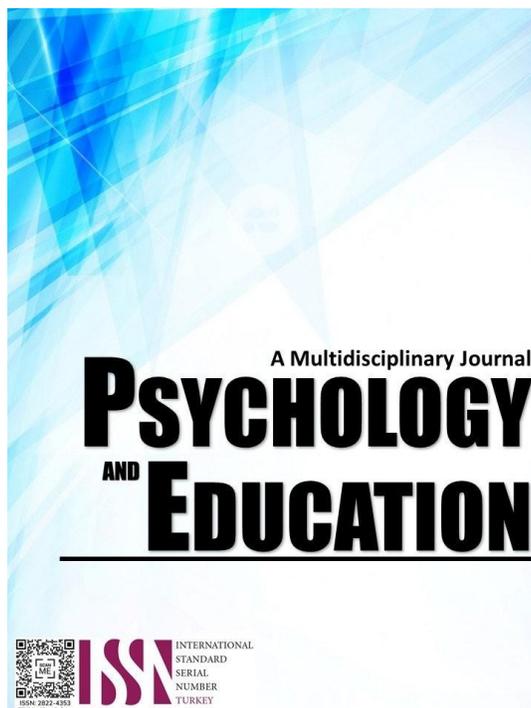


**CHALLENGES OF SCHOOL HEADS IN THE MERIT AND PROMOTION
PROCESS FOR SELECTED PUBLIC JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN
REGION III: INPUTS FOR HUMAN RESOURCE
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**



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Challenges of School Heads in the Merit and Promotion Process for Selected Public Junior High Schools in Region III: Inputs for Human Resource Development Program

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Abstract

This study examined the challenges faced by school heads during the merit and selection process in public junior high schools for the 2022-2023 school year. It aimed to provide insights that can enhance human resource development programs by addressing issues caused by limited resources, which often lead to frustration among teachers and administrators. The research highlighted how implementing targeted strategies can help school heads overcome obstacles while maintaining the principles of meritocracy, competence, suitability, and fairness. Key focus areas included human resource management, organizational philosophy, professional development, and adherence to fair promotion practices. The study also explored differences in profile variables and identified critical components for improving human resource initiatives. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, alongside non-parametric tests such as the Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U tests. Findings aim to support school leaders in validating promotions, advancing careers, and strengthening professional competence within the Department of Education.

Keywords: *challenges, competence, merit and selection, merit system, human resource development program, school administrators*

Introduction

School heads play a crucial role in shaping educational outcomes in public junior high schools. Effective leadership is crucial for managing productive and efficient schools, particularly as the education sector evolves in response to global advancements. The Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines emphasizes career development and innovative teacher management practices to support this goal.

The DepEd Merit Selection Plan governs the recruitment, hiring, retention, and promotion of qualified personnel in public schools. This merit system, aligned with Civil Service Commission policies and the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, ensures promotions are based on competence, fitness, and equity, regardless of gender, religion, or political affiliation (Republic Act No. 9155, 2001). The recent DepEd Order 007, s. 2023 further guides recruitment, selection, and appointment processes to strengthen merit-based promotions.

However, challenges persist in the implementation of the merit and promotion system. Studies (Utomo, 2022) highlighted that gaps in the merit system can undermine teacher motivation and productivity. School heads, as leaders, play a critical role in addressing these challenges by fostering structured, flexible, and fair promotion processes.

The Department of Education's Equivalent Record Form (ERF) tracks teachers' qualifications and professional development; however, it does not guarantee timely promotions, as advancement depends on the availability of vacancies. This limitation, coupled with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), often results in delayed career progression, causing frustration among educators.

As a result, many teachers feel disengaged from the merit and promotion process, struggling with career advancement and recognition of their qualifications and competencies. This study aims to explore the challenges school heads face in managing the merit and promotion process in select public junior high schools in Region III. The findings will provide valuable inputs for human resource development programs to enhance professional competence, career advancement, and the integrity of the promotion system.

Research Questions

The general problem of the study is: How can the proposed inputs for Human Resource Development Programs address the challenges faced by school heads in the merit and promotion process be constructed and validated? Specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - 1.1. age;
 - 1.2. sex;
 - 1.3. educational attainment;
 - 1.4. length of service;
 - 1.5. position; and
 - 1.6. number of supervised teachers?

2. How are the challenges of school heads in the merit and promotion process described in terms of:
 - 2.1. human resource management;
 - 2.2. organizational philosophy;
 - 2.3. professional development; and
 - 2.4. adherence to fitness and equality?
3. Is there any significant difference in the challenges of school heads in the merit and promotion process when grouped according to profile variables?
4. What are the challenges experienced by the school heads in the merit and promotion process?
5. What inputs to the human resource development program can be developed to address the findings of this study?

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a mixed-methods research design. A descriptive approach was employed to systematically describe the challenges faced by school heads in the merit and promotion process within selected autonomous public junior high schools in Region III.

The participants were school heads from select public junior high schools in Region III. These participants were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in the merit and promotion process, ensuring that the data collected was relevant and insightful.

The primary data collection instrument was a researcher-developed questionnaire, validated by three experts in the field of education to ensure content validity. The reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha. The questionnaire included both quantitative items and open-ended questions to capture a broad range of data on the challenges experienced by school heads. In addition to the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of school heads to gather in-depth qualitative information about their experiences and perspectives.

The survey questionnaires were distributed to the selected school heads, and responses were collected within a specified timeframe. Following the survey, interviews were conducted with willing participants to explore emerging themes in greater detail and provide a richer context for the quantitative findings.

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify common challenges and patterns among school heads. Qualitative data from interviews were thematically analyzed to complement and deepen the understanding of the survey results.

This study employed an explanatory mixed-methods design, also known as an explanatory sequential design, which is a research approach that begins by gathering and analyzing quantitative data and then proceeds to collect and analyze qualitative data to provide further insight or clarification of the quantitative findings.

Respondents

The researcher selected 115 school heads from Region III (53 from Bulacan province, 41 from Pampanga, and 21 from Zambales) as respondents for the study, employing random sampling without specific inclusion or exclusion criteria.

Moreover, in the qualitative part, fifteen (15) school heads were included and answered the semi-structured interview. There is no specific criterion set in the selection process except for their roles as school heads.

Instrument

The main tools the researcher employed to gather all necessary data for a comprehensive and effective study were the specially designed interview questionnaires and the selected survey questionnaire. Holmes (2023) stated that a questionnaire is a carefully crafted set of questions that enables researchers to efficiently collect data from a large group of participants, facilitating the obtaining of a representative sample. Likewise, Scribbr (2023) noted that questionnaires can be either self-administered or administered by the researcher, serving as useful instruments for collecting both qualitative and quantitative information, as long as the questions are clear, logically arranged, and pretested to ensure their validity and reliability.

In this study, Cronbach's alpha was utilized to assess the reliability of the scale designed to measure the targeted construct. The alpha value of 0.972 reflected an acceptable degree of internal consistency among the items, indicating they effectively capture the same underlying concept. This level of reliability justified using the scale for further analysis, although there is potential to improve item consistency in future research.

The researcher's self-created questionnaire consisted of two sections: one focused on the roles of school heads in the merit and promotion process, and the other gathered input relevant to the human resource development program under study. It was designed in accordance with the guidelines set forth in DepEd Order No. 007, s. 2023 (Department of Education [DepEd], 2023).

The selected questionnaires in this research study were based on the Merit Selection Plan 2023 of DepEd. The initial draft of the questionnaire was presented to the thesis adviser and three other field experts in educational management and language for critiquing,

suggestions, revisions, and final editing. They are Jefferson John P. Basto, EdD, Head Teacher III in the Schools Division of Bataan, Bingo B. Dela Cruz, MAEd, Instructor at Bataan Peninsula State University- Balanga Campus, and Mark Kevin Y. Dimaun, Dean of Instruction at Bataan Peninsula State University- Bagac Campus. All suggestions for enhancing and improving the instrument were carefully considered and applied. It is only after such processes that the revised draft of the questionnaire was made feasible for the evaluation of the school heads.

Procedure

During the study and validation of the management enhancement program, a letter was prepared and signed by the school division Superintendent within Region III and the school heads themselves, respectively. After the approval of the permission letters, the distribution of the modules and evaluation forms was conducted to gather all the necessary data for the study. The researcher personally distributed and collated the questionnaires and the evaluation forms to the respondents. For the qualitative part of the study, the researcher interviewed fifteen (15) school heads to obtain rich data regarding the challenges they face.

This study adhered to the protocol and standard set by the University in the conduct of research. Likewise, the approval of authorities and consent forms was accomplished first before the actual distribution of the modules and the evaluation forms. The researcher also maintained the anonymity of the respondents' identities and the confidentiality of the data gathered on them. Moreover, the APA 7th edition format will be used for citing the references found in the study.

Data Analysis

This study employs two types of data analysis. The first one is the statistical treatment for the quantitative part, and the second one is the thematic analysis for the qualitative part.

Statistical Treatment

The researcher personally coded, tallied, and tabulated the data collected.

Data Processing and Statistical Treatment

The following statistical statements were used to analyze the data gathered.

1. Frequency. The number of respondents who responded to the item was ascertained using it.
2. Percentage. By dividing the total number of respondents, one may determine the rate per hundred. The age, gender, and duration of service demographic profile of the respondents was described using this information.

The Mann-Whitney U test and the Kruskal-Wallis test were used to analyze the gathered data using descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation. Also referred to as one-way ANOVA on ranks, the Kruskal-Wallis test is a non-parametric method for assessing whether samples come from the same distribution. The Mann-Whitney U test, on the other hand, is a non-parametric substitute for the independent sample t-test. This non-parametric test establishes whether two sample means from the same population are equal by comparing them. The Mann-Whitney U test is typically used when the data are ordinal or the assumptions of the t-test are not met.

The data and information gathered from the evaluation forms, which assess the merit and promotion process through Human Resource Management, Organizational Philosophy, Professional Development, and Adherence to Fitness and Equality, will be analyzed using the mean and standard deviation.

Thematic Analysis

For the qualitative part of the study, Braun et al. (2022) employed reflexive thematic analysis to fully grasp the insights of school heads. The six-step reflexive thematic analysis involved: first, thoroughly familiarizing oneself with the data through repeated reading and note-taking; second, coding important features across the dataset; third, identifying initial broader themes from the codes; fourth, reviewing and refining these themes to ensure they accurately represent the data; fifth, clearly defining and naming each theme to capture its core meaning; and finally, writing up a cohesive report that integrates the analysis with relevant literature. Moreover, to facilitate the analysis, MAXQDA software was utilized for easier data management and analysis.

Ethical Considerations

After receiving formal approval for the dissertation proposal, the researcher took the next step of obtaining the necessary permissions to conduct the study. This process began with submitting a formal letter of request to the Regional Director of the Department of Education (DepEd) Regional Office III. Securing this approval was essential to ensure that the research adhered to institutional policies and ethical standards, especially since it involved educational institutions and their personnel.

The letter served several important functions: it officially informed the regional authority about the study's objectives, scope, and methodology, while also requesting authorization to conduct interviews with school staff. Gaining this approval was crucial to legitimizing the research activities and encouraging cooperation from the schools and participants.

Once granted, the permit from the Regional Office clearly defined the parameters and timeline for data collection. This clarity helped



the researcher avoid administrative and logistical difficulties during the study. By following the outlined guidelines, the researcher was able to coordinate effectively with school heads and teachers, minimizing disruptions to their regular responsibilities and maintaining a professional research environment.

Additionally, the researcher demonstrated ethical responsibility by committing to share the study's results and findings with both the Department of Education and the participating schools. This practice not only ensured transparency but also allowed these stakeholders to benefit from the insights, potentially aiding in the formulation of policies, professional development, and administrative improvements.

Results and Discussion

This section analyzed and interpreted data relevant to the study on the Issues and challenges faced by school heads in the Merit and Promotion Process for Select Public Junior High Schools in Region III, providing inputs for the Human Resource Development Program during the 2023-2024 school year.

Part I. Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, educational attainment, length of service, position, and number of supervised teachers.

Table 1. Profile of the School Heads

Profile	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
34 to 39 years old	6	5.22
40 to 45 years old	26	22.61
46 to 51 years old	39	33.91
52 to 57 years old	26	22.61
Sex		
Female	74	64.35
Male	41	35.65
Highest Educational Attainment		
MA Units	13	11.30
MA Graduate	9	7.83
EDD/PHD Units	45	39.13
EDD/PHD Graduate	48	41.74
Length of Service		
1 to 3 years	2	1.74
4 to 6 years	4	3.48
7 to 9 years	4	3.48
10 to 12 years	25	21.74
13 years and above	80	69.57
Position		
Principal 1	29	25.22
Principal 2	17	14.78
Principal 3	8	6.96
Principal 4	61	53.04
Number of Supervised Teachers		
1 to 9	5	4.35
10 to 19	5	4.35
20 to 29	7	6.09
30 to 39	14	12.17
40 and above	84	73.04
Total	115	100.00

Number of Cases = 183

It can be gleaned from Table 1 that from the total of 115 respondents, 39 or 33.91% aged between 46 to 51 years old, 26 or 22.61% aged between 40 to 45 years old, similarly, 26 or 22.61% ages between 52 to 57 years old, while 18 or 15.65% ages 58 years old and above, and 6 or 5.22% ages between 34 to 39 years old. According to the data, the majority of responders are in the 46–51 age range. This data may be explained by the fact that the majority of school heads are currently in the prime of their managerial careers.

As for the sex, the data show that 74 or 64.35% of the administrators are female, while 41 or 35.65% are male. According to the data, the majority of public-school heads had expertise in the area; 39 out of them, or 33.91%, were between the ages of 46 and 51. With 74 or 64.35% of the respondents, the data further revealed that there are more females than males. It is safe to assume that most respondents are female.

In line with this, Castañeros, Tañajura, and Tan (2023) highlighted that newly appointed school heads often struggle with limited



leadership experience and the challenge of managing both personal and professional duties. This corresponded with the observation that many school heads are in their late 40s or early 50s, an age range when educators usually have gained sufficient experience to take on leadership positions.

It can also be gleaned that 48 or 41.74% are EdD/PhD graduates, while 45 or 39.13% have EdD/PhD units, 13 or 11.30% have MA units, and 9 or 7.83% are MA graduates. Similarly, 48, or 41.74%, were awarded to EDD/PhD graduates due to the position's greater demand for a more intensive application of skills and responsibilities. These findings align with Savaş's (2015) findings, which suggest that leadership and educational attainment are essential for conducting business in school organizations, just as they are in any other organization. When an organization is effective, it achieves its objectives more effectively and efficiently.

In terms of length of service as School Principal, data reveals that 80, or 69.57% have at least 13 years in their credentials, 25, or 21.74% have 10 to 12 years, 4, or 3.48% have 4 to 6 years, while 4 or 3.48% have 7 to 9 years, and 2 or 1.74% have 1 to 3 years.

On position, data shows that 61 or 53.04% are School Principals 4, 29 or 25.22% are School Principals 1, 17 or 14.78% are School Principals 2, and 8 or 6.96% are School Principals 3. 61, or 53.04%, were likely Principal 4 since they advanced to the knowledge and training level.

To support this, Aguilar (2023) found that strong school leadership is strongly connected to the management skills of school heads, which are cultivated through years of experience in areas such as instruction, personnel, and finance. This aligned with the observation that most principals in your study have lengthy tenures, as such experience is typically necessary for greater leadership effectiveness.

In terms of the number of supervised teachers, 84 or 73.04% of them have not less than 40 teachers under their jurisdiction, 14 or 12.17% have 30 to 39 teachers, 7 or 6.09% of them have 20 to 29 teachers, while 5 or 4.35% of them have 1 to 9 teachers, and 5 or 4.35% have 10 to 19 teachers.

Additionally, the data reveal that 73.04% of supervised teachers, or more school leaders, were in charge of 40 or more teachers. It can be inferred that most school heads manage large-scale schools.

Part II. Teachers' Training

Part 2 describes the issues and challenges of school heads in terms of Human Resource Management, Organizational Philosophy, Professional Development, Adherence to Fitness, and Equality.

Table 2. *Human Resource Management*

Indicators	Mean	SD	DI
1. We have policies that state the organization's policy.	3.87	1.06	Slightly Challenging
2. We have processes assessing the organization's immediate and future needs.	3.61	1.23	Slightly Challenging
3. We have a human resource management assessment being carried out.	3.77	1.14	Slightly Challenging
4. We have an updated human resource management meeting participated monthly/quarterly/yearly	3.70	1.03	Slightly Challenging
5. We have reliable developmental consultants.	3.63	0.89	Slightly Challenging
Composite	3.72	0.94	Slightly Challenging

Legend: 4.20–5.00 Not Challenging At All; 3.40–4.19 Slightly Challenging; 2.60–3.39 Moderately Challenging; 1.80–2.59 Challenging; 1.00–1.79 Extremely Challenging; SD-Standard Deviation; DI-Descriptive Interpretation

As shown in Table 2, School Principals described human resource management (Mean=3.72, SD=0.94) as slightly challenging, and among the indicators, the highest mean is on indicator 1 (Mean=3.87, SD=1.06), which is described as slightly challenging, while the lowest mean is on indicator 2 (Mean=3.61, SD=1.23) and is also described as slightly challenging.

Emphasizing the roles that school heads play in terms of promotion and merit encourages adherence and ensures that evaluations are completed most of the time. It can also be inferred that the administrators' tasks of performance and planning commitment are typically completed. Similarly, Whang (2020) highlighted that the responsibilities of school heads in managing human and financial resources, coordinating educational activities, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders have become increasingly demanding, particularly during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This aligned with the finding that school heads view human resource management as a challenging task.

Table 3. *Organizational Philosophy*

Indicators	Mean	SD	DI
1. We have a relevant organizational mission and objectives.	3.72	1.37	Slightly Challenging
2. We have market changes and a community involvement plan.	3.67	1.02	Slightly Challenging
3. We have cultural philosophies adapted to the needs of all stakeholders	3.68	1.00	Slightly Challenging
4. We have personnel involvement policies.	3.57	1.30	Slightly Challenging
5. We have assigned policy-makers in the organization	3.63	0.99	Slightly Challenging
Composite	3.65	1.03	Slightly Challenging

Legend: 4.20–5.00 Not Challenging At All; 3.40–4.19 Slightly Challenging; 2.60–3.39 Moderately Challenging; 1.80–2.59 Challenging; 1.00–1.79 Extremely Challenging; SD-Standard Deviation; DI-Descriptive Interpretation



Table 3 depicts that School Principals described organizational philosophy (Mean=3.65, SD=1.03) as slightly challenging, and among the indicators, the highest mean is on indicator 1 (Mean=3.72, SD=1.37), which is described as slightly challenging, while the lowest mean is on indicator 4 (Mean=3.63, SD=0.99) and also described as slightly challenging.

As Reigeluth's Elaboration Theory (1979) suggested, organizational structures and philosophies should develop gradually from simple to more complex forms, enabling individuals to adjust and succeed. If the organizational philosophy is vague or inconsistently developed, school heads may face difficulties in aligning their management approach and school culture with changing expectations.

Table 4. *Professional Development*

Indicators	Mean	SD	DI
1. We have Research, Innovations or Patented Innovations, Publications, and other creative works	3.53	0.93	Slightly Challenging
2. We encourage and have books, original, edited, or compiled, copyrighted/published	3.70	0.95	Slightly Challenging
3. We have Scholarly research/ Educational Technical Articles/Digital journals	2.95	1.14	Moderately Challenging
4. We have relevant training, seminars, and workshops.	3.63	1.38	Slightly Challenging
5. We have governing talent acquisition and professional innovation for all.	3.64	0.98	Slightly Challenging
Composite	3.49	0.93	Slightly Challenging

Legend: 4.20–5.00 Not Challenging At All; 3.40–4.19 Slightly Challenging; 2.60–3.39 Moderately Challenging; 1.80–2.59 Challenging; 1.00–1.79 Extremely Challenging; SD-Standard Deviation; DI-Descriptive Interpretation

Table 4 shows that School Principals described professional development (Mean = 3.49, SD = 0.93) as slightly challenging. Among the indicators, the highest mean is for indicator 5 (Mean = 3.64, SD = 0.98), which is described as slightly challenging, while the lowest mean is for indicator 3 (Mean = 2.95, SD = 1.14), described as moderately challenging.

Using one of the theoretical foundations, Flavell (1978) emphasized the importance of self-regulation and reflective practice in learning. Effective professional development requires school heads to be self-aware and capable of evaluating their own learning needs, which can be difficult without targeted support and opportunities for reflection.

Table 5. *Adherence to Principles of Fitness and Equality*

Indicators	Mean	SD	DI
1. Acknowledge the responsibility to monitor and document important information by the Department of Education Merit and Selection Plan.	3.87	1.00	Slightly Challenging
2. Pay attention and record important specifics that represent real-life occurrences and actions, including both favorable and unfavorable accomplishments that serve as the foundation for recognition and advancement.	3.52	1.29	Slightly Challenging
3. Continue the process of coaching and feedback to teachers at your school.	3.66	1.42	Slightly Challenging
4. Provide coaching and feedback by the administrator/rater and seek the teachers/input to improve work performance and behavior for merit and promotion.	3.65	1.35	Slightly Challenging
5. Create a supportive atmosphere and take action to enhance performance while overseeing and nurturing individual capabilities in performance evaluation.	3.61	1.34	Slightly Challenging
6. Determine a mid-year review that prescribes the progress in achieving the objectives.	3.99	1.05	Slightly Challenging
7. Inform the teacher/ ratee of the status of performance during the mid-year review.	3.72	1.37	Slightly Challenging
8. Provided coaching, feedback, and appropriate interventions whenever necessary.	4.02	1.03	Slightly Challenging
9. Familiarize responsibly with the tools—RPMS, E-sat, IPCRF	4.05	1.07	Slightly Challenging
10. A review is recommended to assess the advancement in meeting the goals.	3.96	1.01	Slightly Challenging
11. Inform the administrator/rater of the status of the performance of the teacher/ ratee during the mid-year review.	3.70	1.36	Slightly Challenging
12. Complete the four (4) classroom observations by the end of the school year.	3.74	1.39	Slightly Challenging
Composite	3.79	1.18	Slightly Challenging
Composite	3.49	0.93	Slightly Challenging

Legend: 4.20–5.00 Not Challenging At All; 3.40–4.19 Slightly Challenging; 2.60–3.39 Moderately Challenging; 1.80–2.59 Challenging; 1.00–1.79 Extremely Challenging; SD-Standard Deviation; DI-Descriptive Interpretation

Table 5 shows that School Principals described Adherence to the Principles of Fitness and Equity (Mean = 3.79, SD = 1.18) as slightly challenging. Among the indicators, the highest mean is for indicator 9 (Mean = 4.05, SD = 1.07), which is described as slightly challenging. The lowest mean is for indicator 2 (Mean = 3.52, SD = 1.29), which is also described as slightly challenging.

In line with the theoretical foundation utilized, Young's (1958) theory criticized the notion that merit-based systems are always fair, warning that such systems can unintentionally perpetuate bias and social stratification. The theory was particularly relevant as it highlights how, despite formal policies, subjectivity and favoritism can hinder true equity and fitness in promotions. The data showing challenges in adherence to these principles echoed Young's concerns about the gap between policy and practice.



Table 6. Summary of Challenges

Indicators	Mean	SD	DI
Human Resource Management	3.72	0.94	Slightly Challenging
Organizational Philosophy	3.65	1.03	Slightly Challenging
Professional Development	3.49	0.93	Slightly Challenging
Adherence to the Principles of Fitness and Equality	3.79	1.18	Slightly Challenging
Overall	3.66	0.98	Slightly Challenging

Legend: 4.20–5.00 Not Challenging At All; 3.40–4.19 Slightly Challenging; 2.60–3.39 Moderately Challenging; 1.80–2.59 Challenging; 1.00–1.79 Extremely Challenging; SD-Standard Deviation; DI-Descriptive Interpretation

Table 6 summarizes the issues and challenges faced by school heads in terms of Human Resource Management (Mean = 3.72, SD = 0.94), Organizational Philosophy (Mean = 3.65, SD = 1.03), Professional Development (Mean = 3.49, SD = 0.93), and Adherence to Fitness and Equality (Mean = 3.79, SD = 1.18), which are described as slightly challenging. The findings of this research highlight the issues and challenges faced by school heads in the merit and promotion process.

With the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads, as outlined in the Human Resource Development Program, highlighting the issues and challenges faced, school heads can now have comprehensive information regarding their inputs for teachers' merit and promotion processes. The roles are clearly stated and assessed through a survey questionnaire, considering how they are practiced. The survey questionnaire comprises a systematic method for assessing their roles. Responses are measured on a scale and interpreted with descriptive equivalents, allowing respondents to share their insights precisely and fully on how all inputs are performed. With this, the realization of how school heads in each input can help their teachers comply and achieve the requirements for merit and promotion. Encouraging and supporting teachers to consistently address the issues and challenges mentioned will properly guide school heads in helping their teachers.

According to Diose (2019), teachers' job satisfaction is inevitable, as raising employee satisfaction requires an awareness of the variables influencing merit and promotion. Promotion and merit have an impact on the physical and emotional health of educators in their jobs, in addition to their quality of instruction. It also helps the school retain potential academics, reduce absenteeism rates, and meet the expectations of highly skilled faculty. If the school heads can effectively manage the schools they oversee, this goal can be achieved.

Part III. Comparison

The following tables present the significant differences in the challenges faced by school heads and the merit and promotion process when grouped according to profile variables.

Table 7. Challenges vis-a-vis Age

Variables	Group	Mean	Mean Rank	H	Sig.	Decision on H ₀	Interpretation
Human Resource Management	34 to 39 years old	4.73	94.92	45.71	<.001	Rejected	Significant
	40 to 45 years old	3.58	51.85				
	46 to 51 years old	3.00	33.63				
	52 to 57 years old	4.32	78.35				
	58 years old and above	4.24	78.00				
Organizational Philosophy	34 to 39 years old	4.70	92.92	43.46	<.001	Rejected	Significant
	40 to 45 years old	3.50	51.69				
	46 to 51 years old	2.87	34.31				
	52 to 57 years old	4.35	79.15				
	58 years old and above	4.23	76.25				
Professional Development	34 to 39 years old	4.60	97.58	49.19	<.001	Rejected	Significant
	40 to 45 years old	3.37	53.06				
	46 to 51 years old	2.80	33.79				
	52 to 57 years old	4.23	84.75				
	58 years old and above	3.73	65.75				
Adherence to the Principles of Fitness and Equality	34 to 39 years old	4.69	85.58	50.01	<.001	Rejected	Significant
	40 to 45 years old	3.60	51.10				
	46 to 51 years old	2.80	32.82				
	52 to 57 years old	4.74	82.60				
	58 years old and above	4.53	77.81				
Overall	34 to 39 years old	4.68	95.25	47.90	<.001	Rejected	Significant
	40 to 45 years old	3.51	51.15				
	46 to 51 years old	2.87	33.24				
	52 to 57 years old	4.41	81.56				
	58 years old and above	4.18	75.08				

At the .05 level of significance.



The analysis using the Kruskal-Wallis H Test shows a significant difference in the responses of school principals in the areas of Human Resource Management ($H=45.71, p<.001$), Organizational Philosophy ($H=43.46, p<.001$), Professional Development ($H=49.19, p<.001$), and Adherence to Fitness and Equality ($H=50.01, p<.001$). Furthermore, this is supported by the overall responses of the school principals ($H = 47.90, p < .001$) when grouped by age. The p-values are less than the alpha of .05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

After further analysis using Dunn's test, a post hoc analysis test, it was found that the difference occurred when comparing the responses of individuals aged 46 to 51 years old (Mean=2.87, Mean Rank=33.247), which is considered the lowest among the responses of the other age groups of principals.

Table 6 suggests that most school heads in the 46-51 age range have found merit and promotion challenging after reaching the corresponding age. The data revealed further what the respondents perceived as the most compelling aspects, and their age.

Findings suggested that the age of school principals may influence the likelihood of receiving merit-based promotions. It appears that those between the ages of 46 and 51 tend to prioritize different aspects of school improvement.

Similarly, Steed, De Nobile, and Waniganayake (2021) noted that merit-based promotions are often complicated by subjective opinions and unconscious biases, issues that tend to be more noticeable to seasoned principals who have had multiple interactions with the system.

Table 8. *Challenges vis-a-vis Sex*

Variables	Group	Mean	Mean Rank	U	Sig.	Decision on H_o	Interpretation
Human Resource Management	Female	3.66	56.32	1393.00	0.46	Failed to Reject	Not Significant
	Male	3.81	61.02				
Organizational Philosophy	Female	3.60	55.91	1362.00	0.36	Failed to Reject	Not Significant
	Male	3.75	61.78				
Professional Development	Female	3.45	56.20	1384.00	0.43	Failed to Reject	Not Significant
	Male	3.58	61.24				
Adherence to the Principles of Fitness and Equality	Female	3.75	57.74	1498.00	0.91	Failed to Reject	Not Significant
	Male	3.86	58.46				
Overall	Female	3.62	56.02	1370.50	0.39	Failed to Reject	Not Significant
	Male	3.75	61.57				

At the .05 level of significance.

The results of the analysis using the Mann-Whitney U-test indicate that there is insufficient evidence to assert a significant difference in the school principals' responses regarding Human Resource Management ($U=1393.00, p=0.46$), Organizational Philosophy ($U=1362.00, p=0.36$), Professional Development ($U=1384.00, p=0.43$), and Adherence to Fitness and Equality ($U=1498.00, p=0.91$). This is further supported by the overall responses of the principals ($U = 1370.50, p = 0.39$) when grouped by sex, as the p-value is greater than the alpha of 0.05, failing to reject the null hypothesis.

The table indicates that school heads report that teacher merit and promotion processes are not affected by a teacher's sexual orientation.

To reiterate, the Department of Education's Merit Selection Plan (DepEd, 2022) stipulates that merit-based promotions must be conducted without discrimination based on sex, gender, or other personal attributes. Your findings offer empirical evidence that these policies are effectively implemented in practice.

Table 9. *Challenges vis-à-vis Highest Educational Attainment*

Variables	Group	Mean	Mean Rank	H	Sig.	Decision on H_o	Interpretation
Human Resource Management	MA Units	4.29	77.12	17.20	<.001	Rejected	Significant
	MA Graduate	4.62	90.06				
	EDD/PHD Units	3.64	56.80				
Organizational Philosophy	EDD/PHD Graduate	3.46	47.94	12.90	<.001	Rejected	Significant
	MA Units	4.34	77.69				
	MA Graduate	4.44	83.56				
Professional Development	EDD/PHD Units	3.57	55.71	11.74	<.01	Rejected	Significant
	EDD/PHD Graduate	3.40	50.02				
	MA Units	4.14	81.08				
Adherence to the Principles of Fitness	MA Graduate	4.04	75.11	15.66	<.01	Rejected	Significant
	EDD/PHD Units	3.43	56.09				
	EDD/PHD Graduate	3.28	50.33				
	MA Units	4.60	77.15				
	MA Graduate	4.77	88.50				



and Equality	EDD/PHD Units	3.69	55.00	15.47	<.01	Rejected	Significant
	EDD/PHD Graduate	3.48	49.91				
Overall	MA Units	4.34	77.77	15.47	<.01	Rejected	Significant
	MA Graduate	4.47	87.83				
	EDD/PHD Units	3.58	55.90				
	EDD/PHD Graduate	3.40	49.02				

At the .05 level of significance.

The analysis using the Kruskal-Wallis H Test shows significant differences in the school principals' responses regarding Human Resource Management (H=17.20, p<.001), Organizational Philosophy (H=12.90, p<.001), Professional Development (H=11.74, p<.01), and Adherence to Fitness and Equality (H=15.66, p<.01). This is further supported by the overall responses of the school principals (H=15.47, p<.01) when they are grouped by highest educational attainment. The p-values are less than the alpha of .05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

After additional analysis using Dunn's test, which is a posthoc analysis test, it was found that the difference is when the responses of those with EdD/PhD degree (Mean=3.40, Mean Rank=49.02) which is considered low when compared to the responses of the group of the principals with MA units (Mean=4.34, Mean Rank=77.77) and MA Degree (Mean=4.47, Mean Rank=87.83).

This finding confirms that most school heads would rather have a strong educational foundation to carry out their responsibilities.

Additionally, Amalia et al. (2024) noted that educational qualifications often play a significant role in merit-based promotion systems, while also highlighting the challenges in maintaining fairness and transparency.

Table 10. Challenges vis-à-vis Length of Service as Principal

Variables	Group	Mean	Mean Rank	H	Sig.	Decision on H ₀	Interpretation
Human Resource Management	1 to 3 years	4.50	83.50	20.72	<.001	Rejected	Significant
	4 to 6 years	4.55	88.00				
	7 to 9 years	4.05	69.88				
	10 to 12 years	3.00	33.24				
	13 years and above	3.86	63.01				
Organizational Philosophy	1 to 3 years	4.70	90.25	20.67	<.001	Rejected	Significant
	4 to 6 years	4.65	91.38				
	7 to 9 years	4.10	73.38				
	10 to 12 years	2.87	34.40				
	13 years and above	3.80	62.13				
Professional Development	1 to 3 years	4.70	101.25	23.95	<.001	Rejected	Significant
	4 to 6 years	4.15	79.38				
	7 to 9 years	4.00	78.75				
	10 to 12 years	2.79	32.36				
	13 years and above	3.62	62.83				
Adherence to the Principles of Fitness and Equality	1 to 3 years	5.00	101.50	23.92	<.001	Rejected	Significant
	4 to 6 years	4.58	79.00				
	7 to 9 years	4.25	66.75				
	10 to 12 years	2.77	31.82				
	13 years and above	4.02	63.61				
Overall	1 to 3 years	4.73	98.50	22.42	<.001	Rejected	Significant
	4 to 6 years	4.48	85.13				
	7 to 9 years	4.10	73.00				
	10 to 12 years	2.86	32.76				
	13 years and above	3.83	62.77				

At the .05 level of significance.

The Kruskal-Wallis H Test indicates a significant difference in the responses of school principals in the areas of Human Resource Management (H=20.72, p<.001), Organizational Philosophy (H=20.67, p<.001), Professional Development (H=23.95, p<.001), and Adherence to Fitness and Equality (H=23.92, p<.001). This difference is further supported by the overall responses of the school principals (H = 22.42, p < .001) when grouped by years in service as School Principals, as the p-values are less than the alpha of .05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

After further analysis using Dunn's test, which is a post hoc analysis test, it was found that the difference is when the responses of those in the service for 10 to 12 years (Mean=2.86, Mean Rank=32.76), which is considered the lowest when compared to the responses of the other principals' group when it comes to years in service.

The table shows that school heads can support teachers for merit and promotion because they have experience in the field. The idea presented by Gaster (2020) promotes a local strategy that places a strong focus on the workforce's or organization's length of service



as a way to gauge their performance and provide them with the opportunity to reflect and grow from it. It also helps management determine whether their companies are stagnating, declining, or improving.

Table 11. *Challenges vis-a-vis Position*

Variables	Group	Mean	Mean Rank	H	Sig.	Decision on H ₀	Interpretation
Human Resource Management	Principal 1	4.23	75.14	37.76	<.001	Rejected	Significant
	Principal 2	4.49	85.44				
	Principal 3	4.07	71.38				
	Principal 4	3.20	40.45				
Organizational Philosophy	Principal 1	4.28	76.98	36.77	<.001	Rejected	Significant
	Principal 2	4.40	81.24				
	Principal 3	4.22	73.88				
	Principal 4	3.07	40.42				
Professional Development	Principal 1	4.01	76.24	42.87	<.001	Rejected	Significant
	Principal 2	4.12	80.24				
	Principal 3	4.35	86.69				
	Principal 4	2.95	39.37				
Adherence to the Principles of Fitness and Equality	Principal 1	4.56	77.83	41.70	<.001	Rejected	Significant
	Principal 2	4.60	79.82				
	Principal 3	4.72	80.69				
	Principal 4	3.07	39.52				
Overall	Principal 1	4.27	78.09	42.62	<.001	Rejected	Significant
	Principal 2	4.40	83.09				
	Principal 3	4.34	76.81				
	Principal 4	3.07	38.99				

At the .05 level of significance.

The analysis using the Kruskal-Wallis H Test reveals a significant difference in the school principals' responses regarding Human Resource Management (H=37.76, p<.001), Organizational Philosophy (H=36.77, p<.001), Professional Development (H=42.87, p<.001), and Adherence to Fitness and Equality (H=41.70, p<.001). Additionally, when the principals are grouped according to their positions, the overall responses (H = 42.62, p < .001) confirm these findings, as the p-values are less than the alpha level of .05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

After further analysis using Dunn's test, a post hoc analysis test, it was found that the difference was significant when comparing the responses of Principal 4 (Mean=3.07, Mean Rank=38.99), which was considered the lowest among the other principals in terms of position.

The data revealed that there are numerous ongoing issues and challenges related to merit-based promotions. The findings indicated that all respondents held a negative perception that promotions were primarily based on seniority. Both higher and middle-level employees agreed that hard work did not guarantee promotion when the opportunity arose.

In line with this, Kanwetuu, Brenyah, and Obeng (2020) found that teachers' and leaders' commitment is significantly influenced by how fair they perceive promotions to be. However, favoritism and a lack of transparency undermine this perception, a view also reflected in the agreement among your respondents.

Table 12. *Challenges vis-à-vis Number of Supervised Teachers*

Variables	Group	Mean	Mean Rank	H	Sig.	Decision on H ₀	Interpretation
Human Resource Management	1 to 9	4.08	68.20	20.43	<.001	Rejected	Significant
	10 to 19	4.44	82.50				
	20 to 29	4.57	88.07				
	30 to 39	4.36	80.18				
	40 and above	3.47	49.73				
Organizational Philosophy	1 to 9	4.16	74.00	18.34	.001	Rejected	Significant
	10 to 19	4.52	84.40				
	20 to 29	4.46	82.93				
	30 to 39	4.30	78.25				
	40 and above	3.40	50.02				
Professional Development	1 to 9	3.72	67.70	10.89	0.028	Rejected	Significant
	10 to 19	4.04	79.00				
	20 to 29	4.03	74.64				
	30 to 39	3.97	74.86				
	40 and above	3.32	51.98				



Adherence to the Principles of Fitness and Equality	1 to 9	4.23	68.90	19.77	.001	Rejected	Significant
	10 to 19	4.63	78.10				
	20 to 29	4.80	86.36				
	30 to 39	4.62	81.00				
	40 and above	3.49	49.96				
Overall	1 to 9	4.05	70.20	18.72	.001	Rejected	Significant
	10 to 19	4.41	82.30				
	20 to 29	4.46	83.07				
	30 to 39	4.31	80.71				
	40 and above	3.42	49.95				

At the .05 level of significance.

The analysis using the Kruskal-Wallis H Test shows that there are significant differences in the school principals' responses regarding Human Resource Management ($H=20.43$, $p<.001$), Organizational Philosophy ($H=18.34$, $p=.001$), Professional Development ($H=10.89$, $p=.028$), and Adherence to Fitness and Equality ($H=41.70$, $p<.001$). This is further supported by the overall responses of the school principals ($H = 19.77$, $p = .001$) when they are grouped by the number of supervised teachers. The p-values are less than the alpha of .05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

After further analysis using Dunn's test, a post hoc analysis test, it was found that the difference is significant when comparing the responses of those who handle 40 teachers or more (Mean=3.42, Mean Rank=49.95), which is considered the lowest when compared to the responses of the other group of principals.

The table indicates that schools with a higher number of teachers under the supervision of their heads encounter more significant challenges when it comes to merit-based promotions.

For emphasis, Department of Education policies (DO 32, s. 2011; DepEd Order No. 007, s. 2023) emphasize the need for systematic HRM and professional development practices; however, your findings suggest that these are more challenging to implement effectively in larger schools. Tingle et al. (2019) also emphasized that school principals should shape the school's culture by demonstrating skilled management and strong leadership. This included roles, skills, and behaviors associated with leadership.

Part IV. Results of the Qualitative Coding Analysis of the Interview Data

Theme 1: Challenges

This theme captured the participants' experiences and concerns encountered while performing their roles as school heads, which significantly affects their capacity to assist teachers in the merit and promotion process. The theme also includes how participants cope with these challenges.

Subtheme 1.1: Challenges as to Issues about Compliance with DepEd Policies

Participants expressed concerns about the frequent changes and localization of the Department of Education (DepEd) guidelines, which complicate adherence and timely compliance.

Participant 1: "If you are referring to the new guidelines, sa totoo lang pabago-bago at pabigla-bigla. Madalas naglo-localize pa." (If you are referring to the new guidelines, to be honest, they are inconsistent and sudden. They often localize it too.)

Despite these challenges, some participants acknowledged the need to adapt to revised guidelines in order to keep pace with changes in the educational system.

Participant 8: "Napapanahon naman ang revised guidelines kasi need talaga natin to adapt to these changes in the educational system." ("The revised guidelines are timely because we need to adapt to these changes in the educational system.")

To emphasize, DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2020 (Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads) outlined specific expectations for school leaders to remain responsive and adaptable to policy changes, highlighting the ever-changing education landscape and the importance of ongoing professional development and adherence. In line with this, the National Education Policy 2020 emphasized a merit-driven system for teacher retention, career progression, and salary increases, incorporating factors such as peer reviews, attendance records, continuous professional development, and community engagement to recognize and reward outstanding educators (Ranjan, 2020).

Subtheme 1.2: Challenges as to Coping Strategies

Participants described various coping mechanisms to navigate the complexities of the merit and promotion process. These include:

Being Knowledgeable. Understanding the guidelines thoroughly and communicating changes proactively.

Participant 5: "Ipinapaliwanag ko sa kanila ang lahat ng merit and promotion guidelines, sinabi ko na anytime pwedeng magbigay ng changes sa guidelines kaya kailangan talagang i-grab na as early as possible..." ("I explain to them all the merit and promotion

guidelines, I told them that anytime changes can be made to the guidelines, so it needs to be grabbed as early as possible...")

Maintaining Positivity. Employing optimism and self-motivation to overcome challenges.

Participant 11: "Yung bagong memo, sarili mo lang naman ang kalaban mo... It is up to you to prepare yourself to ensure your promotion." ("In the new memo, your only enemy is yourself. It is up to you to prepare yourself to ensure your promotion.")

Partnership Projects, Compliance, and Monitoring Mechanisms. While not explicitly quoted here, these approaches reflect collaborative and systematic efforts to ensure adherence to policies.

As pointed out by Abdurahman and Ghoer (2022), school principals held a crucial responsibility in improving the quality of education through school-based management, although this role was not always fully realized.

Theme 2: Common Social Struggles of School Heads

This theme encompassed the difficult or adverse experiences participants faced, including issues related to teacher motivation, communication, and trust, which impact the merit and promotion process.

Subtheme 2.1: Motivating Teachers to Pursue Promotion

Several participants highlighted the difficulty in encouraging teachers to engage actively in the merit and promotion process.

Participant 6: "Actually, kasi, 1 year pa lang akong na assigned as a school head... lahat sila hindi motivated magpa-promote." ("Actually, I've only been assigned as a school head for 1 year. None of them are motivated to get promoted.")

The lack of motivation was linked to teachers' unawareness of opportunities and the absence of encouragement from school heads.

Participant 10: "Alam mo napakahalaga talaga ng moral encouragement from your superior... Marami silang maibibigay na tulong para magkaroon ang guro ng maganda at complete na papers for merit and promotion." (You know, moral encouragement from your superior is very important... They can provide a lot of help for teachers to have good and complete papers for merit and promotion.)

Another participant emphasized the influential role of school heads in motivating teachers to prepare their documents and participate in the ranking process.

Participant 15: "So talagang malaki ang influence ng school head para sa promotion ng isang guro... mas madami pang guro ang mai-push na mag-ipon sila ng papel at mag-participate sa ranking." ("So, the school head really has a big influence on the promotion of a teacher..." more teachers will be encouraged to gather their documents and participate in the ranking.)

Moreover, Devanadera and Ching (2023) investigated the connection between the managerial roles of school interpersonal, decisional, and informational, and the organizational performance of public elementary schools. They found that effectively carrying out these roles greatly improved both school and teacher performance. Their study emphasized the crucial role of strong leadership in supporting teachers and enhancing overall school results, particularly in the face of challenges brought about by the "new normal" in education, which is supported by the study's findings.

Subtheme 2.2: Lack of Open Communication

Communication gaps between school heads and teachers emerged as a significant challenge.

Participant 8: "Isa sa mga challenges talaga ang open communication or lack of communication... ang school head dapat talaga bababa ka sa kanila." ("One of the challenges is open communication or lack of communication. The school head needs to go down to them.")

Participant 12: "Napaka importante ng open communication." ("Open communication is very important.")

The findings revealed that communication gaps between school heads and teachers remained a significant challenge, highlighting the vital role of open communication within the educational setting. This directly supported Nguyen's (2019) claim that strong communication, along with emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills, was essential for boosting teacher satisfaction and retention. The participants' emphasis on the importance of open communication reinforced the notion that effective dialogue and mutual understanding between school leaders and teachers are essential for improving teacher performance and job satisfaction. Consequently, addressing these communication barriers was crucial for creating a supportive school environment consistent with the key factors for educational success identified by Nguyen.

Subtheme 2.3: Autonomy and Misinformation

Some respondents noted that teachers often act independently without formally informing school heads, leading to miscommunication and misinformation.

Participant 4: "Between the school head and the teacher, siguro yung madalas na nagso-solo ang teachers... hindi formally ini-inform ang school head." ("Between the school head and the teacher, maybe it's often the teachers who go solo... not formally informing the school head.")

Participant 9: "I think the problem is that some teachers are not informing us, with their actions..."

Similarly, school heads perceived their curriculum leadership duties to include monitoring, motivating, setting examples, communicating, and managing staff (Tapala et al., 2021). This emphasized that communication and personnel management were fundamental aspects of a school head's role. The reference to "communicating" directly connected to the concerns expressed by your participants about the absence of formal communication and the tendency of teachers to make decisions independently without notifying school heads.

Subtheme 2.4: Personal and Systemic Challenges

Participants reported personal challenges related to misinformation and the prioritization of administrative duties over promotional activities. Lack of initiative among teachers further complicates the process.

Participant 7: "Some of our teachers are not interested in the promotion, they just want to work..."

Participant 12: "When it comes to my teachers, ilan sa kanila, dahil hindi naman need, nagfo-focus lang sa work nila..." ("When it comes to my teachers, some of them, since it's not necessary, they just focus on their work...")

Furthermore, teachers and school heads experienced delays, bureaucratic hurdles, and reduced motivation due to the current promotion systems (TV5 News, 2023). This specifically addressed the issue of "decreased motivation" among teachers, which was consistent with the participants' observations that many teachers were uninterested in pursuing promotion and chose to concentrate solely on their routine tasks. It also mentioned "delays" and "bureaucratic obstacles," which are related to the systemic issues and administrative burdens highlighted in the findings.

Conclusions

In light of the findings of the study, the researcher arrived at the following conclusions: the respondents are predominantly female, aged 46–51, holding EdD or PhD degrees, with 10–12 years of service, and serving as Principal I, supervising 40 or more teachers, which reflects a highly experienced and qualified group of school leaders; they face only slight challenges in their roles, with the most common difficulties involving adherence to rules on fairness and equality, managing staff, aligning with the school's goals, and supporting professional growth, suggesting the need for targeted interventions to enhance their effectiveness; the analysis reveals that age has no significant effect on the challenges faced, while educational attainment, length of service, position, and number of supervised teachers all show significant relationships with these challenges, indicating that these factors influence the nature and extent of difficulties experienced; school heads encounter considerable challenges in aligning school programs with DepEd policies and curriculum standards, requiring meticulous planning, regulatory compliance, and effective communication for successful implementation; they also face social challenges such as fostering teacher growth, improving communication, and managing misinformation, all of which impact school climate and staff morale, and these can be addressed through open communication, trust-building, and strong professional leadership; finally, in terms of significant differences in the challenges of school heads and the merit and promotion process when grouped according to profile variables, all variables rejected the null hypothesis except for sex.

Based on the results of the study, the researcher recommends the following: enhance leadership training for school heads by providing comprehensive programs that develop skills in managing merit and promotion processes, resource management, and effective communication; streamline the merit system by reviewing and simplifying current processes to reduce promotion waiting periods, ensure timely validation and classification of teachers, and establish clear guidelines and timelines for each stage; focus resources on key factors such as educational level, years of service, job position, and the number of teachers supervised—since age is not a major influence—to provide tailored support that enhances leadership capacity and teacher motivation; ensure that school heads engage in careful planning and consistent communication to align school programs with DepEd policies and curriculum standards, staying informed about regulations, involving teachers in transparent discussions, and overseeing program execution to improve compliance and school performance; foster open communication and trust within teams, uphold well-defined professional standards, and promote ongoing teacher development to address social challenges, improve the school environment, raise staff morale, and strengthen overall school effectiveness; and, recognizing that sex does not significantly influence the challenges or the merit and promotion process, prioritize other profile factors such as educational attainment, years of service, position, and supervisory responsibilities when designing support programs and policies.

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