

# Unveiling Transformative Practices of High-Performing School Heads

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**Abstract:** *This study examined the transformative practices of high-performing school heads in Cabanglasan I and II District, Bukidnon, during SY 2024–2025 using descriptive phenomenology guided by Moustakas (1994) to capture and analyze their lived experiences. Through systematic data analysis, six grand themes emerged Data-Driven Improvement, Inclusive Shared Governance, Teacher Empowerment, Decentralized SBM, Community Ties, and an Enhancement Plan anchored on Leading Strategically, Managing School Operations and Resources, Focusing on Teaching and Learning, Developing Self and Others, and Building Connections. Findings reveal that high School-Based Management (SBM) ratings result from interconnected leadership practices that integrate collaborative decision-making, continuous teacher development, stakeholder engagement, and evidence-based governance. Overall, the study highlights a holistic leadership approach that sustains shared accountability, continuous growth, and long-term school improvement.*

**Keywords:** *High-performing school heads, best practices*

## INTRODUCTION

School heads demonstrate qualities that support school success. They set clear goals, plan strategically, and ensure all actions align with the mission. They share these priorities with staff, students, and stakeholders. They foster teamwork, use data for improvement, and work with the entire school community to build a shared mission. These leaders support teachers through training, mentoring, and openness to classroom innovation.

High-performing school leaders ensure teachers feel valued and prepared. However, research gaps remain in areas such as mentorship, peer support, the effect of leadership on student outcomes, innovation, change management, leadership styles, and stakeholder involvement. Existing studies often overlook the direct impact of these leadership practices on student performance metrics, as well as the role of targeted mentorship and peer support.

This study addresses these gaps by focusing on how mentorship and stakeholder involvement influence academic success and exploring the correlation between leadership behaviours and student outcomes. Highlighting these gaps shows the need for strong, evidence-based methods to understand what makes high-performing school leaders successful.

High-performing leaders understand that skilled teachers drive school success. They set up systems, provide incentives, and cultivate a culture valuing growth, leading to improvements (Aquino et al., 2021).

In Philippine schools, high-performing school heads face challenges highlighted in the PISA and EDCOM reports. The 2023 PISA results showed that Filipino students' skills in reading, math, and science dropped after the pandemic. Experts say this decline is due to learning losses during the pandemic.

This study focuses on the transformative practices of high-performing school heads. It examines how these practices help teachers and staff reach high School-Based

Management ratings. Unlike earlier research, this study also compares these practices with teacher support systems. Pre-interviews showed that high performers excel in managing resources for academic improvement, teacher development, and infrastructure upgrades. (Gumilao, 2024)

High-performing leaders rely on teamwork and partnerships, building trust with stakeholders and emphasizing innovation tailored to community needs. They create programs to strengthen school-community relations, improving student outcomes, teacher performance, and school effectiveness. This study explains how high-performing school heads drive educational outcomes and teacher empowerment, aiming to help other schools replicate these successes.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design grounded in Moustakas (1994) to explore the lived experiences of eight high-performing school heads in Cabanglasan I and II Districts during the 2024–2025 school year. Using purposive sampling, the researcher selected award-winning school heads recognized for excellence in leadership and school-based management (SBM). The diverse educational setting including integrated, IP, elementary, and secondary schools provided a rich context for examining transformative leadership practices that empower teachers, improve school performance, and strengthen community engagement.

Data were primarily gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, following a validated interview protocol developed using Castillo-Montoya's (2016) framework. Ethical standards were strictly observed through informed consent, confidentiality, anonymization, and secured data storage. Interviews were conducted privately, recorded, transcribed, and subjected to member checking to ensure accuracy. The data collection process, carried out from February to April 2024, aligned with

phenomenological principles emphasizing authentic accounts of participants' lived experiences.

Data analysis followed Moustakas' systematic phenomenological steps, including identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, and synthesizing core essences of experience. To ensure trustworthiness, three intercoders independently analyzed the data, compared results, and resolved discrepancies through collaborative review, strengthening reliability and minimizing bias. Through rigorous ethical procedures, intercoder reliability, and systematic analysis, the study ensured credibility and faithfully represented the transformative leadership practices of high-performing school heads.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the analysis of data gathered from eight high-performing school heads in the Cabanglasan I and II districts of Bukidnon during SY 2024–2025. Drawing from interview results, it highlights effective leadership practices and summarizes key findings related to teacher empowerment and improvements in School-Based Management (SBM).

The findings revealed six major themes: Data-Informed Participatory Leadership Drives Improvement; Strategic Data-Driven School Improvement; Inclusive, Participatory Leadership for Shared Governance; Empowering Teachers through Continuous Growth; Decentralizing SBM Implementation and Shared Governance; and Strengthening School-Community Ties for Inclusive Support. Collectively, these themes demonstrate how participatory leadership, strategic use of data, teacher empowerment, decentralization, and strong community partnerships contribute to enhanced school performance and higher SBM ratings.

### *Theme 1: Data-Informed Participatory Leadership Drives Improvement*

It demonstrates that sustainable school improvement occurs when school heads integrate systematic data analysis with active stakeholder participation in decision-making. High-performing leaders use student performance data, teacher evaluations, attendance records, and stakeholder feedback to guide School Improvement Plans (SIPs), refine interventions such as remedial reading programs, and align actions with DepEd priorities like the National Reading Program and MATATAG goals. Through surveys, town halls, professional learning communities (PLCs), benchmarking, and participatory monitoring systems, school heads transform raw data into collaborative, evidence-based strategies that strengthen accountability, transparency, and shared governance (Lopez, 2025; Murugi, 2023; Borg et al., 2019; Josol, 2025). Regular tracking of trends, root cause analysis, and participatory data reviews elevate SBM levels and learner outcomes, particularly in literacy and retention (Argüelles, 2024; Ang et al., 2025; Fernandes, 2023; Read & Atinc, 2017). Overall, the findings affirm that participatory data use—anchored in feedback loops, monitoring systems like

EBEIS and SMEA, and collaborative planning—serves as a transformative leadership practice that drives measurable gains in student achievement and school excellence in Philippine public schools (Argüelles, 2024).

### *Theme 2: Strategic Data-Driven School Improvement*

It highlights how school heads systematically use student performance data, attendance records, and teacher evaluations to identify gaps, set targeted goals, and implement evidence-based interventions that strengthen academic outcomes and resource allocation (Cabrera, 2025). High-performing leaders cultivate data literacy, sustain collaborative data teams, and embed analytics into instructional innovation, particularly within School-Based Management (SBM) contexts (Schildkamp, 2019). Central to this theme is Root Cause Analysis, where leaders diagnose underlying issues through observation, consultation, and data synthesis to design targeted, sustainable solutions (Schifter et al., 2014; Mohamed, 2025; Datnow & Park, 2016; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). SMART goal.

### *Theme 3: Inclusive, Participatory Leadership for Shared Governance*

It emphasizes that school improvement is strengthened when leaders actively engage teachers, staff, parents, and community stakeholders in shared decision-making processes that distribute authority and build collective ownership (Jasojaso, 2024). High-performing school heads operationalize collaborative problem-solving, structured dialogue, and joint action planning to address challenges such as literacy gaps and resource constraints, thereby advancing School-Based Management (SBM) goals under DepEd frameworks (Phebeni, 2025; Xu et al., 2023). This participatory leadership model, highlighted in *Unveiling the Transformative Practices of High-Performing School Heads*, demonstrates how inclusive governance fosters innovation, trust, and improved learner outcomes in Philippine public schools (Esogon, 2024). Furthermore, investing in teacher capacity-building through professional development, mentoring, feedback, and recognition enhances instructional quality and reinforces shared accountability (Muhayimana et al., 2023; Gyansah, 2020; Sianipar & Putri, 2024; Leithwood & Azah, 2017). By cultivating collaborative cultures grounded in mutual respect and shared responsibility, school heads transform schools into adaptive, high-performing communities aligned with Republic Act 9155 and DepEd's SBM mandate (Villafane, 2025; Dacpano, 2022).

### *Theme 4: Empowering Teachers through Continuous Growth*

It highlights that sustained school improvement depends on leaders intentionally investing in ongoing professional development that strengthens teacher competence, confidence, and instructional impact (Smith & Anderson, 2025). High-performing school heads operationalize this through needs-based trainings, mentoring, collaborative Learning Action Cells (LACs), graduate study encouragement, and structured feedback systems aligned with school priorities such as literacy and technology integration (Espacio, 2025). Research affirms that continuous,

collaborative professional development significantly improves teaching quality and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Guskey, 2002), while DepEd frameworks such as NEAP and RPMS institutionalize assessment-driven growth and recognition mechanisms (DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016; DepEd Order No. 2, s. 2022). High-performing leaders further strengthen accountability and motivation by pairing systematic evaluations with recognition and incentives, transforming performance monitoring into a cycle of assessment, feedback, reward, and upskilling that sustains morale and reduces attrition (Esogon & Gumban, 2024; Msofe et al., 2025). Anchored in shared governance and lifelong learning principles under RA 10912, this empowerment model positions teacher growth as a catalyst for systemic transformation and measurable gains in student achievement (Dacpano, 2022).

#### **Theme 5: Decentralizing SBM Implementation and Shared Governance**

It emphasizes shifting authority from central DepEd offices to schools and local stakeholders to strengthen autonomy, accountability, and responsiveness in decision-making, as framed in DepEd Order No. 83, s. 2012 and RA 9155 (EdCom 2, 2025; Bacalso & Luza, 2025). While decentralization is legally supported, persistent central controls and resource limitations often reduce SBM to compliance rather than empowerment (Laguda et al., 2023). High-performing school heads address this by practicing transformational leadership—promoting stakeholder participation in planning, budgeting, monitoring, and evaluation through School Governing Councils and Local School Boards (Banos & Ramos, 2019; De Castro, 2025). Through participatory School Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adjustment (SMEA) processes, collaborative resource management, and data-driven tracking of SIP targets, they operationalize shared governance that elevates schools from SBM Level 1 to Level 3 (Macalindong, 2009; Ortiz & Ramos, 2024). By embedding transparency, community engagement, and strategic resource stewardship, these leaders transform SBM from bureaucratic compliance into a sustainable, community-driven framework that improves learner outcomes and institutional performance (World Bank, 2009; Bacalso & Luza, 2025).

#### **Theme 6: Strengthening School–Community Ties for Inclusive Support**

It highlights how high-performing school heads build strong, collaborative partnerships with parents, LGUs, NGOs, and community groups to ensure equitable support for all learners, including those with special needs. Anchored in participatory governance under SBM, this approach uses responsive communication strategies—such as town halls, social media platforms, newsletters, and surveys—to foster transparency, trust, and shared responsibility (Abellanida, 2024; Quiñones & Bumatay, 2010). Transformational leaders organize forums, co-develop literacy and child-protection programs, and mobilize community resources to improve indicators such as NAT scores, cohort survival rates, and SBM Level 3 attainment (Dacpano, 2022; Arguelles, 2025).

By embedding inclusive dialogue and bayanihan-driven partnerships into school systems, they turn schools into responsive community hubs that promote resilience, equity, and sustained school improvement (Villafane, 2025).

#### **Conclusion**

The *data-informed participatory leadership* is a critical driver of sustainable school improvement, as it unites evidence-based decision-making with shared responsibility among stakeholders. By collaboratively analyzing data and engaging teachers and partners in problem-solving, school heads translate insights into focused actions that improve student outcomes and school performance. This approach aligns closely with DepEd priorities and reinforces a culture of accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement.

The *strategic, data-driven school improvement* is a vital leadership competency that enables school heads to translate evidence into meaningful and sustainable actions. By systematically using data for planning, implementation, and monitoring, school leaders strengthened collaboration, optimized limited resources, and navigated policy transitions effectively. Ultimately, data-informed leadership enhanced School-Based Management practices and contributed to sustained improvements in learner outcomes in Philippine public elementary schools.

The *inclusive, participatory leadership for shared governance* is a transformative approach that enables school heads to foster shared governance and collective accountability. By engaging diverse stakeholders in decision-making and capacity-building processes, leadership becomes distributed and responsive to school needs. This collaborative model strengthens trust and ownership, ultimately sustaining school improvement and advancing common educational goals.

The *Empowering teachers through continuous growth*, needs-based professional growth is a vital leadership practice that enhances confidence, motivation, and instructional effectiveness. When school heads intentionally integrate training, collaboration, feedback, and recognition, professional development becomes a sustained process that supports accountability while nurturing morale. This approach ultimately strengthens teacher retention and drives lasting, school-wide improvement.

The *Decentralizing SBM Implementation and Shared Governance* is most effective when school heads practice transformative leadership that genuinely empowers stakeholders as co-decision-makers rather than passive implementers. Shared governance mechanisms such as School Governing Councils and collaborative monitoring strengthen transparency, accountability, and collective ownership at the school level. Ultimately, decentralization anchored in local participation sustains school improvement beyond compliance and reinforces SBM as a responsive, community-driven framework.

The *Strengthening School–Community Ties for Inclusive Support* is a transformative leadership practice that

enables inclusive, equity-driven school improvement. By engaging communities as active partners through responsive communication and collaboration, school heads foster shared accountability that enhances support for marginalized and SPED learners. These partnerships contribute to sustained gains in resources, School-Based Management performance, and learner outcomes, reinforcing school resilience in the Philippine education context.

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