EPRA International Journal of Environmental Economics, Commerce and Educational Management
Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra0414 |ISI I.F Value: 0.815|SJIF Impact Factor (2025): 8.57 ISSN: 2348 – 814X
Volume: 12 | Issue:7 |July 2025

TEACHER EMPOWERMENT AND LEADERSHIP COMPETENCE AMONG TEACHERS IN PANABO CITY DIVISION

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Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra23275
DOI No: 10.36713/epra23275

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of teacher empowerment on leadership competency among selected teachers in the Division of Panabo City. Utilizing a descriptive-correlational research design, the study involved 133 teacher respondents and employed validated and pilot-tested research instruments. Data were analyzed using weighted mean, Pearson product-moment correlation, and multiple regression analysis at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that the extent of teacher empowerment and leadership competency among teachers was extensive. Furthermore, results showed a significant positive relationship between teacher empowerment and leadership competency. All domains of teacher empowerment – professional development, trust, status, and cooperation – significantly influenced leadership competency, as indicated by a p-value of 0.000 for each predictor. Among these, trust had the strongest influence. The regression analysis yielded an R^2 value of 0.6904, suggesting that 69.04% of the variance in leadership competency can be explained by the four empowerment domains. The findings confirm the predictive nature of teacher empowerment on leadership competency and are aligned with various educational theories such as Social Learning Theory, Constructivist Theory, Adult Learning Theory, Communities of Practice, and Distributed Leadership Theory. Based on these findings, recommendations were made for the Department of Education, school principals, teachers, and future researchers to further promote teacher empowerment and leadership development.

KEYWORDS: *Teacher Empowerment; Leadership Competency; Professional Development; Trust; Cooperation; Status; Teacher Leadership; Educational Leadership*

INTRODUCTION

Leadership in education is often associated with formal roles such as principals or school heads. However, contemporary research emphasizes that leadership should extend beyond these traditional positions, empowering teachers to take on leadership roles within the school context. Teacher empowerment, defined as the process by which educators gain autonomy, professional agency, and voice within their work environment, has emerged as a crucial factor in enhancing overall school effectiveness (Hidiroglu & Tanriogen, 2020). This study seeks to explore how empowering teachers can enhance their leadership competencies, reshaping the traditional leadership landscape in schools.The necessity of rethinking leadership competencies through teacher empowerment has gained increasing global attention. In many international educational systems, teacher empowerment is recognized as a vital component of educational reform. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has identified that teacher leadership is linked to higher student outcomes, stronger collaboration, and improved teacher retention (OECD, 2019). Empowering teachers by offering professional development opportunities, fostering trust, and encouraging cooperation helps create a culture of shared leadership where teachers can effectively contribute to decision-making processes within their schools (Leithwood & Azah, 2019).Globally, the importance of teacher empowerment has been widely recognized in education systems as a means of addressing various challenges inteaching and leadership. Many countries have implemented policies aimed at decentralizing educational management to grant teachers greater autonomy and involvement in decision-making processes (Wenner & Campbell, 2019). In the United States, for example, the focus has been on professional development as a key element of teacher empowerment. The Every Student Succeeds Act emphasizes the role of professional development in enhancing teacher capacity and leadership skills, thus creating a pathway for teachers to take on leadership roles within their schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). This focus on teacher empowerment aligns with the broader shift towards distributed leadership models, which recognize that effective school leadership is not confined to a single administrator but is instead shared among all staff members, including teachers (Gumus et al., 2020). This international perspective highlights the relevance of teacher empowerment in fostering a culture where teachers can contribute meaningfully to school leadership and improvement efforts.In the context of the Philippines, teacher empowerment is equally critical, particularly given the educational reforms introduced in recent years. The Department of Education (DepEd) has implemented programs

that emphasize professional growth and capacity building, such as the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Act of 2019, which requires teachers to engage in lifelong learning and skills enhancement (DepEd, 2020). However, despite these initiatives, challenges remain in ensuring that teachers are adequately empowered to assume leadership roles. The implementation of the K-12 curriculum, for instance, has brought about additional responsibilities for teachers, necessitatinga stronger emphasis on leadership and collaboration within the school environment (Palafox et al., 2020). Moreover, the Philippine educational system has faced persistent issues such as overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and disparities in teacher training, all of which impact the extent to which teachers can be empowered (Garcia & Cruz, 2021). Addressing these challenges requires a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to teacher empowerment and how these factors translate into leadership competency within the school context. Locally, in the Panabo City Division, these issues are particularly salient.The city, situated in the Davao Region of Mindanao, has experienced rapid changes in its educational landscape, necessitating a closer examination of teacher roles and leadership. Schools in Panabo City face similar challenges to those seen across the country, such as the need for continuous professional development and the improvement of school facilities to support quality teaching and learning (Santos, 2020). However, there is a growing recognition of the potential of teachers to lead initiatives that address these challenges, particularly through collaboration and shared leadership models. Local educational leaders have advocated for greater involvement of teachers in school decision-making processes as a means of fostering a collaborative culture that can drive school improvement (Bermudez, 2021). Despite these efforts, there remains a need for empirical research to explore how empowerment specifically influences leadership competencies among teachers in this local context, providing insights that can inform targeted interventions and policies.Research has demonstrated that teacher empowerment is positively associated with various aspects of leadership competency. For instance, a study by O'Brien and Wilkins (2020) found that when teachers perceive themselves as being trusted and respected by their school administrators, they are more likely to engage in leadership activities such as leading workshops and participating in strategic planning. Similarly, professional development opportunities that are aligned with teachers' interests and career goals have been shown to increase their sense of empowerment, leading to a greater willingness to take on leadership roles (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2019).The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform educational policy and practice in both local and broader contexts. By identifying the factors that contribute to effective teacher leadership, the findings can guide school administrators and policymakers in designing programs that support teacher empowerment. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for a shift from traditional hierarchical models of school leadership towards more inclusive and collaborative approaches, where teachers are recognized as key partners in the leadership process (Wenner & Campbell, 2019). This shift is crucial for creating school environments that are responsive to the needs of both teachers and students, ultimately leading to improved educational outcomes.

REVIEW OF SIGNIFICANT LITERATURE

The related literature of this study provided inputs about teacher empowerment and teacher leadership competency. Also, it presented varied studies showcasing the association of the involved variables in this study. The independent variable focused on in this study is teacher empowerment. It has four indicators namely; professional development, trust, status, and cooperation (Hidiroglu & Tanriogen, 2020). Meanwhile, the dependent variable is teacher leadership competency. It has three indicators namely; fostering a collaborative culture, facilitating improvement and establishing standards, modeling leadership attributes and skills, and performing as a referral leader (Yuet, et al., 2019)

Teacher Empowerment

Teacher empowerment is a multidimensional concept that has garnered significant attention in recent years, especially in educational leadership. According to Hidiroglu and Tanriogen (2020), teacher empowerment involves not only providing educators with the authority to make decisions but also offering the resources and opportunities needed to enhance their professional expertise and leadership capabilities. Teacher empowerment aligns with the concept of distributed leadership, where leadership responsibilities are shared among school members rather than centralized in the hands of school heads or administrators. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and engagement among teachers, allowing them to contribute meaningfully to the overall success of the school.

Empowerment suggests real changes in professional expertise, rising autonomy, and active involvement in decision-making processes (Lee, Willis, & Tian, 2018). Empowering teachers means giving them the agency to participate in decisions about school goals, instructional programs, and student success. As Supriadi et al. (2020) assert, this process involves more than just delegating tasks; it involves creating a participatory culture where teachers feel they have a voice in shaping the educational field. Martinez (2022) further adds that an empowered teacher is one who possesses the skills and knowledge to make positive contributions to their school, ultimately leading to professional growth and improved educational outcomes.

Empowerment is also strongly linked to teacher motivation and collaboration. Balyer et al. (2019) emphasize that empowered teachers are more motivated to develop their own competencies and work collaboratively with colleagues to enhance student achievement. Daquila et al. (2023) found a positive correlation between teacher empowerment and student success, further underscoring the importance of creating an environment where teachers are encouraged to take ownership

of their professional development and instructional practices. By fostering a culture of collaboration, teacher empowerment leads to improved student outcomes and a more cohesive school environment.

Teacher empowerment also allows educators to exercise leadership in non- hierarchical, collaborative settings. Lovett (2023) highlights that empowered teachers are more likely to engage in teacher leadership, where they work together in a network of collaborative learning rather than relying solely on top-down directives. This model of shared leadership aligns with the growing recognition that schools benefit from the collective expertise of their teachers. By empowering teachers to lead, schools can create more dynamic and responsive learning environments that are better equipped to meet the needs of diverse student populations.

Several factors influence teacher empowerment, including teacher quality, background, personality, and the programs implemented at schools (Barni et al., 2019). Fraser (2020) adds that empowered educators are those who believe in their abilities, understand the educational system, and dedicate significant time and energy to their work. When teachers feel empowered, they are more likely to take initiative in improving their instructional practices and fostering positive relationships with students and colleagues. Teacher empowerment, therefore, is not just about providing teachers with decision-making authority but also about cultivating their confidence and commitment to their profession.

Decision-making is a critical component of teacher empowerment. Schildkamp (2019) points out that when teachers are involved in educational decisions, such as financial planning, program selection, and student assessment, they develop a stronger sense of ownership and accountability. Mawajdeh (2021) emphasizes that providing teachers with full participation in decision-making processes improves their work quality and leads to a more collaborative and supportive school environment. By giving teachers a voice in important decisions, schools can create a culture of trust and shared responsibility, which in turn enhances overall school effectiveness.

Empowerment also strengthens teachers' problem-solving abilities and organizational commitment. Pasternak et al. (2023) argue that when teachers are empowered to make decisions, they develop stronger problem-solving skills, which benefit the entire school community. En (2023) adds that teachers who are given decision-making authority are more likely to feel a sense of commitment to the organization, as they are directly involved in shaping its goals and strategies. However, Mawajdeh (2021) cautions that schools must establish clear guidelines for teacher participation in decision-making to prevent it from becoming a privilege reserved for only a few teachers.

Professional development is another crucial element of teacher empowerment. According to Washington (2019), professional development provides teachers with the opportunity to enhance their skills and expand their knowledge. Administrators play a key role in supporting teachers' professional growth by offering professional development activities that align with their needs and goals. Lalor and Sperrazza (2022) emphasize that empowering teachers through professional development not only improves their effectiveness but also helps to prevent burnout and stress. Meek (2022) adds that administrators can empower teachers by identifying their specific needs and offering targeted professional learning experiences that foster growth and leadership.

Teacher empowerment also enhances their sense of competency. Reichl (2017) defines competency as teachers' perceptions of their knowledge, skills, and talents in helping students succeed. By offering recognition and support, school leaders can boost teachers' confidence in their abilities, which in turn leads to higher levels of job satisfaction and professional fulfillment. Nelson-Danley (2019) suggests that recognizing teachers' contributions to student achievement is one of the most effective ways to empower them, as it reinforces their sense of accomplishment and encourages further professional development.

Autonomy is another critical aspect of teacher empowerment. According to Felayabi et al. (2022), teacher autonomy refers to the freedom teachers have in making decisions about instructional planning, curriculum design, and classroom management. Teachers who feel empowered to make their own decisions are more likely to take risks, implement innovative ideas, and seek out new ways to engage students (Miller, 2020). Ma (2021) argues that creating a supportive environment where teachers feel trusted and valued helps to foster this sense of autonomy, leading to greater creativity and professional growth.

Finally, teacher empowerment is closely linked to trust and interpersonal relationships within schools. Bardwell (2021) highlights that empowerment is a significant predictor of trust, as it involves creating a school culture where teachers feel supported and respected by their colleagues and administrators. Salamondra (2021) adds that effective communication and trust-building are essential for empowering teachers, as they help to create a collaborative environment where teachers feel confident in sharing their ideas and taking on leadership roles. By fostering trust and open communication, schools can create a more inclusive and empowering environment for all educators.

Professional Development. Leadership competency is a critical factor in teacher empowerment, as it provides educators with opportunities to continuously enhance their skills and knowledge. According to Arif et al. (2022), professional

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development entails lifelong learning that includes formal, non-formal, and informal learning experiences throughout a teacher's career. This ongoing process allows teachers to stay updated with new teaching methodologies, emerging technologies, and the latest educational research, thereby empowering them to be more effective in their classrooms. Furthermore, professional development ensures that teachers remain capable of addressing the evolving needs of students, enabling them to improve student outcomes through enhanced instructional strategies (McAleavy et al., 2018).

Empowerment through professional development also builds teachers' confidence in their roles as educators and leaders. As they acquire new skills and knowledge, they feel more capable of influencing both their classroom environment and the broader educational landscape. Robinson (2019) argues that empowerment is closely tied to the confidence teachers develop when they can engage in continuous learning and have the opportunity to apply their new skills in practice. This sense of empowerment allows teachers to take more ownership of their teaching practices, resulting in higher job satisfaction and professional fulfillment (Miles, 2022).

Effective professional development focuses on meeting teachers' individual needs and concerns. As Padgett (2020) notes, professional development that is driven by teachers' specific interests and the realities of their daily classroom experiences is more likely to result in meaningful professional growth. This tailored approach to professional learning not only empowers teachers to address their unique challenges but also enables them to develop a stronger professional identity. Teachers who feel empowered through professional development are more likely to engage in reflective practice and become change agents in their schools (Panadero, 2018).

Moreover, empowered teachers contribute significantly to the transformation of education. As noted by Shaimemanya (2018), empowered teachers are proactive and self-organized, which enhances their ability to implement innovative teaching practices that benefit their students. The competencies that teachers develop through professional development include not only technical knowledge but also the capacity for critical thinking and decision- making (UNESCO, 2019). These competencies are essential for teachers to become leaders in their classrooms and schools, fostering a culture of continuous improvement in the educational system.

However, challenges such as inadequate time, funding, and resources often hinder teachers' access to professional development opportunities (Andersen & Pitkanen, 2019). Despite these barriers, professional development remains a crucial factor in teacher empowerment, as it enables educators to stay relevant in a rapidly changing educational environment. By providing teachers with the tools and resources they need to grow professionally, schools can empower their educators to be more effective and impactful in their teaching practices (Guzder, 2019).

Trust. Trust is another essential component of teacher empowerment, particularly in fostering strong relationships between teachers and school leadership. According to Khan et al., (2022), trust within the school environment is built over time and is crucial for empowering teachers. A school environment where trust is prioritized encourages teachers to take risks, share their ideas, and contribute to decision-making processes without fear of judgment. When principals demonstrate trust in their teachers by granting them autonomy and responsibility, teachers feel more empowered to take ownership of their teaching practices and initiatives (Akbasli & Dis, 2019).

Trust between school leaders and teachers is also vital for creating a positive working environment. Aydemir (2018) emphasizes that principals who are honest, transparent, and supportive can create a culture of trust that enhances teacher morale and motivation. In such environments, teachers are more likely to collaborate, share ideas, and develop innovative solutions to challenges. Lambert (2022) further notes that trust leads to higher levels of self-confidence among teachers, which in turn empowers them to contribute meaningfully to the success of the school and their students.

Teacher empowerment through trust also extends to shared decision- making. Marmiene et al. (2022) argue that when school leaders trust teachers to solve problems and handle crises, it fosters a sense of empowerment that encourages teachers to actively participate in school governance. This collaborative approach to leadership not only empowers teachers but also strengthens the overall functioning of the school. Teachers who feel trusted by their leaders are more likely to be engaged in school improvement initiatives and contribute to a positive school culture (Levin et al., 2019).

Research has consistently shown that trust is a critical factor in teacher empowerment. Moran and Larwin (2019) found that teachers who trust their principals are more likely to feel empowered and take on leadership roles within their schools. Similarly, Zugelder and Hayes (2019) highlight the importance of trust in building a supportive school environment where teachers can thrive. When teachers trust their leaders, they feel more secure in expressing their opinions and taking on new challenges, which ultimately leads to greater empowerment and professional growth.

Establishing trust in schools requires intentional effort from both school leaders and teachers. Reeves (2023) recommends that schools continually seek ways to expand trust and encourage cooperation among staff members. By fostering trusting relationships, schools can empower teachers to take initiative, collaborate with their colleagues, and contribute to the

overall success of the school. In this way, trust serves as a foundation for teacher empowerment and the development of a collaborative school culture.

Status. Teacher status plays a crucial role in empowerment, as it reflects the professional respect and admiration that teachers receive from their peers, administrators, and the community. According to Aboelkhair (2018), teacher empowerment is closely linked to improved status, which enhances teachers' sense of professional worth and boosts their motivation. Teachers who perceive themselves as respected professionals are more likely to feel empowered to make decisions and take on leadership roles in their schools. This recognition of their expertise fosters a sense of responsibility and pride in their work, ultimately contributing to their professional growth and empowerment.

Empowered teachers often gain status through their knowledge, skills, and contributions to the school community. Tindowen (2019) suggests that teachers who demonstrate a high level of competence in their subject areas and who contribute to school-wide initiatives are more likely to earn the respect and support of their colleagues. This professional respect empowers teachers by reinforcing their sense of self-efficacy and encouraging them to continue pursuing excellence in their teaching practices.

In addition, teacher status is often influenced by external factors such as compensation, working conditions, and public perceptions of the teaching profession. Garcia and Weiss (2019) argue that poor compensation and inadequate resources can negatively affect teachers' perceptions of their status, leading to decreased motivation and job satisfaction. However, when teachers feel that their work is valued and supported, they are more likely to feel empowered and take ownership of their professional development and classroom practices (Flaherty, 2018).

Empowering teachers by improving their status also involves recognizing and celebrating their achievements. Grissom et al., (2021) emphasize the importance of providing teachers with timely feedback and acknowledging their successes, both academically and socially. Celebrating teachers' accomplishments not only boosts their morale but also reinforces their status as respected professionals in the school community. This, in turn, empowers teachers to continue striving for excellence and to take on leadership roles within their schools.

Ultimately, enhancing teacher status is a key component of empowerment, as it reinforces teachers' sense of professional identity and motivates them to pursue continuous improvement. When teachers feel respected and valued by their peers, administrators, and the wider community, they are more likely to feel empowered to take initiative, collaborate with others, and contribute to the overall success of the school (George et al., 2019).

Cooperation. Cooperation is a vital element in teacher empowerment as it fosters a collaborative culture within the school where teachers work together to achieve common educational goals. When teachers cooperate effectively with their colleagues, school leadership, and even the wider community, they build a supportive network that enhances their professional growth and problem-solving abilities. Cooperation entails the willingness of teachers to share ideas, strategies, and resources, and to work as a team in addressing challenges related to teaching and learning. This collective approach to education empowers teachers to take ownership of school initiatives, improves student outcomes, and enhances the overall school climate (Houston, 2019).

A cooperative culture also empowers teachers by reducing the sense of isolation that can sometimes accompany the teaching profession. Teachers who feel supported by their peers are more likely to engage in reflective practices and experiment with new instructional strategies, knowing that they can rely on their colleagues for advice, feedback, and assistance. Cooperation creates an environment where teachers learn from each other, pool their expertise, and collaborate on projects that improve both their teaching practices and student learning experiences (Errida, 2021).

Moreover, cooperation enhances teacher empowerment by promoting shared decision-making within the school. In a cooperative school environment, teachers are often included in key decisions regarding curriculum design, instructional policies, and even school-wide improvement plans. When teachers are involved in these processes, they feel a sense of agency and ownership over the decisions that impact their work and the success of their students. This inclusive approach to leadership empowers teachers by acknowledging their expertise and giving them a voice in shaping the direction of their school (Barron et al., 2021).

Cooperation is also crucial in fostering cross-departmental or interdisciplinary collaboration, which can lead to more innovative teaching approaches and better student engagement. When teachers from different subject areas or grade levels work together, they can develop integrated lessons or projects that connect various disciplines, making learning more engaging and relevant for students. This interdisciplinary cooperation requires teachers to step out of their individual silos and collaborate on creating a more holistic learning experience for students (Filho et al., 2018).

Cooperation is essential in building relationships with external stakeholders, such as parents, local businesses, and community organizations. Empowered teachers often take the initiative to form partnerships with these stakeholders, which

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can enrich the educational experience for students. For instance, teachers who cooperate with community organizations may secure resources for school projects or arrange guest speakers and field trips that provide students with real- world learning experiences (Szuc & Wong, 2021). This type of external cooperation not only empowers teachers by expanding their professional networks but also helps them create a more dynamic and supportive learning environment for their students.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study determined the relationship between the teacher empowerment and teacher leadership competency. More specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the extent of teacher empowerment in terms of:
   - 1.1. Professional Development;
   - 1.2. Trust;
   - 1.3 Status; and
   - 1.4. Cooperation?
2. What is the extent of teacher leadership competency in terms of:
   - 2.1. Fostering a collaborative culture;
   - 2.2. Facilitating improvement and establishing standards;
   - 2.3 Modeling leadership attributes and skills; and
   - 2.4. Performing as a referral leader?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the teacher empowerment and teacher leadership competency?
4. Which of the domains of the teacher empowerment significantly influence teacher leadership competency?

METHODOLOGY

This chapter introduces the methodological aspect of the study. This covers the research design, research respondents, research instruments, data gathering procedure, and data analysis employed in this investigation.

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design, specifically a descriptive correlational approach. Quantitative research involves the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data to examine patterns and test hypotheses, often utilizing statistical techniques (Apuke, 2017). The descriptive correlational method is particularly useful in understanding how two or more variables relate to each other without manipulating any variables. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), this approach is ideal for studies aiming to identify associations between variables in naturally occurring settings. By using this method, the study will explore the relationship between teacher empowerment and teacher leadership competency.The descriptive aspect of this design aims to capture the current state of both the independent variable (teacher empowerment) and the dependent variable (teacher leadership competency), as they exist within the educational context. This aligns with the approach highlighted by Davis (2021), where the primary goal is to describe and understand the features and conditions of the studied variables. Inthis study, Teacher Empowerment was examined based on dimensions such as professional development, trust, status, and cooperation, while Teacher Leadership Competency was assessed through factors such as fostering a collaborative culture, facilitating improvement, and modeling leadership attributes. The correlational element of the research will examine whether a statistical relationship exists between teacher empowerment and teacher leadership competency. this aligns with the method outlined by Kabir (2019), where correlational studies seek to determine the extent to which changes in one variable are associated with changes in another. The design is appropriate because it allows the study to explore how empowering teachers impacts their leadership abilities without manipulating the variables, thus providing insights that are both relevant and applicable to real-world educational settings (Creswell & Creswell,2017).

Results and Discussions

This chapter presents the results of the study. These are the findings of the problems in the previous chapter. These are presented both in textual and tabular form.

The Extent of Teacher Empowerment in terms of Professional Development

Table 1 reflects the extent of teacher empowerment in terms of professional development. It shows that the overall mean is 4.03, at an extensive level. This means that the teacher empowerment in terms of professional development is oftentimes evident. It can be gleaned from the data that all statements reveal an extensive result. Of these, the three (3) items that have the highest mean score are as follows: the extent to which the teacher has the chance to receive trainings on new teaching methods and techniques (4.06), the support provided by the school administration for training on educational technology (4.04), and the support for attending personal development courses by the school management (4.02).

These items prove that the teacher empowerment in terms of professional development is oftentimes evident. The findings of this study imply that schools in Panabo City Division prioritize teacher development through consistent support for training opportunities. Such empowerment initiatives reflect an administrative commitment to upgrading teacher competencies, particularly in innovative pedagogical strategies and the integration of technology in education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were offered: The extent of teacher empowerment is extensive, which implies that it is oftentimes evident. All dimensions of teacher empowerment which include professional development, trust, status, and cooperation, are at an extensive level, which means it is oftentimes evident. Meanwhile, the extent of leadership competency is also extensive, which means that it is oftentimes evident. All dimensions of leadership competency are oftentimes evident. Both variables call for all school members to work hand in hand to strengthen the existing status of the teacher empowerment and leadership competency of teachers.

Based on the findings, teacher empowerment, and leadership competency are correlated. Also, teacher empowerment significantly influences leadership competency. All domains of teacher empowerment, namely, professional development, trust, status, and cooperation significantly influence leadership competency by registering a p-value of .000 which is less than .05 in the level of significance. This leads to the rejection of the null hypotheses. Further, the result indicates that for every unit increase in the three domains of teacher empowerment, leadership competency also increases.

RECOMMENDATION

The following suggestions were offered based on the conclusions of the study:
For higher officials in the Department of Education, it is recommended that strategic policies be designed and institutionalized to promote and sustain teacher empowerment as a core component of educational leadership development. Since the study confirms that professional development, trust, status, and cooperation significantly influence leadership competency, it is crucial that national programs and policies reflect these domains. These may include the enhancement of the NEAP-recognized training programs, the institutionalization of mentorship schemes, and the revision of teacher promotion guidelines to integrate leadership performance indicators linked to empowerment metrics. Moreover, fostering a culture of shared leadership through national recognition of empowered teacher- leaders can reinforce the idea that leadership is not limited to formal designations but can be cultivated across all ranks of the teaching profession.

For School principals, there is an imperative to create an empowering school environment that cultivates leadership potential among teachers. This includes actively involving teachers in school-based management, planning, and decision-making processes, thereby building trust and status among faculty members. Principals should encourage continuous professional development through coaching, peer learning, and collaborative school improvement initiatives. Creating structures such as professional learning communities, leadership task forces, and teacher-led committees can further enhance cooperation and enable teachers to practice leadership roles in authentic contexts. School leaders must also recognize and reinforce teacher efforts by providing timely feedback and celebrating successes, thereby enhancing motivation and professional self-worth.

For teachers, the results of the study underscore the importance of embracing empowerment as a steppingstone to leadership competency. Teachers are encouraged to seek out and engage in professional development activities, take initiative in leading school programs, collaborate actively with peers, and build strong, trust-based relationships within their school community. By viewing themselves as co-leaders in education, teachers can further develop their self- efficacy, leadership confidence, and influence within the school. Teachers must also advocate for continuous improvement not only in pedagogy but also in organizational and leadership capacities.

For future researchers, this study offers a strong foundation for exploring deeper and broader implications of teacher empowerment on leadership development. It is recommended that future studies consider longitudinal designs to track changes over time or expand the scope to other divisions or regions for comparative analysis. Further research may also investigate other potential mediating or moderating variables such as school culture, student achievement, or policy implementation fidelity that may affect or be affected by teacher empowerment and leadership competency. Qualitative approaches such as interviews or case studies could also be used to explore personal narratives and lived experiences of empowered teachers transitioning into leadership roles.

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