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The Work Stressors in Relation to The Instructional Leadership Competence of the School Heads in the Public Secondary Schools in the Province of Quezon

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between work stressors and instructional leadership competence among public secondary school heads in Quezon Province during School Year 2021–2022. Using a descriptive-evaluative-correlational design, the study involved 127 school heads from the Divisions of Tayabas, Lucena, and Quezon through total enumeration. Data were collected using a validated, researcher-made 95-item questionnaire and analyzed through descriptive and correlational statistics. Findings revealed that work stressors were "Much Evident," particularly in emotional and social dimensions, while instructional leadership competence was "Very Much Evident." Significant agreement was established in respondents' rankings of work stressors and most leadership competencies, except in responding to changing instructional program needs and continuing school improvement plans. A strong, highly significant positive relationship emerged between work stressors and instructional leadership competence ($r = 0.7504$, $p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that occupational stressors and instructional leadership competence are significantly associated within the participating schools. The study recommends strengthening institutional support, collaborative problem-solving, communication, professional development, instructional monitoring, and responsive school management practices. Its findings are limited to the participating school heads and the correlational design, which does not establish causality. The study contributes localized evidence to educational leadership research and provides a basis for institutional policies supporting school heads' well-being, effective instructional leadership, and sustainable educational management.

Keywords: Educational Leadership, Instructional Leadership Competence, Occupational Stress, Public Secondary Schools, School Heads, Work Stressors

1. Introduction

School heads undertake administrative and instructional responsibilities, including supervising teachers, monitoring learning outcomes, managing resources, and addressing stakeholder concerns. These responsibilities can involve excessive workloads, limited resources, interpersonal conflicts, and institutional expectations. In this study, work stressors are considered across emotional, intellectual, physical, and social dimensions. Emotional stressors involve anxiety, pressure, and frustration; intellectual stressors involve decision-making and problem-solving demands; physical stressors involve fatigue and insufficient rest; and social stressors involve communication difficulties and interpersonal conflicts. Examining these dimensions helps identify areas in which school heads may require support (Marsh et al., 2023; Rogers et al., 2025). Work stressors and instructional leadership competence are important considerations in public secondary school management. Instructional leadership involves guiding teaching and learning, supervising instruction, supporting teacher development,

monitoring learner progress, and pursuing educational objectives. School heads must also communicate effectively, make decisions, solve problems, and manage organizational responsibilities. Examining their leadership competence alongside work stressors provides a basis for understanding the demands associated with their roles (Hallinger, Liu, Aung, et al., 2025; Ninković & Knežević Florić, 2024). In the Philippine educational system, school heads are responsible for maintaining instructional quality, managing personnel and resources, and implementing educational policies. Republic Act No. 9155 (2001), or the Governance of Basic Education Act, establishes the framework for authority and accountability in basic education, while Republic Act No. 10533 (2013), or the Enhanced Basic Education Act, supports curriculum development and educational improvement. The Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), adopted through Department of Education Order No. 24, s. 2020, establishes professional expectations for school heads in leading strategically, managing school operations and resources, focusing on teaching and learning, developing themselves and others, and building connections (Department of Education, 2020). These expectations require school heads to balance administrative responsibilities with instructional leadership. In the Province of Quezon, school heads in public secondary schools operate within institutional conditions involving administrative demands, resource limitations, personnel concerns, and stakeholder expectations. Although workplace stress and leadership effectiveness have been examined in broader educational and organizational contexts, the specific relationship between work stressors and instructional leadership competence among public secondary school heads in Quezon Province requires localized investigation.

The study is conceptually anchored in the relationship between work stressors and instructional leadership competence. Work stressors are examined through four dimensions: emotional, intellectual, physical, and social. These dimensions represent the psychological, cognitive, physiological, and interpersonal challenges encountered by school heads in performing their responsibilities. Instructional leadership competence is examined through school heads' ability to promote collaborative problem-solving and open communication, prioritize school needs, respond to changing instructional requirements, continue school improvement initiatives, and maintain a clear focus on learners' achievement. The conceptual relationship recognizes that workplace demands and leadership responsibilities are interconnected. Examining these variables provides a basis for determining their association and identifying areas requiring administrative support, professional development, and improved school management practices.

Existing literature addresses occupational stress, employee performance, workplace attitudes, job satisfaction, and leadership responsibilities. However, these discussions do not fully explain the relationship between the specific work stressors experienced by school heads and their instructional leadership competence in public secondary schools in the Province of Quezon. The study addresses this contextual gap by determining the extent of emotional, intellectual, physical, and social work stressors; assessing instructional leadership competence in managing these stressors; examining agreement among respondents regarding their rankings; and determining the significant relationship between work stressors and instructional leadership competence. Conducted during School Year 2021–2022, the investigation also sought to formulate policy recommendations based on its findings. These objectives provide a foundation for identifying leadership development needs, strengthening administrative support, and improving workplace conditions for school heads (Doyle Fosco, 2022; Gooden et al., 2023).

The study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) by examining work-related stressors that may affect the emotional, intellectual, physical, and social well-being of school heads. Understanding these occupational challenges can inform supportive workplace practices and stress management initiatives. It also supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by examining instructional leadership competence in relation to workplace demands. Strengthening school heads' capacity to supervise instruction, support teachers, manage resources, and maintain educational standards is relevant to sustaining effective teaching and learning environments. Furthermore, the study relates to Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) through its emphasis on accountable school management, collaborative decision-making, effective communication, and institutional support. These leadership practices are relevant to strengthening the functioning of public educational institutions. These alignments represent the study's potential contributions rather than direct measurements of SDG achievement.

The study contributes to educational, institutional, public health, and socio-economic sustainability by examining the relationship between occupational stress and instructional leadership competence among public secondary school heads. From an educational sustainability perspective, effective instructional leadership supports continuous school improvement, teacher development, instructional supervision, and the delivery of quality education. Addressing workplace challenges may help school heads maintain their professional responsibilities and respond effectively to changing educational demands. In terms of institutional sustainability, the study emphasizes the importance of administrative support, collaborative problem-solving, communication, personnel management, and responsible resource utilization. These practices may strengthen school operations and promote supportive professional environments. From a public health and well-being perspective, identifying emotional, intellectual, physical, and social stressors provides a basis for considering appropriate occupational support and stress management measures. The study also has socio-economic relevance because effective school leadership contributes to the functioning of public educational institutions and the responsible management of available resources. Overall, the research provides a basis for policy recommendations that address work-related stressors while strengthening instructional leadership competence. Its findings may assist educational administrators and

other stakeholders in developing sustainable workplace practices that support school heads' well-being, institutional effectiveness, and the continued delivery of quality public secondary education (Shen & Wu, 2025).

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a descriptive-evaluative-correlational research design to examine the work stressors experienced by school heads and their instructional leadership competence in managing these challenges. The descriptive approach determined the extent of emotional, intellectual, physical, and social work stressors, while the evaluative approach assessed instructional leadership competence in collaborative problem-solving, communication, prioritization of school needs, instructional program adjustments, school improvement planning, and learners' achievement. The correlational approach examined agreement in respondents' rankings and the relationship between work stressors and instructional leadership competence without manipulating the study variables.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in public secondary schools across three school divisions in the Province of Quezon, Philippines: the Division of Tayabas, Division of Lucena, and Division of Quezon. Located in the CALABARZON Region, Quezon Province comprises diverse geographical areas, including mountainous, coastal, valley, and lowland communities. These divisions were selected to examine the work stressors and instructional leadership competence of school heads within the provincial public secondary education system.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents consisted of 127 school heads from public secondary schools in Quezon Province, comprising three from the Division of Tayabas, 14 from the Division of Lucena, and 110 from the Division of Quezon. They provided information regarding their emotional, intellectual, physical, and social work stressors and their instructional leadership competence in addressing administrative and instructional challenges.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was employed to identify the three school divisions included in the study, while total enumeration was used to select the respondents. All 127 school heads from the identified divisions participated, representing 100% of the target population. This approach ensured the inclusion of all identified school heads within the selected divisions and provided comprehensive data relevant to the research objectives.

2.5 Research Instrument

The study utilized a researcher-made survey questionnaire developed from relevant legal frameworks, related studies, theses, dissertations, and other reference materials. The instrument contained 95 items divided into two parts. The first assessed work stressors in terms of emotional, intellectual, physical, and social aspects, while the second evaluated instructional leadership competence in promoting collaborative problem-solving and communication, prioritizing school needs, responding to instructional changes, continuing school improvement initiatives, and focusing on learners' achievement. The questionnaire underwent validation to establish the relevance, clarity, and appropriateness of its items. Although the original manuscript reports a computed t-value of 6.85 as evidence of reliability, the specific reliability-testing procedure and corresponding reliability coefficient were not identified. Therefore, the instrument's reliability requires confirmation through the original testing documentation.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher initially prepared and presented the dissertation proposal for evaluation and incorporated the recommendations of the panel members. The questionnaire, checklist, and rating scale were subsequently developed, validated, and subjected to reliability testing. Permission to conduct the study was secured from the concerned educational authorities, including Assistant Schools Division Superintendent Dr. Elias A. Alicaya, Jr., through the appropriate administrative channels. Following approval, the researcher personally administered the validated questionnaire to the 127 school heads across the three divisions. Completed questionnaires were retrieved, checked for completeness, organized, and tabulated. The collected data were then analyzed and interpreted according to the study objectives to formulate conclusions and policy recommendations.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and correlational statistical techniques. Frequency counts and percentages described the distribution of respondents and their responses, while weighted means determined the extent of emotional, intellectual, physical, and social work stressors and assessed instructional leadership competence. Rank-order and correlational analyses were employed to examine agreement among respondents' rankings and determine the relationship between work stressors and instructional leadership competence, following established nonparametric statistical procedures (Siegel & Castellan, 1988). The manuscript's abstract

identifies Spearman's rho for correlation analysis and Kendall's coefficient of concordance (W), with the corresponding Chi-square test, for assessing rank-order agreement.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study observed ethical principles governing research involving human participants. Permission was obtained from the appropriate educational authorities, and respondents were informed about the purpose and nature of the investigation. Participation was voluntary, and information collected through the questionnaires was treated confidentially and used exclusively for academic and research purposes. Respondents' identities and personal information were protected, while the collected data were analyzed and reported objectively to maintain research integrity, accuracy, and credibility.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Work Stressors Experienced by School Heads

3.1.1 Nature and Sources of Work Stressors

The study found that work stressors among school heads were "Much Evident," particularly in the emotional and social dimensions. These findings reflect pressures associated with administrative responsibilities, workplace demands, interpersonal relationships, and the maintenance of school operations. Recent research has identified occupational demands, limited workplace resources, and psychological strain as relevant concerns affecting school principals' well-being (Leksy et al., 2023; Marsh et al., 2023). The present findings highlight the importance of identifying the specific workplace demands experienced by participating school heads. Karaevli (2024) identified multiple sources of burnout among school principals, including demands associated with parents, school personnel, senior management, and non-instructional workloads. These findings provide additional context for understanding the emotional and social work stressors reported by the participating school heads.

3.1.2 Teacher Stress and Coping Mechanisms

The study considered workload, administrative duties, role conflicts, available resources, and changing responsibilities as possible sources of occupational pressure. Stress responses and coping practices may differ across individuals and professional circumstances. These issues underscore the importance of examining school heads' experiences within their particular institutional settings (Hayes et al., 2022). The findings suggest that institutional support and appropriate coping practices warrant consideration when addressing school heads' occupational pressures. Because the present study did not directly test the effectiveness of particular coping interventions, such approaches are proposed for further assessment rather than presented as established outcomes of this investigation. Rice and Williams (2022) emphasized the importance of holistic wellness and self-care among school principals, including maintaining supportive relationships and engaging in practices that promote personal well-being. These considerations may inform the development of appropriate stress-management support for school heads.

3.1.3 Occupational Stressors and Role Ambiguity

The discussion of occupational stressors highlights the demands associated with unclear responsibilities and competing administrative and instructional tasks. School heads may need to reconcile multiple expectations while sustaining effective school operations. Further investigation is needed to establish which forms of support most effectively address these pressures in the participating divisions.

3.2 Instructional Leadership Competence of School Heads

3.2.1 Instructional Leadership and School Effectiveness

The study reported that instructional leadership competence was 'Very Much Evident' among the participating school heads. The assessed competencies included collaborative problem-solving, open communication, prioritizing school needs, adjusting instructional programs, continuing school improvement plans, and focusing on learners' achievement. These findings describe the respondents' reported competence within the study setting; they do not independently establish the effectiveness of particular leadership models (Hallinger, Liu, & Chen, 2025).

3.2.2 Human Resource Management and Staff Development

The assessment addressed personnel management, communication, supervision, professional development, and staff welfare as dimensions relevant to school leadership. Recent systematic evidence identifies teacher collaboration and professional learning as potential pathways linking school leadership and instructional practice (Ninković & Knežević Florić, 2024). The study's findings support considering institutional coordination and staff development when formulating recommendations. He et al. (2024) found that school principals' instructional leadership was significantly associated with teachers' professional development. This finding highlights the importance of leadership practices that encourage professional learning and support teachers' instructional growth.

3.2.3 Financial and Material Resource Management

Financial planning, budgeting, resource allocation, accountability, and maintenance of instructional facilities are relevant to the administrative context of school heads. Republic Act No. 9155 (2001) assigns school heads administrative responsibilities for personnel, physical, and fiscal resources. The present study did not independently measure the effects of financial-management interventions.

3.2.4 Leadership Competence and Organizational Performance

The study considered communication, decision-making, supervision, and organizational management as relevant aspects of instructional leadership. Recent systematic reviews connect school leadership practices to school processes and student achievement, although the strength and pathways of these associations vary (Özdemir et al., 2024; Shen & Wu, 2025). The reported leadership competence reflects respondents' assessments rather than a demonstrated causal effect on organizational performance. Meyer et al. (2023) examined how school principals supported teacher collaboration and organizational change during school improvement initiatives. Their findings highlight the importance of leadership practices that facilitate collaborative planning and the implementation of school improvement activities.

3.3 Relationship Between Work Stressors and Instructional Leadership Competence

3.3.1 Association Between Work Stressors and Leadership Competence

The study reported a highly significant relationship between work stressors and instructional leadership competence, with a correlation coefficient of 0.7504 ($p < 0.001$). Significant agreement was also reported in respondents' rankings of emotional, intellectual, physical, and social work stressors. For instructional leadership competencies, significant agreement was observed except in responding to changing instructional program needs and continuing the school improvement plan. Research on principals' wellbeing identifies occupational demands and resources as important contextual factors (Marsh et al., 2023). These findings provide context for the reported relationship, although the correlation does not establish a causal effect.

3.3.2 Physical and Psychological Effects of Occupational Stress

The study examined occupational stressors in emotional, intellectual, physical, and social dimensions. Although stress-related health concerns provide relevant background, the present investigation did not directly measure clinical or medical outcomes. Recent research has identified associations between workplace demands, psychological strain, burnout, and the well-being of school principals (Leksy et al., 2023; Marsh et al., 2023). These findings provide contextual support for understanding occupational stress without establishing that specific medical consequences occurred among the participating school heads.

3.3.3 Emotional, Cognitive, and Health-Related Effects of Stress

Occupational stress may involve emotional, cognitive, interpersonal, and physical dimensions, although the present study did not directly assess medical outcomes. Research involving school principals has identified workplace demands, occupational strain, and burnout as concerns associated with professional well-being (Leksy et al., 2023; Marsh et al., 2023). These findings provide relevant background for interpreting the reported work stressors while avoiding unsupported conclusions regarding cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, metabolic, or other clinical outcomes among the respondents.

3.4 Policy Recommendations for Managing Work Stressors

3.4.1 Individual Stress Management and Coping Strategies

The study's policy recommendations include considering relaxation, physical activity, time management, social support, and manageable workloads as possible approaches to occupational stress. These measures are proposed for consideration rather than evaluated interventions in the present research. The findings point to a need for context-sensitive support for school heads experiencing workplace demands (Paudel et al., 2022).

3.4.2 Organizational Support and Workplace Interventions

Organizational measures proposed for consideration include clear communication, employee participation, workload management, wellness support, and constructive workplace relationships. The present study did not test these measures, so their effectiveness in the participating divisions remains to be evaluated. Their inclusion reflects the study's aim of developing practical policy recommendations from the reported stressors and leadership assessments (Marsh et al., 2023).

3.4.3 Preventive Measures and Institutional Policy Development

Potential institutional responses include identifying work stressors, providing employee assistance, offering stress-management training, strengthening communication, and monitoring workplace concerns. These are proposed actions based on the study's identified areas of concern, not interventions whose effectiveness was

established by the correlational design. Educational authorities may evaluate such measures before wider implementation.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concluded that work stressors were "Much Evident" among public secondary school heads in the Province of Quezon, particularly in the emotional and social dimensions, while instructional leadership competence was assessed as "Very Much Evident." These findings indicate that school heads demonstrated substantial instructional leadership competence despite experiencing considerable workplace demands. Significant agreement among respondents was established in ranking emotional, intellectual, physical, and social work stressors and most instructional leadership competencies. However, agreement was not significant in responding to changing instructional program needs and continuing the school improvement plan, indicating differences in respondents' assessments of these responsibilities. Furthermore, a strong, highly significant positive relationship between work stressors and instructional leadership competence ($r = 0.7504$, $p < 0.001$) demonstrated that the variables were statistically associated without establishing causality. Overall, the findings provide localized evidence emphasizing the importance of responsive school management, institutional support, and sustained instructional leadership competence in addressing occupational challenges.

Educational administrators and school heads should strengthen institutional support mechanisms that address emotional, intellectual, physical, and social work stressors while maintaining effective instructional leadership practices. Priority should be given to improving collaborative problem-solving, open communication, professional development, and appropriate workload management to support school heads in fulfilling their responsibilities. Hosseingholizadeh et al. (2026) emphasized the importance of supportive organizational conditions, collaborative professional environments, and context-responsive development opportunities in strengthening principals' professional learning. These findings support the recommendation to provide sustained leadership development and institutional assistance to school heads.

Particular attention should be directed toward strengthening responsiveness to changing instructional program needs and ensuring continuity in implementing school improvement plans. School heads and teachers should regularly review learners' performance and curriculum accomplishment reports to identify learning gaps and implement appropriate instructional interventions. Timely distribution of learning materials, effective instructional monitoring, and constructive feedback based on formative and summative assessments should also be maintained. Educational authorities should consider institutional policies supporting occupational stress management and effective school operations. Future research may examine other school divisions and evaluate leadership development and stress management interventions to strengthen the applicability of the findings.

The study was limited to 127 public secondary school heads from the Divisions of Tayabas, Lucena, and Quezon during School Year 2021–2022. Its descriptive-evaluative-correlational design examined statistical associations without establishing causal relationships. Data were obtained through a researcher-made questionnaire focusing specifically on emotional, intellectual, physical, and social work stressors and instructional leadership competence. Consequently, the findings reflect the assessed conditions within the participating school divisions and may not represent other educational settings. Future studies may include school heads from additional divisions, examine related leadership and organizational variables, and employ alternative research designs to extend the findings and assess intervention effectiveness.

5. Compliance with ethical standards

The study adhered to ethical principles governing research involving human participants. Permission to conduct the investigation was obtained from the appropriate educational authorities in the Divisions of Tayabas, Lucena, and Quezon. Respondents were informed of the study's purpose and the nature of their participation, which was voluntary. Confidentiality and protection of personal information were maintained, and the collected data were used exclusively for academic and research purposes. The findings were analyzed and reported objectively to uphold research integrity and credibility. The researcher acknowledges the assistance and cooperation of the educational authorities, school heads, and respondents who participated in the study.

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