scale ranging from No Training Needed (1) to Extensive Training Needed (4).

The second instrument was the Content and Technical Validity Checklist, which was administered to expert validators. The instrument assessed needs alignment, PPSSH alignment, clarity of objectives, adequacy of content, appropriateness of methodologies, relevance of outputs, sequencing of activities, qualifications of resource persons, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Ratings were interpreted using a four-point validity scale ranging from Not Valid (1) to Very Highly Valid (4).

The third instrument was the Program Effectiveness Self-Rating Tool, which was administered after the pilot implementation of the Capability-Building Program. Anchored on Kirkpatrick's training evaluation framework, the instrument assessed participants' reactions, learning, behavioral application, and perceived results of the training. Responses were rated using a four-point scale ranging from Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (4). Open-ended questions were also included to gather qualitative insights and recommendations for program improvement. Data collection commenced after obtaining the necessary approvals from the concerned educational authorities. After securing informed consent, the Competency Survey

was administered to all qualified participants. The results of the needs assessment were consolidated and analyzed to determine competency priorities that informed the design of the Capability-Building Program. Following program development, expert validation was conducted, and revisions were made based on validator feedback. The finalized program was then pilot implemented, after which participating school leaders completed the evaluation instrument.

Frequency counts and percentages were used to describe the distribution of responses for each competency indicator. The mode was employed to determine the most frequently occurring training need category for each competency domain. The use of the mode was considered appropriate because the primary purpose of the competency assessment was needs identification rather than measuring the magnitude of competence. Specifically, the modal value enabled the researcher to identify the most commonly perceived training needs of emerging school leaders and served as a direct basis for prioritizing learning strands, training topics, and intervention strategies to be incorporated into the

Capability-Building Program. This statistical approach is consistent with the developmental nature of Research and Development (R&D) studies, where the identification of prevalent needs forms the foundation for program design and development. Frequency counts and modal values were likewise used in analyzing the results of the expert validation and program evaluation phases.

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the use of coded responses and secure storage of research data. All information gathered was utilized solely for research purposes, and findings were reported in aggregate form to protect the identities of the participants and their respective schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Training Needs of Emerging School Leaders

Table 1: Extent of training needs of emerging school leaders in terms of financial management, strategic partnerships, and project implementation (n=68).

Indicators		f	Mode	Descriptive Interpretation
A. Financial Management				
1	Prepares and implements the school's annual budget aligned with SIP and AIP	51	4	Extensive Training Needed
2	Ensures proper allocation, utilization, and monitoring of MOOE and other funds	43	4	Extensive Training Needed
3	Demonstrates knowledge of DepEd, DBM, and COA guidelines and reporting requirements	40	4	Extensive Training Needed
4	Applies transparency and accountability principles in handling public funds	39	3	Moderate Training Needed
5	Prepares accurate and timely financial reports and liquidations	45	3	Moderate Training Needed
6	Utilizes financial data to make informed decisions on resource allocation	43	3	Moderate Training Needed
7	Leads the School Finance Committee in financial planning and evaluation	38	4	Extensive Training Needed
8	Ensures compliance with procurement laws and procedures	47	3	Moderate Training Needed
9	Coordinates with stakeholders for learner-centered resource use	50	3	Moderate Training Needed
10	Demonstrates competence in financial recordkeeping and audit readiness	35	3	Moderate Training Needed
11	Conducts regular financial monitoring and evaluation	33	2	Minimal Training Needed
12	Promotes fiscal responsibility among personnel and stakeholders	31	2	Minimal Training Needed
	Overall Mode		3	Moderate Training Needed
B. Strategic Partnerships				
1	Establishes and maintains linkages with stakeholders to support school goals	45	4	Extensive Training Needed
2	Engages external partners in planning and implementation	55	4	Extensive Training Needed
3	Demonstrates effective communication and negotiation skills	29	3	Moderate Training Needed
4	Develops MOAs and partnership frameworks aligned with DepEd policies	33	4	Extensive Training Needed
5	Mobilizes community resources and stakeholder support	38	4	Extensive Training Needed
6	Monitors and evaluates partnership effectiveness	41	3	Moderate Training Needed
7	Recognizes and celebrates partner contributions	29	2	Minimal Training Needed
8	Builds collaboration with local government units	27	2	Minimal Training Needed
9	Engages alumni and civic organizations	31	3	Moderate Training Needed
10	Utilizes partnerships to enhance learning access	42	3	Moderate Training Needed

11	Promotes stakeholder participation in governance	46	4	Extensive Training Needed
12	Integrates partnerships into SIP and AIP	41	2	Minimal Training Needed
	Overall Mode		4	Extensive Training Needed
C. Project Implementation				
1	Formulates project proposals aligned with SIP and DepEd priorities	55	4	Extensive Training Needed
2	Defines clear objectives, indicators, and timelines for projects	35	4	Extensive Training Needed
3	Allocates and manages resources efficiently	41	4	Extensive Training Needed
4	Coordinates and leads teams in executing activities	47	4	Extensive Training Needed
5	Monitors and evaluates project progress using data	57	4	Extensive Training Needed
6	Prepares accurate and timely accomplishment and financial reports	42	4	Extensive Training Needed
7	Ensures compliance with DepEd guidelines and ethical standards	31	4	Extensive Training Needed
8	Uses M&E results to improve future projects	53	4	Extensive Training Needed
9	Demonstrates problem-solving and decision-making skills	32	3	Moderate Training Needed
10	Involves stakeholders in project planning and assessment	48	4	Extensive Training Needed
11	Applies risk management strategies	40	4	Extensive Training Needed
12	Sustains and institutionalizes successful projects	43	4	Extensive Training Needed
	Overall Mode		4	Extensive Training Needed

<i>Legend:</i>	<i>Scale</i>	<i>Descriptive Rating</i>
1	Extensive Training Needed (ETN)	
2	Moderate Training Needed (MTN)	
3	Minimal Training Needed (MinTN)	
4	No Training Needed (NTN)	

Financial Management

Table 1 shows that emerging school leaders reported an overall mode of 3 (Moderate Training Needed) in financial management. The highest training needs were observed in budget preparation and implementation aligned with the SIP and AIP ($f = 51$), management of MOOE and other funds ($f = 43$), knowledge of DepEd, DBM, and COA guidelines ($f = 40$), and leadership of the School Finance Committee ($f = 38$). Conversely, regular financial monitoring ($f = 33$) and promoting fiscal responsibility among stakeholders ($f = 31$) were identified as areas requiring only minimal training.

These findings suggest that emerging school leaders demonstrate greater confidence in monitoring financial processes than in performing technical tasks related to budgeting, compliance, and financial planning. The results support previous studies emphasizing that financial management remains a critical yet challenging component of school leadership, requiring competencies in resource allocation, accountability, transparency, and effective stewardship of public funds (Amos *et al.*, 2021; Gaspar *et al.*, 2022). Effective financial leadership has been associated with improved organizational efficiency and stronger school performance, underscoring the importance of providing targeted professional development in budgeting, procurement, and financial compliance (Department of Education, 2020).

Strategic Partnerships

Strategic partnerships recorded an overall mode of 4 (Extensive Training Needed), indicating substantial developmental needs among emerging school leaders.

The highest training needs were identified in engaging external partners in planning and implementation ($f = 55$), promoting stakeholder participation in governance ($f = 46$), establishing linkages ($f = 45$), mobilizing community resources ($f = 38$), and developing partnership frameworks and MOAs ($f = 33$).

The findings indicate that while emerging school leaders recognize the importance of stakeholder engagement, they may experience difficulties in building, formalizing, and sustaining collaborative partnerships. This result is consistent with studies emphasizing that stakeholder engagement plays a vital role in strengthening accountability, improving decision-making processes, and enhancing educational quality and organizational effectiveness (Peng *et al.*, 2024). Likewise, Leithwood *et al.* (2020) highlighted that productive school-community relationships contribute significantly to sustainable school improvement. Given the growing emphasis on shared governance and collaborative leadership, competencies in communication, networking, negotiation, and partnership management should be prioritized in leadership development programs.

Project Implementation

Project implementation recorded an overall mode of 4 (Extensive Training Needed), making it the domain with the greatest training need. Nearly all indicators, including proposal development ($f = 55$), project monitoring and evaluation ($f = 57$), stakeholder involvement ($f = 48$), resource management ($f = 41$), and project sustainability ($f = 43$), were rated as requiring extensive training. The results suggest that emerging school leaders

need stronger competencies in project planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. As schools increasingly rely on results-based management and evidence-informed decision-making, the ability to effectively manage programs and projects has become essential. Research has shown that successful school leadership requires the integration of strategic planning, organizational management, and continuous improvement processes to ensure the effective implementation of initiatives and reforms (Day & Sammons, 2016; Tan *et al.*, 2024). These findings therefore highlight the need for structured professional development focusing on project design, risk management, monitoring and evaluation, and sustainability planning to enhance implementation effectiveness and organizational outcomes (Department of Education, 2024).

Capability-Building Program Developed for Emerging School Leaders

Based on the identified competency gaps, a capability-building program entitled STEP UP! (Strengthening and Training Emerging Personnel for Upgraded Performance) was developed to enhance the competencies of emerging school leaders in financial management, strategic partnerships, and project implementation. The program was designed in response to the moderate training needs identified in financial management and the extensive training needs identified in strategic partnerships and project implementation.

The program is anchored on the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), particularly the domains on resource management, community partnerships, and strategic leadership (Department of Education, 2020). It consists of four learning modules: (1) Financial Planning and Resource Management, which addresses budgeting, fund utilization, procurement, and financial reporting; (2) Strategic Partnerships and Stakeholder Engagement, which focuses on partnership development, stakeholder mobilization, communication, and partnership frameworks; (3) Educational Innovation

and School Improvement, which promotes innovative and sustainable school initiatives; and (4) Project Implementation and Monitoring, which develops competencies in project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, risk management, and sustainability planning.

The design of the program is supported by studies emphasizing that leadership development initiatives are most effective when they are aligned with identified competency needs and organizational priorities (Leithwood *et al.*, 2020; Montecinos *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, Hallinger (2020) stressed that contemporary school leaders require a combination of managerial, strategic, and relational competencies to respond effectively to increasingly complex educational environments. Moreover, the development of professional development interventions based on empirically identified needs, challenges, and contextual realities enhances the relevance and effectiveness of educational programs. Evidence suggests that needs-based frameworks and improvement initiatives are more responsive to the actual development requirements of participants and contribute to more sustainable educational outcomes (Fallaria, 2026). By directly targeting the competency gaps revealed by the needs assessment, the program provides a structured and context-responsive intervention aimed at strengthening the leadership capacity of emerging school leaders.

The proposed capability-building program served as an evidence-based professional development intervention that may assist emerging school leaders in improving their competence in financial management, strategic partnerships, and project implementation, thereby enhancing school governance, stakeholder engagement, and the successful delivery of school programs and projects.

Validity of the Capability Building Program

Table 2 presents the results of the expert validation of the proposed STEP UP! Capability-Building Program. The program obtained an overall mode of 4 (Very

Table 2: Results of the validation of the capability building program.

Criteria	Mode	Descriptive Interpretation
The proposed PD program is based on the results of competency-based professional development needs assessments	4	Very Highly Valid
The proposed PD program's content and methodologies are justified and supported by research literature or theories and/or legal bases if any.	4	Very Highly Valid
The proposed PD program responds to at least one PPSSH domain, strand, and indicator, and/or other emerging needs of the Department.	4	Very Highly Valid
The target PPSSH domain, strand, and indicator in each session is indicated.	4	Very Highly Valid
The proposed PD program identifies the career stage/s and profile (teacher/school head/supervisor, position, subject, and/or grade/year level taught) of the target participants.	4	Very Highly Valid
The target number of participants is specified.	4	Very Highly Valid
The proposed PD program's objectives are articulated according to the SMART principles.	3	Highly Valid

Contents are appropriate and adequate to support the attainment of the learning objectives and expected outputs.	3	Highly Valid
Contents are accurate and based on credible sources of information.	4	Very Highly Valid
Contents are organized according to the most appropriate sequence and structure.	3	Highly Valid
The methodologies (e.g. active learning, experiential learning or collaborative learning, etc.) employ adult learning principles with opportunities to be active, experiential, social, self-directed and goal oriented.	4	Very Highly Valid
The methodologies describe in detail or step-by-step process how the assigned resource speaker will deliver content and engage participants.	3	Highly Valid
The methodologies indicate the relevant learning resources that the resource speaker and participants will use to support the attainment of the session objectives.	3	Highly Valid
The methodologies use recognized best learning practices such as motivational/mood-setting activities, modeling, etc.	4	Very Highly Valid
The session outputs are concrete, e.g., reflection journal, TA Plan, lesson exemplar, rubrics, worksheets.	4	Very Highly Valid
The session outputs are relevant to the session objectives and can be realistically produced by participants within set time.	3	Highly Valid
Sessions are appropriately sequenced and adequately timed.	4	Very Highly Valid
The Resource Speakers/Subject-Matter Experts' CVs reflect expertise relevant to the PPST/PPSSH/PPSS domain/s, strand/s and indicator/s covered in the Speaker's/Subject-Matter Expert's session/s.	4	Very Highly Valid
The proposed PD Program M&E plan reflects the four levels of evaluation according to Kirkpatrick's Model (Level 1: Reaction; Level 2: Learning; Level 3: Behavior; and Level 4: Result).	4	Very Highly Valid
The attached itemized expenditure reflects the cost of the proposed PD program vis-à-vis the allowable expenses.	4	Very Highly Valid
Overall Mode	4	Very Highly Valid

Legend: Scale	Descriptive Rating
1	Very Highly Valid (VHV)
2	Highly Valid (HV)
3	Moderately Valid (MV)
4	Not Valid (NV)

Highly Valid), indicating that it is highly acceptable in terms of content, design, relevance, and implementation mechanisms.

Most validation criteria were rated Very Highly Valid, particularly those related to alignment with competency-based needs assessment, responsiveness to the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), use of research-based content, application of adult learning principles, and inclusion of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation plan. These findings suggest that the program was systematically developed to address the identified competency needs of emerging school leaders in financial management, strategic partnerships, and project implementation.

A few indicators, including the articulation of SMART objectives, content sequencing, methodology detailing, and session outputs, were rated Highly Valid, indicating opportunities for minor enhancement. Nevertheless, the ratings affirm that the program possesses adequate rigor, coherence, and relevance to support the intended learning outcomes.

The very high validation ratings demonstrate that the

proposed capability-building program is both technically sound and context-responsive. Consistent with previous studies, professional development initiatives are more likely to be effective when they are grounded in identified competency needs and aligned with professional standards (Hallinger, 2020; Leithwood *et al.*, 2020). Thus, the findings establish that the STEP UP! Capability-Building Program is a valid intervention for strengthening the leadership competencies of emerging school leaders.

Effectiveness of the capability building program

Table 3 presents the effectiveness of the STEP UP! Capability-Building Program based on Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Evaluation Model. The findings indicate that the program was highly effective, as evidenced by the overall modal ratings of Strongly Agree across the dimensions of Reaction, Behavior, and Results, while the Learning dimension obtained modal ratings ranging from Agree to Strongly Agree. These results suggest that the program was well-received by participants, enhanced their knowledge and skills, facilitated the application of learning in their respective schools, and contributed

Table 3: Results of the effectiveness of the capability building program based on Kirkpatrick's Evaluation Model (n=25).

s		F	Mode	Descriptive Interpretation
Level 1: Reaction (Satisfaction, relevance, perceived usefulness)				
1	The PD objectives were clear and relevant to my role as a school leader.	15	4	Strongly Agree
2	The topics covered were aligned with my actual work needs.	12	4	Strongly Agree
3	The sessions were engaging and well-facilitated.	16	4	Strongly Agree
4	The overall PD experience was worthwhile.	16	3	Agree
	Overall Mode		4	Strongly Agree
Level 2: Learning (Knowledge and skill acquisition)				
1	I gained new knowledge and skills in Work and Financial Planning.	14	4	Strongly Agree
2	I gained new knowledge and skills in Strengthening Strategic Partnerships.	14	4	Strongly Agree
3	I learned new strategies for Innovation and Creative Leadership.	12	3	Agree
4	I gained practical tools for Project Implementation and Monitoring.	16	3	Agree
	Overall Mode		3	Agree
			4	Strongly Agree
Level 3: Behavior (On-the-job application/transfer of learning)				
1	I applied improved methods in Work and Financial Planning in my school.	13	4	Strongly Agree
2	I initiated or strengthened at least one strategic partnership after the training.	17	4	Strongly Agree
3	I implemented at least one school innovation or creative initiative learned from the training.	12	4	Strongly Agree
4	I used tools/techniques in Project Implementation and Monitoring (e.g., dashboards, trackers).	15	3	Agree
5	I have consistently integrated the learned strategies into my leadership practices.	12	3	Agree
6	My immediate supervisor encourages and supports my application of the PD learning.	12	3	Agree
7	I have sufficient opportunities in my role to apply the new practices.	16	4	Strongly Agree
	Overall Mode		4	Strongly Agree
Level 4: Results (Perceived outcomes/impact in school processes and performance)				
1	School financial planning and resource use improved as a result of the training.	16	4	Strongly Agree
2	Partnerships contributed to resources, services, or school improvements.	14	4	Strongly Agree
3	The innovations applied produced noticeable improvements in school processes or outputs.	11	3	Agree
4	School projects became more timely, organized, or better monitored after applying the training.	13	3	Agree
5	Overall, the program led to improvements in my leadership performance.	14	4	Strongly Agree
6	Overall, the program contributed positively to my school's operations or outcomes.	16	4	Strongly Agree
	Overall Mode		4	Strongly Agree

Legend: Scale Descriptive Rating

1 Strongly Agree (SA)

2 Agree (A)

3 Slightly Agree (SLA)

4 Disagree (D)

to improvements in leadership practice and school operations.

The positive ratings in the Reaction and Learning levels indicate that the program successfully addressed the professional development needs of emerging school leaders. Participants perceived the training sessions as relevant, engaging, and aligned with their leadership responsibilities, while also reporting gains in financial management, strategic partnerships, innovation, and project implementation. These findings support the view that professional development initiatives are more effective when they are grounded in identified competency needs and provide opportunities for contextualized and experiential learning (Hallinger, 2020; Leithwood *et al.*, 2020).

Similarly, the strong ratings in the Behavior and Results levels demonstrate that participants were able to transfer the acquired competencies into practice and observed positive outcomes in their schools. Improvements were particularly evident in financial planning, stakeholder engagement, leadership performance, and school operations. Consistent with Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2016), effective professional development extends beyond knowledge acquisition and is reflected in behavioral change and organizational improvement. The findings therefore suggest that the STEP UP! Capability-Building Program has the potential to serve as an effective intervention for strengthening the competencies of emerging school leaders and supporting improved school governance and management.

CONCLUSION

The study found that emerging school leaders require varying levels of professional development in financial management, strategic partnerships, and project implementation. While financial management was identified as a moderate training need, strategic partnerships and project implementation emerged as areas requiring extensive training. These findings indicate the need to strengthen the managerial, collaborative, and project leadership competencies of emerging school leaders to effectively address the demands of contemporary school governance.

Based on the identified competency gaps, the STEP UP! Capability-Building Program was developed and was subsequently rated as Very Highly Valid by expert validators. The pilot implementation further demonstrated its effectiveness in enhancing participants' knowledge, skills, workplace practices, and perceived leadership performance. These findings suggest that a needs-based and standards-aligned professional development program can effectively strengthen the competencies of emerging school leaders and supporting improved school governance, stakeholder engagement, and project implementation.

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