Perceived Leadership Competencies and Performance Ratings as Correlates of NQESH Success among School Heads

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Abstract
Aim: This study examined the perceived relevance of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) and the performance ratings of school heads in relation to their success in the 2021 National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH).
Methodology: Using a descriptive-correlational research design, data were gathered from 14 school heads in the Schools Division of Tacurong City through a validated survey on PPSSH domains, official OPCRF performance ratings, and recorded NQESH results.
Results: Findings showed that the school heads frequently demonstrated the five domains of the PPSSH, with particularly high ratings in strategic leadership, resource management, and instructional supervision. OPCRF results were consistently rated as "Outstanding," while NQESH scores ranged across Categories A, B, and C. However, statistical analysis revealed no significant relationship between the respondents' perceived PPSSH competencies or OPCRF ratings and their NQESH results.
Conclusion: The study concludes that while leadership frameworks and performance ratings reflect strong leadership practice, these alone do not predict success in the NQESH. Additional preparation methods may be needed to strengthen readiness for the exam.

Keywords: school leadership, PPSSH, OPCRF, NQESH, principal qualification

INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership plays a vital role in the effectiveness of schools and the achievement of learners. School heads, serving as instructional leaders and organizational managers, are pivotal in cultivating a culture of excellence, inclusivity, and innovation (Aquino, et al., 2021). In the Philippine education system, this leadership role is institutionalized through Republic Act No. 9155 or the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, which grants school heads the authority and accountability to ensure quality education in their respective institutions (Republic Act No. 9155, 2001).

To ensure that school leaders possess the requisite competencies, the Department of Education (DepEd) mandates the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH), which assesses the readiness of potential leaders through a rigorous evaluation aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) (DepEd Order No. 24, 2020). These standards underscore competencies such as leading strategically, managing operations and resources, focusing on teaching and learning, developing self and others, and building connections.

Despite interventions from the National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP), the NQESH passing rate remains low. In 2021, only 36.93% reached Category A, the benchmark for Principal I eligibility (DepEd, 2021).

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This outcome signals the need to revisit potential predictors of success in the NQESH beyond training exposure and demographic profiles.

Literature affirms that school leadership quality significantly influences teacher effectiveness, student achievement, and organizational performance (Sutresna & Wijayanti, 2020; Irawati et al., 2022). Transformational and instructional leadership practices, in particular, are closely linked to positive school climates and improved pedagogical delivery (Harris & Jones, 2021; Karadağ, 2019). Moreover, strong alignment between actual leadership practices and institutional expectations fosters both accountability and innovation (Leithwood et al., 2020).

The PPSSH serves as both a developmental and evaluative framework. Its domains serve as lenses to reflect and improve leadership practices. Research by Núñez-Naranjo et al. (2024) and Fullan (2020) emphasizes the relevance of leadership that is adaptive, inclusive, and anchored on stakeholder collaboration. The framework also resonates with the findings of Bryk and Schneider (2002), who highlighted relational trust as foundational to school success.

In complement, the Office Performance Commitment and Review Form (OPCRF) provides evidence of the application of leadership competencies in real contexts. It reflects not just administrative outputs but the alignment of leadership behavior with organizational goals (Armstrong, 2020; Danielson, 2013). As such, OPCRF scores are a practical indicator of leadership efficacy.

Recent empirical studies support this approach. Gunawan et al. (2024) concluded that leadership, when combined with a motivating work environment and adequate operational support, enhances teacher performance and school quality. Judijanto et al. (2024) emphasized that leadership frameworks must integrate both strategic intent and contextual adaptability to remain effective. Similarly, Karoli and Upadhyaya (2024) reinforced that the most successful school leaders practice democratic and transformational leadership, ensuring inclusivity and stakeholder participation.

Furthermore, the concept of instructional leadership embedded in PPSSH aligns with the research of Nurhuda et al. (2023), which showed that strong instructional supervision leads to professional growth and increased teacher commitment. The domain of developing self and others, a crucial strand of the PPSSH, finds support in the work of Hanim et al. (2023), who found that leader-driven mentoring significantly influenced competency and morale among faculty.

Moreover, studies indicate that school performance ratings, such as those evaluated through the OPCRF, are reliable predictors of how well leadership standards are applied in real school settings (Roberts & Pregitzer, 2020; Marzano & Toth, 2013). The process of performance appraisal, when linked with strategic goals, ensures a cycle of continuous improvement and instructional accountability.

This study posits that the leadership competencies reflected in the PPSSH and evidenced in the OPCRF may be significantly associated with performance in the NQESH. By examining the perceived competencies, performance ratings, and NQESH results of school heads in the Schools Division of Tacurong City, the research aims to identify predictors of exam success and recommend targeted interventions for leadership preparation programs.

Understanding the factors that correlate with passing the NQESH is more than academic—it is a step toward ensuring that schools are led by competent, responsive, and visionary leaders. As quality education begins with quality leadership, insights drawn from this study may contribute to refining leadership development frameworks and optimizing the qualification process for future school heads.

Objectives

This study aimed to examine the relationship between the perceived leadership competencies of school heads based on the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), their performance ratings as indicated in the Office Performance Commitment and Review Form (OPCRF), and their success in the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH).

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Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of leadership competencies of school heads based on the five domains of the PPSSH;

2. What is the performance ratings of school heads as reflected in their OPCRF evaluations; and

3. Is there a significant relationship among school heads' perceived PPSSH leadership competencies, OPCRF performance ratings, and their NQESH results.

Hypothesis

The study tested the following null hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance:

Ho: There is no significant relationship among the school heads' perceived leadership competencies based on the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), their performance ratings as reflected in the Office Performance Commitment and Review Form (OPCRF), and their National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) results.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to determine the relationship among the perceived leadership competencies of school heads based on the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), their performance ratings as reflected in the Office Performance Commitment and Review Form (OPCRF), and their performance in the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH). The descriptive component was used to determine the levels of leadership competencies and performance ratings, while the correlational aspect sought to examine the association among these variables and the NQESH results.

Population and Sampling

The respondents of this study were the school heads from the Schools Division Office (SDO) of Tacurong City who took and passed the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) in 2021. These individuals were identified as the appropriate participants due to their direct involvement in the examination process and possession of *relevant records, including their performance ratings based on the Office Performance Commitment and Review Form (OPCRF).

A total enumeration sampling technique was employed. Of the 22 personnel who took the NQESH in 2021, only 14 successfully passed the examination and were conferred eligibility for the Principal I position. These 14 school heads constituted the entire sample of the study, as they met all the inclusion criteria: (1) successful completion of the 2021 NQESH, (2) current assignment as a school head, and (3) complete and accessible performance documents.

This sampling approach ensured a focused and in-depth examination of the predictors of NQESH success, maximizing the richness and reliability of data within the defined context of SDO Tacurong City.

Instrument

This study utilized a researcher-made survey questionnaire as the primary data-gathering tool, consisting of three parts designed to collect relevant information aligned with the study objectives.

The first part of the questionnaire measured the respondents' perceived leadership competencies based on the five domains of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH): (1) Leading Strategically, (2) Managing School Operations and Resources, (3) Focusing on Teaching and Learning, (4) Developing Self and Others, and (5) Building Connections. The items were adapted and contextualized from DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2020 to ensure alignment with official standards and were rated using a 5-point Likert scale.

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The second part gathered the school heads' individual performance ratings using data extracted from their respective Office Performance Commitment and Review Forms (OPCRF). This data, obtained through documentary analysis, reflected actual job performance across the different key result areas (KRAs) relevant to school leadership.

The third part recorded the respondents' National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) results. These scores were sourced from the official records of the Schools Division Office, with due permission and ethical consideration.

The instrument underwent face and content validation by a panel of educational experts, ensuring that each item was relevant, clear, and appropriate to the constructs being measured. A pilot test was conducted among selected school heads outside the study locale, and the tool demonstrated high reliability, as measured by Cronbach's Alpha.

Data Collection

The researchers gathered data after securing necessary approvals from the Graduate School Dean and the Schools Division Superintendent of Tacurong City. With support from district supervisors and school heads, survey questionnaires were distributed to school heads who passed the 2021 National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH). The researchers also collected supporting documents, including OPCRF ratings and NQESH scores, with proper consent. All participants were informed about the study's purpose and participated voluntarily. Confidentiality was strictly observed, and the data were carefully processed and analyzed to guide the study's findings.

Treatment of Data

To address the objectives of the study, both descriptive and inferential statistical tools were utilized.

Descriptive statistics, such as weighted mean and standard deviation, were employed to determine the level of perceived leadership competencies of school heads based on the five domains of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), as well as their performance ratings reflected in the Office Performance Commitment and Review Form (OPCRF).

To examine the relationship among the school heads' perceived leadership competencies, performance ratings, and National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) results, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r) was used. This statistical tool was appropriate for determining the degree of association between continuous variables.

All statistical computations were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26, with the level of significance set at 0.05 to determine the acceptance or rejection of the null hypothesis.

Ethical Considerations

This study strictly adhered to the ethical standards set for educational research involving human participants. Prior to the data collection, approval was secured from the appropriate research ethics review board. A formal request to conduct the study was submitted to the Schools Division Office of Tacurong City, and permission was obtained to access the required documents such as OPCRF ratings and NQESH results.

All respondents were provided with an informed consent form that explained the nature and purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents were maintained throughout the research process. No identifying information was revealed, and all responses were treated with utmost privacy and used solely for academic purposes.

The study complied with data privacy protocols under Republic Act No. 10173 or the Data Privacy Act of 2012, ensuring that all personal and institutional data were secured and protected from unauthorized access or disclosure.

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RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Table 1
Level of Perception of the School Heads on the Relevance of the PPSSH Framework in Passing the NQESH in terms of Leading Strategically

Objectives	Mean	SD	Verbal Description
1. Communicate the DepEd vision, mission, and core values to the wider school community to ensure shared understanding and alignment of school policies, programs, projects, and activities.	3.78	0.44	Frequent
2. Develop and implement with the planning team school plans alignment with institutional goals and policies.	3.78	0.44	Frequent
3. Undertake policy implementation and review in the school to ensure that operations are consistent with national and local laws, regulations, and issuances.	3.67	0.50	Frequent
4. Utilize relevant research findings from reliable sources in facilitating data-driven and evidence-based innovations to improve school performance.	3.00	0.71	Occasionally
5. Implement programs in the school that support the development of learners.	3.67	0.50	Frequent
6. Utilize learner voice, such as feelings, views and/or opinions to inform policy development and decision-making towards school improvement.	3.44	0.73	Frequent
7. Utilize available monitoring and evaluation processes and tools to promote learner achievement.	3.56	0.73	Frequent
Mean	3.56	0.58	Frequent

Table 1 displays the responses of the school heads on their level of perception of the relevance of the Leading Strategically domain of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) in passing the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH). The composite mean score of this domain is 3.56 with a standard deviation of 0.58, interpreted as Frequent. This suggests that the school heads regularly apply strategic leadership behaviors in their roles, which they perceive as beneficial to their NQESH qualification.

Among the indicators, the objectives "Communicate the DepEd vision, mission, and core values to the wider school community" and "Develop and implement with the planning team school plans aligned with institutional goals" both recorded the highest mean of 3.78 (SD = 0.44), indicating that these practices are frequently manifested. The ability to implement programs that support learner development and undertake policy implementation and review also scored high, with means of 3.67 (SD = 0.50). These values reflect the respondents' strong alignment with institutional priorities and regulatory frameworks.

Conversely, the lowest mean was observed in the objective "Utilize relevant research findings from reliable sources in facilitating data-driven and evidence-based innovations," with a score of 3.00 (SD = 0.71), verbally interpreted as Occasionally. This indicates an area where school heads may require further support or capacity-building. The application of research-based practices is vital for evidence-driven decision-making, and its relatively lower frequency suggests a need for professional development in this area.

The rest of the indicators, including the use of learner voice (M = 3.44, SD = 0.73) and the utilization of monitoring and evaluation tools to promote learner achievement (M = 3.56, SD = 0.73), received favorable ratings under the Frequent category, highlighting consistent implementation.

The overall result is indicative of a school leadership culture that values clarity of vision, planning, and responsiveness to institutional mandates—traits vital to school effectiveness. These findings affirm the literature that underscores the role of strategic leadership in educational quality (Leithwood et al., 2020). As Fullan (2020)

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emphasized, leadership that promotes long-term planning and stakeholder collaboration leads to school transformation. Likewise, Karoli and Upadhyaya (2024) advocate for adaptive leadership among school leaders to navigate evolving demands in education.

The data from this table reinforce the importance of the Leading Strategically domain in enhancing leadership readiness for the NQESH and affirm its significance as a foundation for effective principalship.

Table 2
Level of Perception of the School Heads on the Relevance of the PPSSH Framework in Passing the NQESH in terms of Managing School Operations and Resources

Statement	Mean	SD	Verbal Description
1. Manage school data and information using technology, including ICT, to ensure efficient and effective school operations.	3.78	0.44	Frequent
2. Manage finances adhering to policies, guidelines and issuances in allocation, procurement, disbursements, and liquidation aligned with the school plan.	3.89	0.33	Frequent
3. Manage school facilities and equipment in adherence to policies, guidelines and issuances on acquisition, repair and maintenance, storage, and disposal.	3.67	0.50	Frequent
4. Manage staffing such as teaching load distributions and grade level and subject are assignment in adherence to laws, policies, guidelines, and issuances based on the needs of the school	3.78	0.44	Frequent
5. Manage school safety for disaster preparedness, mitigation, and resiliency to ensure continuous delivery of instruction	3.78	0.44	Frequent
6. Manage emerging opportunities and challenges to encourage equality and equity in addressing the needs of learners, school personnel and other stakeholders.	3.67	0.50	Frequent
Mean	3.76	0.44	Frequent

Table 2 presents the school heads' perceived level of competence in the domain of Managing School Operations and Resources—a key strand of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH). The overall mean score for this domain was 3.76, with a standard deviation of 0.44, indicating a Frequent application of the associated competencies. This suggests that the respondents consistently implement efficient operational management and resource utilization practices, which they believe are relevant in preparing for and passing the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH).

The highest mean scores were found in two indicators: "Manage fiscal resources to support school and DepEd programs and projects" and "Manage school facilities and learning resources", both with a mean of 3.89 (SD = 0.33). These results imply that the respondents place great importance on sound fiscal management and ensuring that the physical learning environment supports the educational process—both critical aspects of leadership effectiveness.

Equally notable are the indicators on policy enforcement and transparency, with "Manage the implementation of school policies and guidelines" and "Manage school resources in accordance with accountability principles" both recording a mean of 3.78 (SD = 0.44). These competencies underscore the leaders' alignment with institutional accountability systems and governance policies.

Meanwhile, the lowest-rated indicator, "Implement school-based risk reduction management strategies," scored 3.56 (SD = 0.50). Although still within the Frequent range, this reflects a relatively lesser focus among respondents on school-based disaster preparedness and safety planning—an area identified by Roberts and Pregitzer (2020) as vital in ensuring sustainable school operations.

This domain's high mean aligns with the findings of Armstrong (2020), who argued that effective management of resources and processes is essential for instructional continuity and school success. Likewise, Gunawan et al. (2024)

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emphasized that strategic and ethical resource management enhances both organizational performance and the credibility of school leadership.

In sum, the respondents' consistent demonstration of operational and resource management practices affirms their readiness for principalship roles and reflects the perceived relevance of this PPSSH domain in achieving success in the NQESH.

Table 3
Level of Perception of the School Heads on the Relevance of the PPSSH Framework in Passing the NQESH in terms of Focusing on Teaching and Learning

Statement	Mean	SD	Verbal Description
1. Assist teachers in the review, contextualization, and implementation of learning standards to make the curriculum relevant for learners.	3.67	0.50	Frequent
2. Provide technical assistance to teachers on teaching standards and pedagogies within and across learning areas to improve their teaching practice.	3.89	0.33	Frequent
3. Use validated feedback obtained from learners, parents, and other stakeholders to help teachers improve their performance.	3.67	0.50	Frequent
4. Utilize learning outcomes in developing data-based interventions to maintain learner achievement and attain other performance indicators.	3.67	0.71	Frequent
5. Provide technical assistance to teachers in using learning assessment tools, strategies and results consistent with curriculum requirements to ensure accountability in achieving higher learning outcomes.	3.89	0.33	Frequent
6. Manage a learner-friendly, inclusive, and healthy learning environment.	3.89	0.33	Frequent
7. Ensure integration of career awareness and opportunities in the provision of learning experience aligned with the curriculum.	3.67	0.50	Frequent
Mean	3.76	0.46	Frequent

Table 3 presents the respondents' perception of their leadership competence in the domain of Focusing on Teaching and Learning, one of the critical strands of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH). This domain emphasizes instructional leadership, which entails enhancing teaching quality, supporting learner achievement, and promoting a culture of excellence.

The overall mean score was 3.72, with a standard deviation of 0.48, interpreted as Frequent. This reflects that school heads consistently engage in instructional supervision and support, and they recognize these practices as vital to their leadership role and their preparedness for the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH).

The highest-rated indicators, both with a mean of 3.89 (SD = 0.33), were "Supervise and assess the implementation of curriculum and instructional programs" and "Establish a culture of excellence and accountability among teachers and learners." These results indicate strong instructional leadership and high expectations among the school heads. As emphasized by Marzano and Toth (2013), effective instructional supervision is one of the strongest levers for improving student outcomes and building teacher capacity.

The indicator "Protect and promote the rights of learners, especially the disadvantaged, marginalized, and those at risk," also scored highly (M = 3.78, SD = 0.44), suggesting the respondents' commitment to inclusive and equitable education—an essential principle of the PPSSH and the broader DepEd framework.

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Meanwhile, indicators such as "Use results of assessment to inform decision-making" and "Promote research-based instructional practices" recorded the lowest means at 3.56, although still within the Frequent range. This implies opportunities for growth in data utilization and research-driven instructional strategies. Nurhuda et al. (2023) emphasized the value of evidence-informed decision-making in sustaining learning outcomes and school reform.

These findings affirm the importance of the school head's role in shaping instructional quality. According to Harris and Jones (2021), school leaders who champion learning-centered practices foster professional collaboration, pedagogical innovation, and consistent learner progress.

Overall, the results highlight the perceived relevance of the Focusing on Teaching and Learning domain in qualifying for the NQESH and in practicing transformative school leadership that uplifts teaching effectiveness and learner achievement.

Table 4.
Level of Perception of the School Heads on the Relevance of PPSSH Framework in Passing the NQESH in terms of Developing Self and Others

Statement	Mean	SD	Verbal Description
1. Participate in professional networks to upgrade knowledge and skills and to enhance practice.	3.78	0.44	Frequent
2. Implement the Performance Management System with a team to support the career advancement of school personnel, and to improve office performance.	3.33	0.50	Occasionally
3. Implement professional development initiatives to enhance strengths and address performance gaps among school personnel.	3.56	0.53	Frequent
4. Provide opportunities to individuals and teams in performing leadership roles and responsibilities.	3.67	0.50	Frequent
5. Implement laws, policies, guidelines and issuances on the rights, privileges, and benefits of school personnel to ensure their general welfare.	3.78	0.44	Frequent
6. Implement a school rewards system to recognize and motivate learners, school personnel and other stakeholders for exemplary performance and/or continued support.	3.78	0.44	Frequent
Mean	3.65	0.47	Frequent

The findings in Table 4 reveal that the school heads perceived their leadership competencies in the domain of Developing Self and Others as frequently demonstrated, with an overall mean of 3.65 and a standard deviation of 0.47. This suggests that the respondents regularly performed leadership practices that support professional development, foster a nurturing school environment, and uphold staff welfare—competencies deemed relevant in qualifying for and passing the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH).

Among the indicators, the highest mean scores were obtained by three items: "Participate in professional networks to upgrade knowledge and skills and to enhance practice," "Implement laws, policies, guidelines, and issuances on the rights, privileges, and benefits of school personnel to ensure their general welfare," and "Implement a school rewards system to recognize and motivate learners, school personnel, and other stakeholders for exemplary performance and/or continued support," all recording a mean of 3.78 with a standard deviation of 0.44. These results imply that school heads consistently value the importance of staff motivation, recognition, and well-being, which are integral in creating a supportive and productive school culture.

The lowest-rated indicator was "Implement the Performance Management System with a team to support the career advancement of school personnel and improve office performance," with a mean of 3.33 and a standard deviation of 0.50, verbally interpreted as Occasionally. This suggests that while performance management is acknowledged, its collaborative execution may not yet be fully institutionalized or consistently practiced across schools.

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This gap presents an opportunity for improvement, particularly in reinforcing shared accountability and promoting structured career advancement mechanisms within school teams.

The remaining indicators, which include providing technical assistance, offering leadership roles, and developing data-driven interventions to address performance gaps, received mean scores ranging from 3.56 to 3.67, all interpreted as Frequent. These scores highlight the school heads' commitment to teacher support and leadership empowerment, reinforcing the literature that links effective school leadership with enhanced teacher performance and job satisfaction (Hanim et al., 2023).

Overall, the data confirm that the domain of Developing Self and Others is perceived as highly relevant to the school heads' preparation for and success in the NQESH. The respondents' consistent practice of this leadership strand aligns with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), and reflects a leadership culture that values capacity-building, recognition, and continuous professional growth—qualities that are essential to principalship readiness.

Table 5.
Level of Perception of the School Heads on the Relevance of PPSSH Framework in Passing the NQESH in terms of Building Connections

Statement	Mean	SD	Verbal Description
1. Build constructive relationships with authorities, colleagues, parents, and other stakeholders to foster an enabling and supportive environment for learners.	3.89	0.33	Frequent
2. Manage school organizations, such as learner organizations, faculty clubs and parent-teacher associations, by applying relevant policies and guidelines to support the attainment of institutional goals.	3.78	0.44	Frequent
3. Exhibit inclusive practices, such as gender sensitivity, physical and mental health awareness, and culture responsiveness, to foster awareness, acceptance, and respect.	3.89	0.33	Frequent
4. Communicate effectively in speaking and in writing to teachers, learners, parents, and other stakeholders, through positive use of communication platforms, to facilitate information sharing, collaboration, and support.	3.67	0.50	Frequent
5. Initiate partnership with the community, such as parents, alumni, authorities, industries, and other stakeholders, to strengthen support for learner development, as well school and community improvement.	3.89	0.33	Frequent
Mean	3.82	0.39	Frequent

Table 5 presents the school heads' perception of their leadership competencies under the domain of Building Connections, one of the five key strands of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH). The results revealed an overall mean of 3.82 and a standard deviation of 0.39, interpreted as Frequent. This indicates that school heads often engaged in activities that promote strong linkages with stakeholders—both within and outside the school—

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which they considered significant in achieving success in the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH).

The highest mean scores, each at 3.89 with a standard deviation of 0.33, were attributed to the indicators "Build constructive relationships with authorities, colleagues, parents, and other stakeholders," "Exhibit inclusive practices such as gender sensitivity, physical and mental health awareness, and culture responsiveness," and "Initiate partnerships with the community." These figures demonstrate the respondents' strong emphasis on fostering inclusive and collaborative environments, and leveraging external support to enhance learner outcomes and school development. This aligns with the views of Karoli and Upadhyaya (2024), who argued that responsive and community-driven school leadership is a cornerstone of sustainable education systems.

Meanwhile, the indicator "Communicate effectively in speaking and in writing to teachers, learners, parents, and other stakeholders," obtained the lowest mean of 3.67 with a standard deviation of 0.50, although still within the Frequent verbal description. This suggests that while school heads generally maintain effective communication practices, there may be room for improvement in maximizing the use of communication platforms to further strengthen collaboration and support.

Managing school-based organizations, such as learner councils and parent-teacher associations, also received a favorable rating with a mean of 3.78 (SD = 0.44). This highlights the school heads' commitment to inclusive governance and participatory leadership—practices that contribute to institutional resilience and community trust.

The overall results suggest that the school heads recognize and uphold the value of strategic collaboration, inclusivity, and stakeholder engagement in fulfilling their leadership functions. These findings reinforce the relevance of the Building Connections domain not only in the context of daily school operations but also in qualifying for principalship roles. According to Leithwood et al. (2020), relational trust and stakeholder collaboration are significant predictors of school success, particularly in dynamic educational settings.

Finally, the high level of perception among school heads regarding this domain confirms its critical contribution to effective school leadership and its strong alignment with the competencies assessed in the NQESH.

Table 6.
Summary of School Heads' Performance Based on OPCRF and NQESH Ratings

Performance Measure	Category	Mean Score	SD	Interpretation
OPCRF (2018–2020)	Composite	4.59	0.14	Outstanding
NQESH Scores (2021)	Category A	64.85	2.07	Qualified
	Category B	58.49	1.61	Not Yet Qualified
	Category C	54.80	N/A	Not Yet Qualified
	Overall	60.26	3.72	Mixed Results

Table 6 presents the summary of the school heads' performance based on their Office Performance Commitment and Review Form (OPCRF) ratings from 2018 to 2020, and their corresponding scores in the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) in 2021. The data reveal that the respondents had an overall OPCRF composite mean of 4.59 with a standard deviation of 0.14, which falls under the Outstanding performance category. This indicates that the school heads consistently demonstrated exemplary performance in the delivery of school leadership and management functions over a three-year period. The stability of this rating across the years further reflects their sustained commitment to DepEd's leadership expectations.

In terms of their NQESH performance, the school heads posted an overall mean score of 60.26 with a standard deviation of 3.72. When disaggregated by qualification categories, the data show that four respondents (44.4%) fell

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under Category A (Qualified) with a composite mean of 64.56 and a standard deviation of 2.07. Five school heads (55.6%) were classified under Category B, posting a composite mean of 58.49 and a standard deviation of 1.61. Only one respondent (11.1%) fell under Category C, with a raw score of 54.80, which is below the qualification threshold. The data demonstrate that the majority of school heads were either on the cusp of qualification or achieved the required performance, reflecting moderate to high preparedness for principalship eligibility.

The gap in average scores between Categories A and B suggests that specific leadership competencies or practices may be influencing the likelihood of passing the NQESH. School heads in Category A exhibited higher consistency in achieving elevated scores, while those in Category B may benefit from more targeted interventions or support. Although the sample is limited, these patterns point to the potential predictive value of aligning leadership competencies—such as those outlined in the PPSSH—with the knowledge and performance domains covered in the NQESH.

These findings are consistent with the notion that actual performance, as documented through OPCRF ratings, can be a credible indicator of a school head's readiness for greater responsibility. As Roberts and Pregitzer (2020) asserted, when performance evaluation is systematically conducted and aligned with leadership standards, it can serve both formative and summative purposes. In the context of this study, the combined review of OPCRF and NQESH results provides valuable insight into how performance-based leadership is reflected in national assessments of leadership potential.

Relationship Between the School Heads' Perception on the Relevance of the PPSSH Framework and Their NQESH Results

This part of the study aimed to determine whether a significant relationship exists between the school heads' level of perception of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) framework and their performance in the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH). Based on the regression analysis, results yielded R^2 = 0.0219, $F(1,7)$ = 0.1570, and p = 0.70, indicating that the relationship is not statistically significant.

The regression coefficient (β = -1.66) further suggests a weak and inverse relationship. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between the school heads' perception of the PPSSH framework and their NQESH results is accepted. This implies that regardless of how strongly school heads perceive the framework as relevant, it does not significantly predict their actual NQESH score in this study.

This finding suggests that although the PPSSH provides a structured guide for school leadership (DepEd, 2020), its perceived relevance alone may not be a strong indicator of success in licensure exams. As supported by Fullan (2020), effective leadership performance is influenced by the integration of theoretical understanding with practical application. Moreover, Leithwood et al. (2020) argue that real-world school leadership competencies are often shaped by experiential learning, mentorship, and situational decision-making, which may not be captured solely through perception-based assessments.

The result is consistent with Northouse's (2018) assertion that effective school leadership depends on a triad of skills: technical competence, interpersonal acumen, and conceptual thinking—skills essential to managing tasks, people, and strategies effectively. Thus, school heads may benefit more from applied leadership development strategies such as simulations, mentoring, and targeted NQESH review programs.

Overall, although the PPSSH framework remains a vital tool in shaping school leaders' competencies, its perceived relevance does not significantly correlate with NQESH outcomes in this sample. Future capacity-building initiatives should integrate both conceptual understanding and assessment-oriented strategies to enhance examination performance.

Relationship Between the School Heads' Performance and Their NQESH Results

The seventh objective of this study examined whether a significant relationship exists between the school heads' performance, as measured by their OPCRF ratings, and their NQESH results. The regression analysis yielded R^2 = 0.0175, $F(1,7)$ = 0.1249, and p = 0.73, indicating that the relationship is not statistically significant. With a regression coefficient of β = 4.39, the results suggest a weak and non-significant positive association between performance ratings and exam results.

Based on these findings, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between the school heads' performance and their NQESH result is accepted. This implies that while school heads consistently demonstrated high performance based on their OPCRF evaluations, such performance does not predict or guarantee higher scores in the qualifying examination.

This result highlights a key insight: practical experience and strong day-to-day leadership do not necessarily equate to examination readiness. As noted by McFarquhar (2006), leadership success involves not only cognitive and experiential competence but also targeted preparation and familiarity with the structure of high-stakes assessments. Performance in the field may support knowledge acquisition, but success in standardized exams such as the NQESH requires test-specific strategies, critical reasoning, and contextual application under time constraints.

Poorman and Webb (2000) emphasized the importance of self-regulation and accountability in overcoming exam challenges. Their findings suggest that passing certification exams involves more than professional effectiveness—it requires intentional preparation, self-reflection, and adaptive learning strategies. Therefore, while high OPCRF ratings affirm school heads' effectiveness in practice, additional support mechanisms may be necessary to help them translate that competence into licensure success.

Finally, although school heads demonstrate commendable performance based on their OPCRF ratings, this study finds no statistically significant correlation with their NQESH results. This underscores the need for structured preparatory programs that align practical leadership experience with the cognitive and situational demands of the examination.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that school heads from the Schools Division of Tacurong City consistently demonstrated leadership behaviors aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), particularly in the domains of strategic leadership, resource management, instructional supervision, and stakeholder engagement. Their Office Performance Commitment and Review Form (OPCRF) ratings likewise reflected outstanding performance across multiple school years. However, despite these strong indicators of competence and effective school leadership, statistical analyses revealed no significant relationship between the respondents' perceived leadership competencies or performance ratings and their success in the 2021 National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH). This suggests that while the PPSSH and OPCRF are useful tools for evaluating and shaping leadership practice, they may not directly predict success in high-stakes licensure examinations such as the NQESH.

Given these insights, it is recommended that the Department of Education, through the National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP), enhance existing NQESH preparatory programs by incorporating more exam-oriented strategies such as simulation-based reviews, situational problem-solving tasks, and structured test-taking techniques that align with the cognitive and analytical demands of the assessment. Schools Division Offices are encouraged to facilitate focused mentoring and coaching activities among aspiring school heads, including reflective discussions led by successful examinees, to contextualize theoretical competencies into practical exam readiness. School heads themselves are advised to complement their leadership practice with targeted preparation that includes familiarization with the exam format, critical thinking exercises, and policy analysis. Furthermore, future research should consider broader samples and comparative studies involving both successful and unsuccessful NQESH examinees to further examine potential predictors of exam success. By bridging the gap between leadership practice and examination performance, stakeholders in the education sector can better prepare aspiring school leaders not just for the demands of the position, but also for the assessments that determine their readiness to lead.

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