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Competencies of Full-Fledged Secondary School Principals in Samar Division

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Abstract

Aim: This study examines the competencies of full-fledged secondary school principals in the Schools Division of Samar and, based on the results, proposes a Sustainable Learning and Development (L&D) Program to strengthen leadership capacity.

Methodology: A quantitative descriptive-correlational design was employed. Twenty-six principals completed a validated questionnaire (Content Validity Index = 1.00; Cronbach's alpha = 0.947–1.000), establishing strong validity and reliability. Descriptive statistics summarized demographic profiles and competency ratings, while Kendall's Tau and Cramer's V tested associations between demographics and competency domains.

Results: Most principals were in their fifties, predominantly female, and academically qualified with master's or doctoral degrees, alongside extensive teaching and administrative experience. They rated themselves as Very Competent across all PPSSH domains, with stronger performance in finance, governance, and human resource management, and comparatively lower ratings in curriculum and instructional leadership. While self-ratings may reflect positive bias, the findings nonetheless indicate robust managerial competence. Statistical analysis revealed no significant associations between demographics and competencies, though doctoral-level education approached significance, suggesting a potential benefit of advanced preparation.

Conclusion: Principals in Samar Division demonstrate consistently high competence across leadership domains, particularly in governance and management, though instructional leadership remains an area requiring sustained support. A Sustainable L&D Program emphasizing professional learning, mentoring, and contextualized training is recommended to reinforce balanced leadership competencies and ensure long-term school improvement.

Keywords: School leadership; Leadership competencies; PPSSH; Career Stage 4 principals (Philippines); Sustainable learning and development; Samar Division

INTRODUCTION

School leadership remains a cornerstone of educational quality and student achievement. Principals shape the teaching and learning environment by setting direction, fostering teacher growth, and mobilizing resources to advance school goals (Day et al., 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020). At the global level, frameworks such as those advanced by the OECD (2019) emphasize adaptability, collaboration, and evidence-based decision-making as critical competencies for leaders navigating complex educational systems in the twenty-first century. Leadership scholarship also underscores the importance of reflective practices and professional resilience, particularly in contexts of rapid educational change (Bontuyan, 2025).

In the Philippine context, these global imperatives are contextualized through the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), which serves as the conceptual framework for this study. The PPSSH articulates leadership competencies across domains such as instructional leadership, governance, and resource management (Department of Education, 2020). It underscores that principals are not only managers of operations but also leaders of learning and community engagement. Empirical studies in the Philippines affirm this expanded role: Gultom and Lizada (2022) highlighted continuous professional learning as a driver of inclusive schools; Villegas and Saavedra (2021)



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pointed to resource mobilization as key to sustaining performance; Uy et al. (2025) demonstrated how professional standards chart pathways for nurturing proficient educators; and Carvajal et al. (2023) revealed that authentic leadership qualities directly shape institutional success across industries.

However, most of these studies draw evidence from urban or nationally aggregated data, overlooking rural and disadvantaged contexts where leadership demands may be more complex. Unlike prior works, this study specifically investigates principals in Samar Province, a setting characterized by resource scarcity, socio-economic constraints, and high teacher turnover. Such conditions amplify the urgency of examining whether Career Stage 4 principals possess the competencies envisioned by the PPSSH and whether demographic factors shape these capacities. Similar to the findings of Pangilinan (2025), who examined the challenges of Filipino teachers in coastal villages, the Samar setting offers a lens into the unique pressures faced by educators in marginalized areas.

Guided by the PPSSH as the conceptual anchor, this study therefore sought to: (a) assess the competencies of secondary school principals in the Schools Division of Samar, (b) determine associations between demographic variables and leadership competencies, and (c) propose a Sustainable Learning and Development (L&D) Program that strengthens balanced leadership capacity. By situating global leadership trends within the Philippine policy framework and applying them to a rural division, this study contributes a contextualized perspective that extends the discourse on school leadership beyond more commonly studied urban environments.

Statement of the Problem

School leadership is increasingly recognized as a decisive factor in shaping educational quality and student achievement. While national and international studies have examined principals' leadership competencies, much of the evidence has focused on urban contexts or aggregated national data, leaving rural and disadvantaged divisions such as Samar underexplored. Principals in Samar face unique challenges, including limited resources, socio-economic constraints, and high teacher turnover, yet little empirical data exists on how well they meet the expectations set by the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH). This lack of localized evidence makes it difficult to design targeted interventions that can strengthen leadership capacity in the division.

Given these gaps, it becomes necessary to assess the competencies of Career Stage 4 secondary school principals in Samar, examine possible demographic influences, and propose a context-responsive professional development program. By doing so, this study addresses an important knowledge gap and provides evidence that can inform both policy and practice in strengthening school leadership in resource-challenged settings.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to examine the competencies of Career Stage 4 secondary school principals in the Schools Division of Samar based on the domains of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH).

Specifically, it aims to:

1. To determine the demographic profile of the principals in terms of:
 - 1.1 age and sex;
 - 1.2 work experience;
 - 1.3 highest educational attainment;
 - 1.4 rank or position;
 - 1.5 years in position;
 - 1.6 number of secondary schools served; and
 - 1.7 professional development history.
2. To assess their competencies across the PPSSH domains, namely:
 - 2.1 leadership;
 - 2.2 learning environment;
 - 2.3 curriculum and instruction;
 - 2.4 human resource and team development;
 - 2.5 finance and resource management and mobilization; and
 - 2.6 governance and accountability.
3. To examine whether significant associations exist between demographic variables and principals' competencies.



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Research Questions

1. What are the demographic profiles of the secondary school principals in Samar Division in terms of age, sex, work experience, highest educational attainment, rank or position, years in position, schools served, and professional development history?
2. How do secondary school principals rate their competencies across the PPSSH domains of leadership, learning environment, curriculum and instruction, human resource and team development, finance and resource management, and governance and accountability?
3. Are there significant associations between the respondents' demographic profile and their assessed level of competencies across the PPSSH domains?

Hypothesis

In line with the research questions, the following hypotheses will be tested at the 0.05 level of significance::

H_0 : There is no significant association between the demographic profile of the principals and their competencies across the PPSSH domains.

H_a : There is a significant association between the demographic profile of the principals and their competencies across the PPSSH domains.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational design to examine the competencies of full-fledged secondary school principals in the Schools Division of Samar. The descriptive component was used to present the demographic profile of the respondents and to assess their self-rated competencies across the six domains of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH). The correlational component determined whether significant associations existed between the respondents' demographic attributes and their competency levels. This design was considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to measure existing conditions, describe trends, and test relationships between variables without manipulation (Pangilinan, 2025; Sanchez, 2023).

Population and Sampling

The respondents were 26 full-fledged secondary school principals under Career Stage 4 in the Schools Division of Samar. Purposive sampling was applied, with eligibility limited to principals holding full-fledged status and currently serving in secondary schools. The retrieval rate of the questionnaires was 89.66 percent, which was adequate for analysis. The sample size was considered sufficient because it represented the entire population of eligible principals within the division, thereby functioning as a census rather than a sample. This ensured comprehensive coverage and minimized sampling bias, consistent with best practices in small-population studies (Amihan & Sanchez, 2023).

Instrument

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire composed of two sections: (a) demographic profile and (b) leadership competencies. The demographic portion collected information on age, sex, educational attainment, teaching experience, and administrative service. The competency portion was anchored on the six PPSSH domains: school leadership, learning environment, curriculum and instruction, human resource and team development, finance and resource management, and governance and accountability. A five-point Likert scale (1 = Not Yet Competent to 5 = Highly Competent) enabled respondents to self-assess their proficiency.

The instrument underwent validation by a panel of experts consisting of specialists in educational leadership, PPSSH implementation, and psychometrics. This process yielded a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 1.00, confirming alignment with the PPSSH framework. Reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha produced values between 0.947 and 1.000, establishing strong internal consistency. Accordingly, the questionnaire was deemed both valid and reliable for evaluating principal competencies.

Data Collection

The questionnaires were administered personally by the researchers and through designated school contacts. Respondents were provided sufficient time to complete the instrument, after which the forms were retrieved and checked for completeness. Data were then encoded and reviewed for accuracy, with clarifications made when necessary to ensure consistency.



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Treatment of Data

Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to summarize the demographic profile and competency levels. To determine associations between demographic attributes and competencies, Kendall's Tau and Cramer's V tests were employed. These nonparametric tests were appropriate given the categorical and ordinal nature of the data. Findings were presented in tables and discussed in relation to existing literature (Bontuyan, 2025).

Ethical Considerations

The researchers adhered to ethical standards throughout the conduct of the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their participation was voluntary. The confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents were strictly observed, with data used solely for academic purposes. The study ensured respect for participants' rights, in line with ethical research protocols prescribed by the Department of Education and the institution's review standards.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study on the competencies of full-fledged secondary school principals in the Schools Division of Samar. The data are organized according to the objectives of the research, beginning with the demographic profile of the respondents, followed by their competency ratings across the six domains of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), and the test of association between demographic attributes and competency levels.

Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the 26 respondents in terms of age, sex, highest educational attainment, years of teaching, and years of administrative service.

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents

Profile Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age (Years)	59–64	6	23.08
	53–58	13	50.00
	47–52	6	23.08
	42–46	1	3.84
	Total	26	100
Sex	Male	10	38.46
	Female	16	61.54
	Total	26	100
Highest Educational Attainment	Doctorate Degree	6	23.08
	Doctorate Units	8	30.77
	Master's Degree	4	15.38
	Master's Units	7	26.92
	Bachelor's Degree	1	3.85
	Total	26	100
Position/Rank	Principal IV	5	19.23
	Principal III	7	26.90
	Principal II	6	23.10
	Principal I	8	30.80
	Total	26	100
Years in Position	Below 5 years	2	7.69
	5–9 years	8	30.77
	10–14 years	11	42.31



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	15–19 years	3	11.54
	20–24 years	1	3.85
	25–29 years	1	3.85
Total	-	26	100

The data in Table 1 reveal that the majority of the full-fledged secondary school principals in the Schools Division of Samar were in their fifties, with half (50.00 percent) belonging to the 53–58 age bracket and nearly one-fourth (23.08 percent) in the 59–64 range. The mean age of 55.48 years, with a standard deviation of 4.59, suggests that most principals were at the later stages of their professional careers. This indicates a mature leadership pool with extensive experience and institutional knowledge.

In terms of sex, 61.54 percent of the respondents were female, reflecting the continuing trend of female dominance in educational leadership in the Philippines. This aligns with the observations of David et al. (2021), who noted that the teaching and school leadership profession in the country has increasingly been characterized by feminization. Such demographic trends may have implications for leadership style, with female principals often being described as more collaborative and relational in their approaches (Balyer, 2021).

Regarding educational attainment, the majority of principals had pursued graduate education, with 30.77 percent holding doctoral units and 23.08 percent already possessing doctoral degrees. Only one respondent (3.85 percent) reported holding a bachelor's degree as their highest qualification. These findings highlight a strong commitment to advanced professional development among school heads. As Uy, Patosa, Dacuma, and Santiago (2023) pointed out, pathways to proficiency and excellence in teaching and leadership are often linked to sustained engagement in professional learning. In this case, the high proportion of principals with postgraduate studies underscores their preparedness to address the multifaceted demands of school leadership.

With respect to position, the largest proportion of respondents were Principal I (30.80 percent), followed by Principal III (26.90 percent), Principal II (23.10 percent), and Principal IV (19.23 percent). This distribution suggests that while many principals remain at the entry level of principalship, a substantial number have progressed to higher ranks, reflecting varied opportunities for career advancement. Furthermore, 42.31 percent had been serving as principals for 10–14 years, while 30.77 percent had between 5–9 years of service. This indicates a relatively seasoned leadership body, with more than half of respondents having at least a decade of administrative experience.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the principals in Samar Division represent an experienced and academically qualified group of leaders. Their demographic profile is consistent with trends observed in other divisions in the Philippines, where principals typically possess advanced educational credentials and extensive teaching and administrative backgrounds (Leithwood et al., 2020; Gultom & Lizada, 2022). Such attributes are expected to contribute positively to their leadership competencies and their capacity to implement the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH).

Competency Levels Across PPSSH Domains

Table 2 presents the mean ratings of the principals' self-assessed competencies across the six PPSSH domains.

Table 2. Competency Levels of Respondents Across PPSSH Domains

Domain	Overall Median	Description
Leadership	5	Very Competent
Learning Environment	5	Very Competent
Curriculum and Instruction	5	Very Competent
Human Resource and Team Development	5	Very Competent
Finance and Resource Management and Mobilization	5	Very Competent

The results in Table 2 indicate that full-fledged secondary school principals in the Schools Division of Samar consistently rated themselves as Very Competent across all six PPSSH domains, each achieving an overall median of 5. This suggests that the respondents perceive themselves as highly capable in leadership, managing learning



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environments, curriculum and instruction, human resource development, finance and resource mobilization, and governance-related functions.

The highest medians were recorded in finance and resource management, human resources and team development, highlighting the principals' strength in administrative and managerial domains. This reflects the strong emphasis placed by the Department of Education (DepEd) on accountability, financial transparency, and effective personnel management, which are vital in sustaining school operations. These findings are consistent with Dela Cruz and Dizon (2022), who reported that Filipino principals often excel in administrative competencies due to the system's accountability structures.

On the other hand, while domains such as curriculum and instruction and learning environment also received "Very Competent" ratings, they remain critical areas that require sustained professional support. As Uy, Patosa, Dacuma, and Santiago (2023) emphasized, leadership should not only prioritize managerial and governance functions but also give equal weight to instructional leadership and curriculum innovation to ensure holistic school improvement. Similarly, Leithwood et al. (2020) noted that effective school leadership balances management and pedagogy to enhance teaching quality and student achievement.

Taken together, the results affirm that the principals in Samar Division possess a strong and balanced competency profile. However, the findings also underscore the need for continuous professional development programs that sustain high performance in administrative functions while also strengthening instructional and curriculum leadership capacities.

Association Between Demographic Profile and Competencies

Table 3 presents the results of the statistical tests of association between demographic variables and competency ratings.

Table 3. Association Between Demographic Profile and Competency Levels

Profile Variable	Correlation Coefficient	p-value	Interpretation
Age	0.183	0.271	Not Significant
Sex	0.039	0.980	Not Significant
Work Experience	-0.060	0.720	Not Significant
Position/Rank	-0.050	0.777	Not Significant
Educational Background			
Undergraduate	0.284	0.350	Not Significant
Master's	0.315	0.630	Not Significant
Doctoral	0.588	0.051	Not Significant (Near Significant)
No. of Schools Served as Principal	0.071	0.688	Not Significant

The results in Table 3 show that demographic variables such as age, sex, work experience, position, and number of schools served as principal were not significantly associated with the competency ratings of respondents across the PPSSH domains. These findings indicate that leadership competencies of full-fledged secondary school principals in Samar Division are not strongly influenced by their demographic characteristics.

Interestingly, educational background approached significance, with a correlation coefficient of 0.588 and a p-value of 0.051 for doctoral degree holders. Although not statistically significant at the 0.05 level, this suggests that higher academic attainment may provide an advantage in enhancing leadership competencies. This finding resonates with Balyer (2021), who argued that advanced graduate education contributes to more effective school leadership practices by equipping principals with deeper theoretical and practical insights.

At the same time, the lack of strong associations between demographic factors and competencies reflects the argument of Leithwood et al. (2020) that effective leadership is less a product of age, sex, or years of service, and more a function of professional learning, contextual adaptability, and values-driven practice. Furthermore, Uy et al., (2025) emphasized that competency development is shaped by continuous learning pathways and institutional support rather than static demographic traits.



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Taken together, these results highlight the need to sustain competency development through targeted professional development and mentoring programs, ensuring that principals at all stages of their careers are equally supported to meet the demands of twenty-first-century school leadership.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, several conclusions may be drawn. First, the demographic profile of full-fledged secondary school principals in Samar Division reflects a pool of leaders who are largely in their fifties, predominantly female, and academically qualified, with most holding master's or doctoral degrees. Many have extensive teaching and administrative experience, which positions them as seasoned practitioners in the field of educational leadership.

Second, the principals consistently rated themselves as Very Competent across all six domains of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), particularly excelling in finance and resource management, governance, and human resource development. This indicates that they possess strong managerial and governance skills necessary to sustain school operations and compliance with accountability standards. However, curriculum and instructional leadership, while still rated "Very Competent," emerged as a relative area where continuous professional support remains essential.

Third, the statistical analysis revealed no significant associations between most demographic variables and competency levels, underscoring that leadership proficiency is not dependent on age, sex, or years of experience. Educational attainment, however, showed a near-significant association, suggesting that advanced graduate studies may contribute to stronger leadership performance in specific domains.

Overall, the study concludes that full-fledged secondary school principals in Samar Division are highly competent leaders who demonstrate balanced proficiency across the PPSSH domains. Their competencies are shaped less by demographic characteristics and more by professional preparation, continuous learning, and contextual leadership practice.

Recommendations

In view of the conclusions, it is recommended that the Schools Division of Samar strengthen its professional development initiatives for full-fledged principals. While the respondents demonstrated very competent levels across all domains, emphasis should be placed on sustaining curriculum and instructional leadership to complement their strong managerial and governance skills. Continuous learning opportunities, particularly in pedagogy and curriculum innovation, will help ensure that leadership competence remains balanced and responsive to evolving educational needs.

Moreover, school leaders should be encouraged and supported to pursue advanced academic studies, especially doctoral programs. The near-significant association between higher educational attainment and competency levels suggests that further academic preparation enhances leadership capacity. Financial assistance, scholarship opportunities, or study leave provisions may be considered by the Division to facilitate this professional growth.

Equally important is the institutionalization of mentoring and coaching systems within the division. Senior principals who have demonstrated strong competence may serve as mentors to newly designated leaders, thereby fostering reflective practice, collaborative learning, and succession planning. This approach will not only build capacity among novice leaders but also reinforce a culture of continuous improvement.

Finally, the study recommends the development of a Sustainable Learning and Development (L&D) Program that is context-specific to the realities of Samar Division. Such a program should incorporate reflective practices, ongoing feedback, and mechanisms that build resilience and adaptability among principals. This will ensure that leadership competencies are not only maintained but also continually enhanced in response to the challenges of the twenty-first-century learning environment. Future research may expand the scope of this study to include other divisions in Region VIII, as well as employ mixed-methods approaches to capture the perspectives of teachers, supervisors, and stakeholders.

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