

Leading Curriculum Change: A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of School Heads Implementing the Strengthened Senior High School Curriculum

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Publication history:

Received: September 13, 2026

Revised: October 15, 2026

Accepted: October 18, 2026

Published: October 19, 2026

International Journal of Sustainable and Integrated Studies, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 659–668, October 2026.

Abstract

This study explored the experiences, challenges, and leadership responses of five public school heads implementing the Strengthened Senior High School Curriculum in the Bicol Region, Philippines, and developed a preliminary contextualized leadership framework. Guided by Educational Change Theory and the Narrative Inquiry Framework, it employed qualitative narrative inquiry using purposive sampling. Data were collected through written narrative responses, clarification calls, field notes, and document reviews, then analyzed through narrative re-storying and thematic narrative analysis. Six themes emerged: meaning-making amid uncertainty, capacity-building under resource constraints, distributed and relational leadership, stakeholder engagement, contextual resourcefulness, and reflective leadership development. Participants reported teacher shortages, scheduling difficulties, instructional resource limitations, and stakeholder concerns, which they addressed through collaborative planning, mentoring, consultations, and community partnerships. Four school heads described critical experiences that shaped their leadership perspectives, whereas one reported relatively stable implementation. These findings informed the preliminary SPARC Curriculum Leadership Framework, comprising Sense-Making, People-Centered Capacity-Building, Alliance-Building, Resourceful Contextualization, and Continuous Resilience. The study recommends institutional support and further framework validation. It supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 and indirectly relates to Goal 8 by highlighting leadership conditions for educational continuity and workforce-oriented curriculum implementation. Its sustainability implications concern institutional adaptability, professional collaboration, and context-responsive curriculum leadership.

Keywords: Adaptive Leadership, Curriculum Implementation, Educational Change, Narrative Inquiry, Public School Heads, SPARC Curriculum Leadership Framework, Stakeholder Engagement, Strengthened Senior High School Curriculum

1. Introduction

Curriculum reform requires school leaders to translate educational policies into effective instructional and administrative practices. Successful implementation depends on leadership capacity, teacher preparedness, institutional collaboration, and the ability to respond to emerging challenges (Fullan, 2016; Azorín & Fullan, 2022). In the Philippines, the Strengthened Senior High School (SHS) Curriculum introduces changes intended to improve educational relevance, learner preparedness, and alignment with higher education and employment pathways. These reforms place substantial responsibilities on school heads, who coordinate instructional

adjustments, resource allocation, teacher development, and stakeholder engagement (Department of Education, 2025b; Hermogenes & Escarlos, 2026). This study explores the professional narratives of five public school heads implementing the Strengthened SHS Curriculum in the Bicol Region to identify their experiences, challenges, and leadership responses and propose a preliminary contextualized curriculum leadership framework.

Educational change extends beyond revising curriculum standards and institutional policies. It requires shifts in professional practices, organizational relationships, and collective understanding of reform objectives. Fullan (2016) emphasized the complexity of educational change, while Azorín and Fullan (2022) highlighted the importance of collaborative cultures in sustaining institutional improvement. School heads therefore serve as instructional and organizational leaders responsible for connecting policy requirements with school-level implementation. In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, expanded basic education through the K to 12 Program, including two years of Senior High School (Republic Act No. 10533, 2013). Although the program aimed to strengthen graduates' readiness for employment, entrepreneurship, and higher education, implementation continued to face limitations involving resources, curriculum offerings, teacher qualifications, and industry coordination. Abrigo and Orbeta (2023) emphasized the importance of addressing these gaps while recognizing the potential educational and employment benefits of additional schooling. To improve the relevance and responsiveness of SHS education, the Department of Education introduced curriculum revisions emphasizing streamlined learning pathways, foundational competencies, and greater alignment with learners' aspirations and workforce requirements. Stakeholder consultations informed the proposed adjustments (Department of Education, 2025a). The Strengthened SHS Curriculum underwent Grade 11 pilot implementation during School Year 2025–2026 (Department of Education, 2025b). For School Year 2026–2027, the Department subsequently directed full Grade 11 implementation while continuing the Grade 12 pilot in designated schools (Department of Education, 2026a, 2026b). These developments require school heads to manage staffing, subject offerings, instructional resources, professional development, and communication with stakeholders. Aya-ay et al. (2026) identified organizational readiness, teacher preparation, and instructional resources as important implementation concerns. These responsibilities highlight the importance of understanding how school heads exercise leadership while navigating curriculum transitions, particularly in the institutional contexts of the Bicol Region.

Recent Philippine studies identify curriculum readiness, professional development, resource management, and institutional collaboration as recurring concerns in educational reform. Herrera (2025), through a scoping review of MATATAG Curriculum implementation studies, emphasized teacher and school-head experiences, training, resilience, and administrative support. Bentayao et al. (2024) likewise found that school heads implementing policy changes relied on adaptive leadership, strategic assistance, and capacity-building. These studies concern the broader MATATAG and revised K to 10 reforms rather than the Strengthened SHS Curriculum specifically, but provide relevant insights into school-level change management. Research directly examining the Strengthened SHS Curriculum presents comparable implementation concerns. Balagtas and Buenavidez (2026) identified curricular misalignment, resource constraints, institutional gaps, and instructional adaptation among SHS teachers. Aya-ay et al. (2026) emphasized organizational preparedness and continuing professional support, while De Mesa and Urgil (2026) highlighted instructional resource limitations, assessment difficulties, teacher collaboration, and the importance of mentoring and professional learning communities. Hermogenes and Escarlos (2026) further underscored the need for equitable resources, teacher development, stakeholder partnerships, and sustained policy support. School leadership is equally important in addressing these challenges. Ta-Ala et al. (2025) associated school heads' readiness and positive attitudes with preparation, professional development, and stakeholder engagement. Labag (2025) identified resilience, flexibility, emotional intelligence, and strategic adaptation as important leadership responses during curriculum transitions. Meanwhile, Creagh et al. (2025) documented workload intensification and time pressures among teachers and school leaders, reinforcing the importance of institutional support and manageable administrative responsibilities. International research provides further insights into school-level reform implementation. Grgić and Jutzi (2024) demonstrated relationships between organizational culture and teachers' perceptions of curriculum reform, while Ho et al. (2025) showed how misunderstandings and superficial agreement among educational leaders and teachers can weaken implementation. Azorín and Fullan (2022) emphasized collaboration and professional relationships as foundations of sustainable educational change. Collectively, these studies suggest that effective curriculum implementation depends not only on technical readiness but also on leadership interpretation, institutional culture, communication, and collective professional engagement.

The implementation of the Strengthened SHS Curriculum occurs within diverse educational environments. In the Bicol Region, participating public schools differ in infrastructure, teacher specialization, and available community resources, creating varying administrative demands. These institutional conditions make school heads responsible for contextualizing curriculum requirements while maintaining instructional continuity. At the national level, Philippine studies have identified resource limitations, teacher preparedness, and institutional capacity as continuing concerns in curriculum implementation (Herrera, 2025; Aya-ay et al., 2026). Abrigo and Orbeta (2023) stressed the need to improve SHS service delivery and strengthen connections between educational preparation

and future employment. More recent investigations of the Strengthened SHS Curriculum similarly emphasized school-level support, instructional adaptation, and organizational coordination (Balagtas & Buenavidez, 2026; Hermogenes & Escarlos, 2026). Globally, educational reform is understood as an institutional and relational process influenced by organizational culture, professional experiences, and leadership practices. So et al. (2024), examining curriculum decentralization in South Korea, demonstrated that policy interpretation is shaped by teachers' experiences, professional autonomy, and school relationships. Ho et al. (2025) identified communication and sense-making challenges during curriculum development in Hong Kong, while Grgić and Jutzi (2024) highlighted the influence of school culture on reform implementation in Switzerland. Similarly, UNESCO (2024) emphasized instructional leadership, collaboration, professional development, and appropriate institutional support in improving educational quality. These findings provide an international perspective for examining the experiences of school heads implementing curriculum reform in the Philippine context.

The study is anchored in Fullan's Educational Change Theory, which explains educational reform as a complex and continuing process involving meaning-making, capacity-building, collaboration, leadership, and improvement. Fullan (2016) emphasized that meaningful reform requires changes in organizational practices and professional relationships rather than compliance with policy directives alone. This perspective is reinforced by Azorín and Fullan (2022), who identified collaborative professional cultures as essential to educational transformation. Complementing this theoretical foundation is the Narrative Inquiry Framework of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), which examines lived experiences through three interconnected dimensions: temporality, sociality, and place. Temporality concerns the relationship between past experiences, present circumstances, and future expectations. Sociality considers personal feelings, professional relationships, and institutional interactions, while place refers to the physical and organizational settings in which experiences occur. Together, these frameworks provide a basis for understanding how school heads interpret curriculum requirements, respond to implementation challenges, and construct meaning from their leadership experiences. They support an examination of educational change as both an institutional process and a personally experienced professional journey.

Existing research provides important evidence concerning curriculum implementation, resource limitations, teacher preparedness, and leadership practices. However, much of the reviewed Philippine literature focuses on implementation readiness, teacher experiences, administrative management, or measurable leadership characteristics (Herrera, 2025; Ta-Ala et al., 2025; Balagtas & Buenavidez, 2026). Although Bentayao et al. (2024) examined school heads' management practices through qualitative inquiry, their research addressed the MATATAG Curriculum rather than the Strengthened SHS Curriculum. Recent studies directly concerning the Strengthened SHS Curriculum have primarily examined teacher experiences, readiness gaps, and implementation requirements (Aya-ay et al., 2026; De Mesa & Urgil, 2026; Hermogenes & Escarlos, 2026). These contributions leave a need for further examination of school heads' professional narratives, particularly how they interpret reform mandates, experience critical events, manage institutional pressures, and develop adaptive leadership responses over time. Addressing this gap, the present study employs qualitative narrative inquiry to explore the experiences of five public school heads implementing the Strengthened SHS Curriculum in the Bicol Region. Guided by Fullan's Educational Change Theory (Fullan, 2016) and the narrative dimensions established by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), the inquiry examines school heads' implementation stories, identifies critical challenges and leadership responses, and seeks to formulate a preliminary contextualized curriculum leadership framework. The study aims to contribute experience-based insights that may inform educational leadership development and curriculum implementation practices.

The study primarily supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), which emphasizes inclusive, equitable, and quality learning opportunities. UNESCO (2024) identified effective educational leadership, professional capacity-building, and institutional collaboration as important conditions for improving educational systems. By examining the experiences of school heads implementing curriculum changes, the study contributes to understanding the administrative and instructional support needed to sustain educational quality. The study also has a secondary connection to Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) through the Strengthened SHS Curriculum's objectives of improving workforce readiness and educational pathways. Abrigo and Orbeta (2023) emphasized the relationship between SHS education, employment opportunities, and the development of relevant competencies. The study's contribution to this goal is indirect, focusing on the leadership conditions that support curriculum implementation rather than measuring employment outcomes.

The study contributes to educational, institutional, and community sustainability by examining how school heads manage curriculum transitions while maintaining instructional continuity and supporting teachers. Research emphasizes that sustainable educational change requires collaboration, professional capacity, institutional adaptability, and supportive leadership (Azorín & Fullan, 2022; UNESCO, 2024). Its institutional relevance concerns school-level decision-making, resource coordination, professional development, and adaptive leadership. Studies of curriculum implementation highlight the importance of organizational readiness, leadership resilience, and continuing support in managing educational transitions (Labag, 2025; Aya-ay et al., 2026). Its

community and socioeconomic relevance lies in understanding how school leadership supports locally responsive educational practices and the implementation of pathways intended to prepare learners for further education and employment (Abrigo & Orbeta, 2023; Hermogenes & Escarlos, 2026). By developing a preliminary curriculum leadership framework grounded in the narratives of Bicol school heads, the study may offer insights for strengthening institutional capacity, collaborative governance, and the continuity of educational reform.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative narrative inquiry design grounded in Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) framework, which examines how individuals construct meaning through personal experiences and professional narratives. This approach allowed an exploration of school heads' leadership experiences during the implementation of the Strengthened SHS Curriculum. The inquiry was organized around three interconnected dimensions: temporality, which considered past experiences, present actions, and future expectations; sociality, which examined personal emotions and professional relationships; and place, which addressed institutional, geographical, and socioeconomic conditions influencing leadership practices. These dimensions guided the interpretation of participants' experiences within their respective educational settings.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in selected public secondary schools offering the SHS Program in the Bicol Region, Philippines. Participating schools represented different institutional sizes, geographical locations, socioeconomic conditions, and resource capacities. These variations provided contextual diversity for examining curriculum leadership experiences. Specific school names and locations were withheld to protect participants' identities and maintain confidentiality.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The study involved five public school heads, identified through the pseudonyms Principal A, Principal B, Principal C, Principal D, and Principal E. All participants were responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Strengthened SHS Curriculum in their respective schools. Principals A, B, and E had five to ten years of leadership experience, Principal C had more than ten years, and Principal D had less than five years. Principals C and E headed large public secondary schools, while Principal D served in a small rural school. Participants' identifying information was generalized to maintain confidentiality.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was employed to select five public school heads directly involved in implementing the Strengthened SHS Curriculum. This nonprobability sampling approach enabled the selection of participants whose professional experiences were relevant to the research objectives. Ahmed (2024a) emphasized the importance of aligning sampling techniques with the purpose and methodological requirements of a study. Participants were required to be appointed principals or officers-in-charge of public secondary schools offering SHS in Region V, have direct responsibility for curriculum implementation, and be willing to share detailed professional experiences. Selection considered variations in institutional settings, leadership experience, and resource conditions to obtain diverse accounts of curriculum implementation.

2.5 Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was a semi-structured narrative guide administered through written responses to gather detailed accounts of school heads' leadership experiences. Telephone clarification calls supplemented these responses. It included a participant profile, introductory questions, three major sections aligned with the research questions, and a concluding reflection. The questions addressed curriculum implementation experiences, critical events, operational challenges, leadership responses, and professional development. Knott et al. (2022) explained that qualitative interviews allow participants to articulate their interpretations and experiences while providing researchers with a structured yet flexible approach to data collection. The instrument encouraged chronological narratives, beginning with participants' initial awareness of curriculum reforms and continuing through preparation, implementation difficulties, stakeholder interactions, and leadership reflections. Field notes and official school documents served as supplementary sources for contextualizing participant accounts and examining the chronology of implementation events.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection involved written narrative responses, clarification calls, field notes, and document review. Each participant received the interview guide through email and submitted one completed response record. The records were dated July 27–28 and August 7, 2026. Participants spent approximately 60 to 110 minutes completing their responses, followed by telephone clarification calls lasting 10 to 20 minutes to address incomplete or unclear information. Clarification calls were conducted in Tagalog, Bikol, or English according to participant preference.

With participants' consent, the calls were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Translated quotations were checked against audio recordings by a second bilingual researcher, with disagreements resolved through discussion. Schumann et al. (2025) emphasized the importance of addressing linguistic and contextual meaning in cross-language qualitative research. Field notes were maintained to document relevant observations, emotional expressions, school environments, and researcher reflections. Official school documents were reviewed to contextualize participants' accounts and verify reported implementation events. Participants were informed of the study's objectives, procedures, voluntary nature, and confidentiality safeguards before participation.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis combined narrative re-storying based on Clandinin and Connelly (2000) with thematic narrative analysis informed by Fullan's Educational Change Theory (Fullan, 2016). The five researchers repeatedly examined the participants' records, reading each account at least twice before reorganizing the narratives chronologically according to temporality, sociality, and place. The resulting re-storied accounts represented interpretive reconstructions, with direct quotations distinguished from researchers' paraphrased descriptions. The second stage involved manual coding using Microsoft Excel. Bingham (2023) described the value of combining deductive and inductive coding to support systematic and transparent qualitative analysis. The first two researchers independently coded all five response records, while the third reviewed the codebook and addressed the remaining coding disagreements. Initial deductive codes were based on Fullan's constructs of meaning-making, capacity-building, collaboration, leadership, and continuous improvement. Additional inductive codes captured resource improvisation, established professional relationships, and stakeholder concerns. The codebook expanded from five initial codes to 28 and was subsequently reduced to 21 after merging overlapping categories. Approximately 15 excerpts required further discussion to resolve coding disagreements. The final codes were organized into six themes concerning meaning-making, capacity-building, distributed leadership, stakeholder engagement, contextual resourcefulness, and reflective leadership development. Divergent experiences, particularly Principal B's account of encountering neither resistance nor a significant leadership turning point, were retained. The themes subsequently informed the development of the SPARC curriculum leadership framework. Naeem et al. (2023) discussed how systematic thematic analysis can support the development of conceptual models from qualitative findings. Trustworthiness was addressed using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These dimensions continue to be recognized in contemporary qualitative research (Ahmed, 2024b). Credibility was supported through participant review of re-storied narratives, attributed quotations, and generalized events. All five participants approved their materials without revisions, although they did not review the cross-case themes. McKim (2023) emphasized the importance of meaningful participant review in qualitative research. Two external colleagues examined selected narrative excerpts and coding decisions, leading to refinements in the codebook and theme labels. Transferability was supported through contextual descriptions, while dependability was maintained through an audit trail of coded excerpts, codebook revisions, and analytical decisions. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive journals and researcher discussions. Olmos-Vega et al. (2023) emphasized the role of reflexivity in examining how researchers' experiences and assumptions influence qualitative interpretation.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study reported ethical procedures consistent with Republic Act No. 10173, or the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173, 2012). Administrative clearance was obtained from the concerned Schools Division Offices, and written informed consent was secured after participants received information about the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary participation, and confidentiality provisions. Participants were informed of their right to decline questions or withdraw without administrative consequences. Confidentiality was maintained through pseudonyms, gender-neutral references, and the removal or generalization of identifying institutional and personal information. Given the small sample, complete anonymity could not be guaranteed. Digital recordings, transcripts, and analytical records were encrypted and stored in password-protected cloud storage accessible only to the research team. Although the study did not undergo formal ethics committee review, the researchers documented administrative permission, informed consent, confidentiality safeguards, and participant authorization for audio recording.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Professional Narratives of School Heads in Implementing the Strengthened SHS Curriculum

3.1.1 Principal A: Managing Staff Shortages and Community Resistance

Principal A initially experienced uncertainty about the Strengthened SHS Curriculum and sought guidance from experienced colleagues. Implementation became particularly challenging when several teachers retired or pursued other career opportunities, resulting in staffing shortages and scheduling difficulties. Principal A requested additional personnel, redistributed teaching assignments, and sought assistance in preparing the master schedule. Parental misconceptions about the possible removal of SHS also prompted community consultations. The principal reported that these interventions restored community trust and stabilized enrollment, while the experience strengthened their commitment to purpose-driven leadership. These findings illustrate how curriculum

implementation requires adaptive decision-making, professional collaboration, and responsiveness to institutional challenges. Bentayao et al. (2024) emphasized that school heads implementing educational reforms must demonstrate adaptability, strategic support, and effective communication. Similarly, Ganon Shilon (2024) described school leaders as boundary spanners who connect policy expectations with institutional realities. Principal A's experience reflects the importance of combining administrative coordination with collaborative and community-oriented leadership.

3.1.2 Principal B: Structured Planning and Administrative Coordination

Principal B described a relatively stable implementation experience supported by division-level orientations, model class programs, and coordinated planning. Preparation involved consultations with the assistant principal, department heads, teachers, students, and parents. The primary challenge involved aligning old and new curriculum subjects with available teaching personnel. Unlike the other participants, Principal B reported no significant resistance, operational crisis, or critical leadership turning point. Principal B's account illustrates that curriculum reform can be experienced without major reported institutional disruptions. Ta-Ala et al. (2025) emphasized the importance of school heads' readiness, professional development, and implementation planning in curriculum transitions. Ho et al. (2025) further highlighted the importance of clear communication and shared understanding between educational leaders and teachers. Principal B's narrative suggests that structured administrative coordination and accessible policy information may support implementation without requiring crisis-driven leadership responses.

3.1.3 Principal C: Instructional Leadership and Teacher Support

Principal C managed curriculum implementation in a large secondary school offering academic and technical-vocational programs. Major challenges included teacher reassignment, scheduling requirements, laboratory sessions, and industry immersion arrangements. Some teachers experienced professional uncertainty because of changes in subject assignments. Principal C established professional learning communities, introduced alternative scheduling arrangements, and coordinated with local businesses to address immersion requirements. A critical turning point occurred when teachers expressed emotional exhaustion, prompting the principal to emphasize listening, mentoring, and instructional support. These findings highlight the importance of balancing administrative requirements with teachers' professional and emotional needs. De Mesa and Urgil (2026) identified instructional resource limitations, assessment challenges, and the need for mentoring and collaborative professional learning during Strengthened SHS implementation. UNESCO (2024) likewise emphasized leadership practices that prioritize professional development, instructional support, and collaboration. Principal C's experience illustrates the relevance of people-centered leadership in managing complex curriculum adjustments.

3.1.4 Principal D: Community-Based Resourcefulness and Curriculum Contextualization

Principal D implemented the curriculum in a small rural school serving an agricultural and coastal community. Preparation involved aligning learning pathways with local livelihoods, consulting teachers and community leaders, and addressing instructional resource limitations. When commercial training equipment was unavailable, teachers and students developed practical learning materials using scrap and donated resources. Principal D also addressed parental concerns through consultations and testimonials from former graduates. The principal reported that these efforts reduced hesitation and increased interest in relevant learning pathways. These findings illustrate contextualized leadership and community participation in addressing curriculum implementation challenges. Hermogenes and Escarlos (2026) emphasized equitable resources, stakeholder collaboration, and institutional support in implementing the Strengthened SHS Curriculum. Aya-ay et al. (2026) similarly identified instructional resources and organizational readiness as important implementation concerns. Principal D's experience suggests that local knowledge, community cooperation, and practical innovation can support curriculum implementation while highlighting continuing institutional resource needs.

3.1.5 Principal E: Relational Trust and Collaborative Curriculum Leadership

Principal E led a large secondary school with established professional relationships among faculty members and community stakeholders. Implementation involved reviewing teacher qualifications, enrollment trends, schedules, and resource requirements through collaborative planning. Mentoring and consultation were emphasized to address workload adjustments and instructional concerns. Following an implementation monitoring meeting, Principal E recognized the importance of teacher participation beyond administrative compliance. The principal reported that established professional trust encouraged open communication and strengthened collective responsibility. These findings emphasize relational trust and collaborative decision-making as important dimensions of curriculum leadership. Grgić and Jutzi (2024) demonstrated the relationship between organizational school culture and teachers' perceptions of curriculum reform. Azorín and Fullan (2022) likewise emphasized collaborative professional cultures as foundations of educational change. Principal E's narrative suggests that existing professional relationships can support collective problem-solving and institutional adaptation during curriculum transitions.

3.2 Cross-Narrative Themes in Curriculum Implementation and Leadership

Cross-narrative analysis identified six interconnected themes describing the participants' experiences of educational change. These themes were interpreted using Fullan's Educational Change Theory (Fullan, 2016), while allowing additional patterns to emerge from the participants' accounts.

3.2.1 Meaning-Making Under Curriculum Implementation Uncertainty

Principals A and C expressed initial hesitation and concern about implementing the revised curriculum, while Principals D and E described cautious optimism accompanied by uncertainty about institutional readiness. Principal B reported a more structured experience supported by division-level orientations and information dissemination. All five participants described seeking guidance through professional consultations, administrative orientations, or collaborative planning before initiating implementation. These findings demonstrate how school heads interpret educational reform according to their professional experiences and institutional circumstances. Ganon Shilon (2024) emphasized the role of principals in facilitating shared sense-making and negotiating curriculum requirements across institutional boundaries. So et al. (2024) similarly demonstrated that curriculum interpretation is influenced by professional experiences, organizational relationships, and school contexts. The participants' differing narratives also reflect the temporal and relational dimensions of professional experiences emphasized by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Meaning-making therefore emerged as an important foundation of curriculum leadership.

3.2.2 Capacity-Building Amid Staffing and Resource Constraints

Participants identified teacher shortages, scheduling difficulties, instructional preparation gaps, and resource limitations as major implementation challenges. Principal A experienced significant personnel losses, Principal B encountered repeated class program revisions, and Principal C managed complex faculty reassignments. Principals D and E emphasized teacher training, instructional materials, mentoring, and collaborative planning. Their responses involved professional development, workload adjustments, and coordination among teaching personnel. These findings are consistent with recent investigations of Strengthened SHS Curriculum implementation. Aya-ay et al. (2026) identified readiness gaps involving teacher preparation, organizational capacity, and instructional resources. Balagtas and Buenavidez (2026) similarly reported curriculum alignment problems, resource constraints, and institutional challenges affecting teachers. The present findings extend these discussions by illustrating how participating school heads experienced and responded to implementation difficulties through administrative adjustments and professional support.

3.2.3 Distributed and Relational Leadership Practices

All five participants described involving other school personnel in curriculum implementation. Principal A relied on an experienced colleague for scheduling assistance, while Principal B coordinated with the assistant principal and department heads. Principal C promoted cross-departmental collaboration, Principal D emphasized collective decision-making, and Principal E relied on established professional relationships. These accounts demonstrated shared responsibilities, professional consultation, and faculty participation in implementation decisions. The findings indicate that curriculum leadership was exercised through professional relationships and distributed responsibilities rather than solely through individual authority. UNESCO (2024) identified collaboration and professional capacity development as important dimensions of educational leadership. Azorín and Fullan (2022) likewise emphasized the importance of collaborative organizational cultures in supporting educational transformation. These perspectives reinforce the participants' accounts of shared expertise and institutional cooperation during curriculum implementation.

3.2.4 Managing Stakeholder Resistance Through Dialogue

Principals A and D encountered parental concerns regarding curriculum changes and learners' educational pathways, while Principals C and E described teacher concerns involving assignments, workload, and instructional responsibilities. Their responses included direct consultations, orientation sessions, community partnerships, and opportunities for stakeholder feedback. Principal E described open communication supported by established professional trust, while Principal B identified no teacher resistance beyond clarification questions. These findings highlight communication and stakeholder engagement as important leadership responses during curriculum transitions. Hermogenes and Escarlos (2026) emphasized the need for institutional collaboration and stakeholder participation in implementing the Strengthened SHS Curriculum. Ho et al. (2025) demonstrated that communication problems and differences in policy interpretation can weaken shared understanding during curriculum reform. The participants' experiences suggest that dialogue and consultation may help school heads address concerns while maintaining professional relationships. Principal B's contrasting account indicates that resistance was not universal.

3.2.5 Contextual Resourcefulness and Community Collaboration

Participants described adapting curriculum requirements to available institutional and community resources. Principal D developed instructional equipment from donated and recycled materials and aligned technical-vocational learning with local livelihoods. Principal C established partnerships to address industry immersion requirements, while Principal A adjusted implementation plans according to staffing capacity. Principal E

emphasized established professional trust in sustaining collaboration. Resourcefulness therefore appeared through material innovation and the use of existing social relationships. These findings demonstrate how school heads respond to resource limitations through contextualized decisions and community support. Hermogenes and Escarlos (2026) identified stakeholder partnerships and equitable resources as important considerations in curriculum implementation. Bentayao et al. (2024) similarly highlighted adaptive leadership and strategic support during Philippine curriculum transitions. Contextual resourcefulness emerged inductively from the participants' accounts rather than from the original theoretical constructs, suggesting its potential relevance to understanding school-level leadership in resource-constrained settings.

3.2.6 Reflective Growth and Leadership Transformation

Principals A, C, D, and E identified critical experiences that influenced their understanding of educational leadership. Principal A described responding decisively to staffing losses, Principal C recognized the importance of teacher well-being, Principal D emphasized community-based innovation, and Principal E acknowledged the limitations of compliance-oriented leadership. These experiences were associated with greater attention to collaboration, adaptability, and professional support. In contrast, Principal B reported no significant leadership turning point. These findings suggest that school heads may reinterpret their professional responsibilities through critical experiences and reflection. Labag (2025) emphasized resilience, emotional intelligence, flexibility, and adaptive leadership in managing curriculum transitions. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) likewise recognized that professional experiences acquire meaning through reflection across time, relationships, and context. The narratives of four participants indicate perceived movement toward more responsive and people-centered leadership. However, these interpretations do not establish that particular events caused leadership transformation, and Principal B's account demonstrates that such changes do not necessarily follow a crisis-driven pattern.

3.3 Development of the Preliminary SPARC Curriculum Leadership Framework

Cross-narrative findings informed the development of the preliminary SPARC Curriculum Leadership Framework, comprising five interconnected components: Sense-Making, People-Centered Capacity-Building, Alliance-Building, Resourceful Contextualization, and Continuous Resilience. Sense-Making emerged from participants' interpretations of curriculum uncertainty, while People-Centered Capacity-Building reflected responses to staffing challenges, professional development, and shared leadership. Alliance-Building emphasized stakeholder dialogue and collaborative decision-making. Resourceful Contextualization reflected material improvisation and local relationships, while Continuous Resilience captured reflective leadership responses to implementation difficulties. Principal B's divergent experience was retained, particularly because the participant reported neither significant resistance nor a critical turning point. The framework was developed from the six identified themes, with Fullan's educational change constructs providing an initial analytical foundation (Fullan, 2016). The SPARC Framework presents a preliminary interpretation of curriculum leadership rather than a validated model or extension of Fullan's theory. Its components reflect aspects of educational change associated with meaning-making, professional capacity, collaboration, leadership, and continuous improvement. Ganon Shilon (2024) emphasized principals' role in connecting school practices with external expectations, while Azorin and Fullan (2022) highlighted collaboration as an important foundation for sustained educational improvement. Resourceful Contextualization emerged inductively, particularly from Principal D's account of material innovation and Principal E's account of established professional relationships. Continuous Resilience similarly reflected the adaptive and reflective responses described by four participants. However, because the framework was developed from five school heads within one region, further research is required to examine its applicability, refine its components, and establish its usefulness across different educational settings. The six themes were consolidated into five framework components: meaning-making informed Sense-Making; capacity-building and distributed leadership informed People-Centered Capacity-Building; stakeholder engagement informed Alliance-Building; contextual resourcefulness informed Resourceful Contextualization; and reflective leadership development informed Continuous Resilience.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study revealed that the implementation of the Strengthened Senior High School Curriculum was experienced by five school heads as a complex process requiring relational leadership, contextual resourcefulness, and continuous reflection. Four participants identified critical experiences that prompted reflection on their leadership responsibilities and emphasized collaboration, adaptability, instructional support, or community engagement, while one experienced relatively stable implementation supported by established administrative procedures. Major challenges included teacher shortages, scheduling difficulties, resource limitations, and stakeholder resistance, which participants addressed through consultation, shared decision-making, community partnerships, and adaptive strategies. These findings informed the development of the preliminary SPARC Curriculum Leadership Framework, comprising Sense-Making, People-Centered Capacity-Building, Alliance-Building, Resourceful Contextualization, and Continuous Resilience. The framework provides a contextual interpretation of the participants' leadership experiences but requires further validation before broader application.

The study recommends that the Department of Education and Schools Division Offices consider the preliminary SPARC Framework as a basis for discussions on curriculum leadership development, subject to further validation. Educational authorities may provide early policy orientation, practical capacity-assessment tools, stakeholder engagement guidance, recognition of contextualized implementation strategies, and opportunities for professional reflection. Future researchers are encouraged to examine the framework across larger and geographically diverse school populations, conduct longitudinal investigations, and incorporate the perspectives of teachers, students, and parents to strengthen the findings. Further studies should also evaluate whether SPARC-aligned professional development improves school outcomes, teacher morale, and leadership confidence.

The study was limited to five purposively selected school heads from the Bicol Region, restricting the transferability of its findings. Data relied primarily on retrospective accounts collected through one written narrative response record from each participant, supplemented by clarification calls, making the narratives susceptible to memory reconstruction and differences in narrative depth. The re-storying process involved researcher interpretation, while confidentiality measures limited contextual descriptions. Although document reviews supported the verification of reported activities and timelines, they did not establish implementation effectiveness. The absence of teacher, student, and parent perspectives further limited the findings. Consequently, the proposed SPARC Framework remains preliminary and requires validation through broader and more comprehensive investigations.

5. Compliance with Ethical Standards

The study reported ethical procedures consistent with Republic Act No. 10173, or the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Administrative clearance was obtained from the concerned Schools Division Offices, and written informed consent was secured before participation. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, voluntary nature, confidentiality provisions, and their right to decline questions or withdraw without administrative consequences. Confidentiality was protected through pseudonyms, gender-neutral references, and the generalization of identifying information. Digital recordings, transcripts, and analytical records were encrypted and stored in password-protected cloud storage accessible only to the research team. Given the small sample, complete anonymity could not be guaranteed. The study did not undergo formal ethics committee review.

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