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INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL HEADS' LEADERSHIP ON EARLY CAREER TEACHERS' MENTAL HEALTH AND JOB SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the influence of school heads' transformational leadership on the mental health and job satisfaction of early career teachers in public schools in the Maria Aurora District, Aurora. Utilizing a descriptive-correlational quantitative research design, it examined how leadership dimensions – idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration – impact teacher well-being. Ninety early career teachers (1–5 years in service) from 43 public schools participated, assessed using the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) and an adapted Teacher Job Satisfaction Scale (TJSS). Findings revealed that school heads were perceived to exhibit transformational leadership at a "Very Satisfactory" level. Most early career teachers reported moderate psychological distress and average job satisfaction. A statistically significant positive correlation was found between school leadership and both mental health and job satisfaction. Demographic variables, particularly age and teaching experience, also showed moderate relationships with well-being and satisfaction. Based on these insights, a leadership-based action plan was proposed to enhance teacher support and retention.

KEYWORDS: *Transformational Leadership, Mental Health, Job Satisfaction, Early Career Teachers, Educational Leadership, Teacher Retention*

1. INTRODUCTION

The success of any education system largely depends on the well-being and satisfaction of its teachers, especially those in the early stages of their careers. In the Philippines, early career teachers typically in their first five years of teaching face considerable psychological, instructional, and institutional challenges. These include overwhelming workloads, lack of mentorship, administrative burdens, and emotional stress, often resulting in burnout and attrition. If left unaddressed, these challenges may jeopardize the delivery of quality education and threaten the stability of the teaching workforce.

School heads, as frontline leaders in education, are in an essential position to address these issues. Leadership styles significantly shape school environments, influence teacher motivation, and affect professional well-being. Studies suggest that transformational leadership, characterized by ethical role modeling, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and personalized support, can foster teacher engagement, reduce stress, and increase job satisfaction. Despite this, many leadership practices in Philippine schools remain largely hierarchical or compliance-driven, which can diminish morale among early career educators.

The Maria Aurora District in the Province of Aurora presents a compelling context for examining this phenomenon, given its diverse school settings and resource disparities. While there is growing interest in improving educational leadership, empirical research that connects leadership styles with the mental health and job satisfaction of early career teachers remains scarce, particularly in rural and developing areas.

This study addresses that gap. Grounded in Bass's Transformational Leadership Theory, it investigates how specific leadership dimensions affect the mental health and job satisfaction of early career teachers in public schools. The goal is not only to understand these relationships but also to recommend actionable strategies to create supportive teaching environments. Ultimately, this research advocates for leadership models that promote teacher retention, enhance well-being, and strengthen school communities.

2. OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this study is to determine how school heads' transformational leadership influences the mental health and job satisfaction of early career teachers in the Maria Aurora District.

Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

1. How may the personal profile of the early career teacher-respondents be described in terms of:
   1.1 age;
   1.2 sex;
   1.3 years of teaching experience;
   1.4 highest educational attainment; and
   1.5 number of training and seminars attended?
2. How may school heads' leadership be described by early career teacher-respondents in terms of:
   2.1 idealized influence;
   2.2 inspirational motivation;
   2.3 intellectual stimulation; and
   2.4 individualized consideration?
3. How may the early career teachers describe their mental health?
4. How may early career teachers describe their job satisfaction in terms of:
   4.1 work environment;
   4.2 relationships with colleagues and school leaders;
   4.3 professional development opportunities; and
   4.4 overall work engagement?

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5. Is there a significant relationship between school heads' leadership and the mental health and job satisfaction of early career teachers?
6. Is there a significant relationship between the personal profile of early career teachers and their mental health and job satisfaction?
7. What leadership-based action plan may be proposed based on the findings?

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to examine the influence of school heads' transformational leadership on the mental health and job satisfaction of early career teachers. The descriptive aspect focused on describing the leadership styles, mental health, and job satisfaction of respondents, while the correlational aspect analyzed the statistical relationships between these variables.

3.1. Sampling Procedure

The study utilized total enumeration, a census method that involved all qualified respondents. A total of 90 early career teachers (1–5 years of service) from 43 public elementary and secondary schools in the Maria Aurora East and West Districts under the Schools Division of Aurora were included. The manageable size of the population allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how school leadership influences teacher well-being without relying on sampling estimates.

Permission to conduct the study was secured from the Schools Division Office of Aurora. Questionnaires were distributed through a combination of face-to-face administration and Google Forms, depending on the accessibility of participants. Respondents were briefed on the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained.

A pilot test was conducted to ensure the instrument's reliability. Content validation was performed by experts in educational leadership and psychology, while internal consistency was tested using Cronbach's Alpha. Scores exceeding 0.70 were considered acceptable for reliability.

3.2. Respondents

Respondents were early career teachers from 33 elementary schools and 10 high schools. Their teaching assignments ranged across various grade levels and subjects. The choice to include both elementary and high school teachers provided richer insights into how leadership dynamics operate across different educational contexts. Participants were identified in coordination with school heads and district offices.

The research was conducted in Maria Aurora District (East and West) in the Province of Aurora, a region characterized by both rural and semi-urban schools. The district's diverse educational landscape made it ideal for assessing the influence of leadership styles on early career teachers. Schools varied in terms of resources, administrative support, and professional development access, all of which could affect teacher well-being.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Personal Profile of Early Career Teacher-Respondents

Analysis of demographic data revealed that the majority of early career teachers were female, in the 26–30 age range, and had 1–3 years of teaching experience. Most held a Bachelor's degree, while a smaller percentage had begun postgraduate studies. Teachers had varying participation in professional development, with most attending 1–3 seminars/trainings in the past three years.

These findings support Ingersoll (2015) and the DepEd PPST (2017), which characterize early career teachers as young professionals navigating the transition into full-time teaching. Their limited experience and exposure place them at greater risk of stress and dissatisfaction if not supported adequately.

4.2 School Heads' Leadership Characteristics as Perceived by Teachers

Respondents rated their school heads' leadership as **"Very Satisfactory"** across all four transformational dimensions:

- Idealized Influence (M = 3.36) – Leaders were perceived as ethical, trustworthy role models.
- Inspirational Motivation (M = 3.34) – School heads communicated a clear and compelling vision.
- Intellectual Stimulation (M = 3.31) – Encouraged creativity and problem-solving.
- Individualized Consideration (M = 3.38) – Provided personalized mentorship and support.

These results align with Bass and Riggio (2006) and Leithwood et al. (2021), who argue that transformational leaders foster teacher trust, innovation, and motivation. The highest score in Individualized Consideration highlights the importance of emotional support for new teachers.

4.3 Mental Health Status of Early Career Teachers

Based on GHQ-12 scoring, the majority of respondents fell into the moderate psychological distress category (scores 12–19). Some showed signs of high distress, while a smaller group demonstrated good mental health (scores 0–11).

This reinforces findings by Kyriacou (2019) and Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2020) that early career teachers are vulnerable to emotional exhaustion and stress. The moderate to high distress levels highlight the need for school-based mental health initiatives and emotionally intelligent leadership.

4.4 Job Satisfaction of Early Career Teachers

Job satisfaction was measured across four domains, all of which received "Satisfactory" to "Very Satisfactory" ratings:
Work Environment (M = 3.23) – Teachers felt moderately supported by school facilities and policies.
Relationships with Colleagues and Leaders (M = 3.28) – Collegiality and respectful leadership were present.
Professional Development (M = 3.10) – Opportunities existed but were not always accessible or sustained.
Overall Work Engagement (M = 3.18) – Teachers showed a moderate level of enthusiasm and commitment.

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These results echo Hoy & Tarter (2017) and Bautista & Mercado (2022), who emphasize that supportive relationships and professional growth opportunities are key contributors to job satisfaction. However, the slightly lower rating in professional development highlights the need for more structured and frequent training.

4.5 Relationship Between School Heads' Leadership and Teachers' Mental Health and Job Satisfaction

Statistical analysis using Pearson's r showed a significant positive correlation between school heads' transformational leadership and both:

- Mental Health ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.05$)
- Job Satisfaction ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.05$)

These findings confirm the theoretical assumptions of Bass (2006) and are supported by studies from Day & Gu (2023) and García & Vázquez (2021), affirming that visionary and empathetic leaders enhance psychological well-being and professional engagement.

4.6 Relationship Between Personal Profile and Mental Health and Job Satisfaction

Demographic variables such as age and years of teaching experience were found to have a moderate positive relationship with both mental health and job satisfaction. Younger teachers and those with less experience were more likely to report stress and lower satisfaction levels.

This aligns with findings from Darling-Hammond (2017) and Gronn & Hargreaves (2019), which suggest that new teachers often struggle with adaptation and confidence, necessitating leadership support tailored to their needs.

4.7 Proposed Leadership-Based Action Plan

Based on the findings, a Leadership-Based Action Plan was developed to address early career teachers' needs. Key components include:

- Mentorship Programs – Peer coaching and structured onboarding.
- Mental Health Support – School-based wellness initiatives, counseling access.
- Leadership Development for School Heads – Training in emotional intelligence, inclusive leadership, and feedback mechanisms.
- Professional Growth Opportunities – Capacity-building workshops tailored to early career needs.

This action plan aims to create a positive school culture where early career teachers feel valued, supported, and empowered to grow professionally.

5.CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. **School heads' transformational leadership is a critical factor** in shaping the mental health and job satisfaction of early career teachers. The presence of ethical leadership, inspirational motivation, and personalized support significantly enhances teachers' sense of well-being and fulfillment.
2. **Early career teachers experience moderate psychological distress**, indicating a vulnerable stage in their professional journey. Without appropriate leadership and institutional support, this can escalate into burnout and attrition.
3. **Job satisfaction is influenced by a combination of factors**, including work environment, professional relationships, and growth opportunities. While generally satisfactory, the lower rating in access to professional development calls for more consistent capacity-building interventions.
4. **A statistically significant relationship exists between transformational leadership and both mental health and job satisfaction**, validating the theoretical framework of Bass (2006). Teachers who perceive their school heads as transformational leaders report lower stress levels and higher job satisfaction.
5. **Demographic variables such as age and teaching experience moderately influence well-being and satisfaction**, suggesting the need for differentiated leadership and support systems that are responsive to career stages.
6. **A targeted leadership-based action plan is essential** for sustaining teacher engagement, reducing psychological distress, and enhancing professional growth. Such a plan must include structured mentoring, mental health initiatives, inclusive leadership practices, and professional development programs.

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