

Leadership Competencies of the Clergy and Lay Person Administrators in the Church-Owned Preschools

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ABSTRACT

The body of knowledge is luxuriant with studies delving into leadership competencies; however, there are meager studies conducted to contrast the competencies of the clergy and layperson school administrators, the fact that many church-owned schools have this kind of set up. This study addressed this gap by looking into the governance of church-owned preschools in the Philippines. It detected the significant differences of such competencies between the lay and the clergy-administrators. It used the descriptive-comparative design. Moreover, the cross-sectional survey method was used to gather data through questionnaires. This study adopted The Leadership Domains checklist developed by Douglas Reeves (2009) as the data gathering tool. Twenty church-owned preschools participated in the study, and informal follow-up interviews were also conducted to triangulate the results. The data were analyzed and interpreted using both descriptive and inferential statistical tests. The t-test for independent groups was used to identify differences in the leadership competencies of the school administrators. This study found out that the clergy group is "exemplary" while the laypersons are "proficient" in the ten leadership competencies. They are both equipped with the necessary leadership competencies needed in managing their respective preschool institutions. Although the clergy and the lay administrators excel differently in terms of their leadership competencies, the clergy-administrators possess the highest level of competency, specifically on "communication." On the other hand, the highest leadership competency of the lay administrators is "decision making." This study implies trying a lay-and-clergy tandem of administering the church-owned preschools. Furthermore, the School Board might want to focus on developing potential educational leaders from their existing human resources through "shepherding" and "mentoring."

Keywords

Educational Leadership, Clergy and Lay Administrators, Preschool Education, Leadership Competencies, Educational Management

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Introduction

The literature is rich with consistent reports that school leadership is vital in developing and sustaining school level instructional improvement (Doos & Wilhelmson, 2020; Jensen, 2020; van Geel, Keuning, Visscher, & Fox, 2019; Waters, Marzano, and McNulty, 2003). Moreover, numerous studies have been conducted that demonstrate the importance of effective leadership in the education setting, and the correlation it has to student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000).

In the parlance of early childhood education, the instructional leaders are in a unique position to develop standards and expectations for those concerned with the development of children and wellbeing of families, while setting the foundation for success in school for children (Rodd, 1998). This means that the administrator's leadership styles play a vital role in improving and sustaining preschool quality. However, Schell, Youngblood, and Farrington (2008) reported that administrators' leadership styles have already changed over time. Skills such as planning and knowledge of fiscal and business analysis are no longer accepted as the only qualities of an effective leader; rather, teamwork, communication, and the ability to motivate are skills that are increasingly desired in leaders. The pieces of evidence of good leadership, according to Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002), can be witnessed in workplaces where the inspiration of staff creates a positive atmosphere that works toward the fulfillment of a long-term vision.

Even if the literature is rich with educational leadership, there remains a scarcity of studies on church-owned preschools and their respective instructional leaders. In the Philippines, one of these pieces of evidence as an educational leader is a license to teach. However, there are some church-owned preschools whose educational managers are the clergy themselves. Several of them are not licensed professional teachers. Meaning, they do not meet the minimum requirement for teaching. However, as administrative pastors, they are expected to exercise oversight when the church congregations to which they are appointed happen to have educational institutions. With the clergy serving as chaplains or school administrators, the connection between these educational institutions and the congregations that gave birth to them is assured. However, most of these pastors do not have a competent grasp of school leadership, where impact and influence in the areas of curriculum and instruction are significant.

In many cases, there is a "mismatch" between the educational credentials of the clergy and the pastoral ministry context where there is a need for administratively-experienced, academically-equipped, and competent leaders of church-based institutions. Thus, a mismatch occurs when members of the clergy who are assigned as school administrators do not have the competencies to lead a school since they are either Master of Divinity or Master of Theology graduates, not Educational Management or Administration graduates. They were not explicitly trained for school administration but on church administration. Nevertheless, they have to take up the position of a school administrator. The leadership competencies of these school

administrators must then be dealt with for the smooth flow of operations of church-owned schools.

For church-owned schools, the leaders must be of the highest ethical standards. Ethical leadership demands courage and a great ounce of sincerity. It means doing the right thing based on one's core values at the expense of being unpopular. On this, Starratt (2005) proposed three (3) foundational virtues: (a) the virtue of presence, (b) the virtue of authenticity, and (c) the virtue of responsibility. The virtue of presence suggests that for it (presence) to be a virtue, there must be "a dialogical relationship between the learner and the material under study."

Along with this context, a paucity of literature exists. Very few studies have dealt with leadership competencies of clergy acting as educational leaders, whose preparation is not on academic management but church administration. Hence, this study identified the leadership competencies of school administrators of church-owned schools using Reeves' model (2009) and the difference of the leadership competencies of lay and clergy school administrators. To measure their leadership competencies, comparing their competencies to lay person-administrators' competencies could point out both strengths and areas needing improvement.

This research serves as a benchmark for competencies when such church-owned institutions decide to appoint clergy people as administrators. Due to the shortage of materials for this kind of study, it will also serve as a resource for individuals who want to study the impact of clergy on education. There are plenty of materials that deal with running private institutions, but so far, only a few have focused on clergy capabilities in educational leadership.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used descriptive-comparative design. Creswell (2014) mentioned that the descriptive design describes what is. Hence, this study is descriptive in the sense that existing conditions of the church-owned preschools in terms of governance are described and interpreted. The comparative design uses a contrast of contexts method, which works best when the cases that it juxtaposes are maximally different (Skocpol & Somers, 1980). Thus, it is comparative because it aimed to find out the difference between the school administrators in terms of their leadership competencies. Specifically, this study used the cross-sectional survey method, as it sought to gather information about the characteristics of a group of people through a questionnaire at one point in time (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

Population and Locale of the Study

Purposively sampled, the participants were the lay and clergy administrators of 20 church-owned preschools. The inclusion criteria were the following: (1) they should be involved as the head of the academic administration; (2) they should be either a lay person or a pastor; (3) they should have at least three years of doing the administrative job; and (4) they should be willing to participate.

Generally, 347 respondents were considered as evaluators in this study, composed of 42 preschool teachers, 115 school board members, and 190 church council officers. On the other hand, 20 administrators were contrasted. Among them were 14 lay person-administrators and six clergy-administrators.

Notably, there are two main top leadership designations in the different church-owned preschools: as a school administrator and as a school principal. Some schools do not have a school director, rather, a principal or vice versa. To clarify the designations, the researchers included only the top leadership position.

The administrators are also classified according to their ministry category. The clergy mentioned here are those school administrators who are also the leaders of the churches that own the preschools being studied. The laypersons discussed here are the non-clergy school administrators who also happen to be the members of such churches. They are further classified according to their educational qualifications. At the moment, the minimum requirement to become a pastor qualified to be an administrator in the church-owned preschools is a Bachelor's degree. But some finished their Master's degrees. Some are currently taking up their Doctorate degrees, but since they have not graduated yet, they are included in the Master's degree level.

Instrument

This study adopted the Leadership Domains checklist developed by Reeves (2009), as used by Sanchez (2011), as the data gathering tool. The model by Reeves was used to determine a comparative study on the levels of competency of the church-owned preschool administrators. The questionnaires had already been subjected for validity test by known experts in the fields of leadership, which was further tested for reliability by Sanchez in his research on CICM schools in 2011.

Composed of 10 leadership competency domains, the central part of the questionnaire has four categories that determine the levels of competency of the respondents namely, 4-Exemplary, 3-Proficient, 2-Progressing, and 1-Do not meet standards.

1. *Exemplary*: the leader meets the requirements for proficiency and goes beyond those requirements and thus creates a model to which other leaders can aspire.
2. *Proficient*: the leader meets organizational needs; adequate and indeed necessary
3. *Progressing*: not yet proficient but have the willingness and ability to learn the skills required for leadership proficiency.
4. *Not meeting Standards*: the leader does not understand what is required for proficiency or has demonstrated through his/her action and inaction that he/she chooses not to become proficient (Sanchez, 2011).

Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection protocol was followed (Bulusan, 2019). Before the administration of the questionnaires, permission was sought from the Office of the Bishop. The researchers administered the questionnaires to the twenty school

administrators. Questions that arose from answering the questionnaires were personally responded to by the researcher. Follow-up informal interviews were also conducted to triangulate the results. Due to the wide geography of the study site, the researchers sent out a series of messages via the short messaging system to the heads of the different church-owned preschools to get the necessary data. Regarding the number of school board members, the same data collection method was undertaken. For the church council members, this was based on the basic structure of the council as provided for in the church polity.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed and interpreted using both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Frequency and percentage distribution were used to measure the level of leadership competencies of the preschool administrators. The scaled items were interpreted by using the following arbitrary scale points in Table 1.

The t-test for independent groups was used to identify differences in the leadership competencies of the school administrators. The null hypothesis, which is stated as there is no significant difference in the leadership competencies of the school administrators, was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 1. Mean Score Interpretation of the Level of Competency in the Leadership Domains

Mean Scores	Level of Leadership Competency/Management Competency	Symbols	Description
3.25-4.00	Exemplary	E	The leader meets the requirements for proficiency and goes beyond those requirements and thus creates a model to which other leaders can aspire.
2.50-3.24	Proficient	PF	The leader meets organizational needs; adequate and indeed necessary
1.75-2.49	Progressing	PG	Not yet proficient but have the willingness and ability to learn the skills required for

			leadership proficiency.
1.00-1.74	Do not meet standards/Needs Assistance	DS	The leader does not understand what is necessary for proficiency or has demonstrated through his/her action and inaction that he/she chooses not to become proficient

Results

This study aimed to compare the leadership competencies of the clergy and layperson administrators of church-owned preschools. It used comparative strategy through descriptive cross-sectional survey design.

One striking finding in this study is the higher set of mean scores of the clergy-administrators (3.25=Exemplary) as compared to the lay administrators (3.09=Proficient). The highest mean of the clergy group is on communication (3.33) while the lay persons group is on decision making (3.21). The lowest competency garnered by both groups is technology. The lay persons group scored 2.80 while the clergy group garnered 3.08, still under "proficient."

Table 2. Comparison of Mean Scores and Test for Equality of Means per Leadership Competency

Leadership Competencies	Mean		t-test for Equality of Means				Description
	Administrator Type	Clergy Lay	T	df	p-value		
Resilience	3.22	3.07	2.211	236	.028		S
Personal Behavior	3.29	3.20	1.283	237	.201		NS
Student Achievement	3.26	3.14	1.744	236	.082		NS
Decision Making	3.27	3.21	1.201	237	.231		NS
Communication	3.33	3.19	1.862	237	.064		NS
Faculty Development	3.30	3.18	1.740	236	.083		NS
Leadership Development	3.24	2.98	3.574	236	.000		S
Time, Task, and Project Management	3.24	2.97	3.945	237	.000		S
Technology	3.08	2.80	3.020	193.5	.003		S
Learning and Professional Development	3.29	3.11	2.426	236	.016		S
Grand Mean	3.25	3.09					

This study theorizes that there is no difference in the leadership competencies of NWPAC-UMC school administrators when classified according to lay and clergy-administrators. Data were analyzed using the t-test of difference at .05 level of significance, and five among the ten leadership competencies were recorded to have p-values less than 0.05, thereby rejecting the null hypothesis. Hence, the following competencies are significantly different: on resilience ($P=0.028$), leadership development ($P=0.000$), Time, Task, and Project Management ($P=0.000$), Technology ($P=0.003$), and Learning and Professional Development ($P=0.000$).

In other words, in terms of the significant difference, five competencies are significant. They are resilience, leadership development, time, task, and project management, technology, and learning and professional development.

Discussion

Generally, both the clergy and the lay administrators of the UMC-owned preschools in the Northwest Philippines Annual Conference are "proficient," which means that the leaders meet organizational needs, adequate and indeed necessary. In the discharge of their duties, therefore, it is safe to surmise that they are well-qualified and are equipped with sufficient managerial skills to operate their respective learning institutions. With this finding, it is also safe to surmise that the learning institutions are in "good hands" and are performing excellently.

This claim is in harmony with what Allen and his colleagues (2005) proposed that competencies acquired in education are the necessary prerequisites not only for boosting individual effectiveness on initial entry to the labor market but also for long-lasting employability and academic performance of their respective institution. However, rapid obsolescence of technological achievements and shifts in labor demand often result in the devaluation of specific competencies over time. This means that in terms of competency levels, the clergy-administrators are more equipped with competencies that would propel a better leading and managing performance as compared to the lay administrators. Although "proficient," the lay administrators do possess enough leadership competencies that are needed by educational leaders and managers like them. This further means that the lay administrators can still improve their leadership competencies.

One obvious reason for the difference between the mean scores is the age gap. Most of the lay administrators are retired educators or teachers, while the clergy-administrators are still active in their present tasks as church leaders and workers. The clergy-administrators' training on managing a local church may also have been influencing their "exemplary" competency levels as educational leaders and managers.

As a bottom line, the findings show that both the clergy and lay administrators have "exemplary" and "proficient" competency levels required for any educational organization. This finding corroborates the idea of Abraham and his colleagues (2001), who advocated that all organizational functions require a set of essential managerial, generic, and technical or functional competencies to be performed effectively. In order to

accomplish their respective tasks in the organization, they should be equipped with specific competencies (Abraham et al., 2001). Findings likewise indicate that educational managers equipped with high levels of leadership competencies are considered to produce enhanced levels of job outcomes (Rad & Yarmohammadian, 2006).

Communication as a competency level garnered the highest mean score among the clergy (3.33=exemplary) while among the lay administrators, the highest mean score lies in decision making (3.21=proficient). This implies that the clergy-administrators are adept at using their communicative skills in discharging their duties and functions as educational managers. This is so because primarily their profession as pastors or clergy members necessitate their aptitude in communicating with people. This scenario is a vivid display of the transfer of learning as theorized by Thorndike (1901).

As regards to the lay administrators, they are good at decision making because of their background in their church function as lay leaders and members. In the context of the United Methodist Church, lay people are probably the persons leading the organizations and committees in the church council. As such, it is expected that they are adept at deciding on issues because laypeople generate innovative ideas that help leaders with the development and execution of complex decisions and strategies.

With this strength, the laypeople can also be considered as effective leaders because decision making in anyone almost always involves some form of leadership. Leadership is defined as the initiation of new directions of locomotion by one or more individuals, which are then readily followed by other group members" (Dyer et al., 2008). Leadership may be classified as designated or elected or unplanned for the reason that individuals differ in personalities or experiences. Some may have the natural ability to lead. As Shakespeare wrote in the play, *Twelfth Night*: "some men are born great; some men achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them."

In the test of difference, leadership competencies of the two respondent groups have different competency levels in managing the UMC-owned preschool institutions. The respondents record significant differences along resilience ($P=0.028$) because of the implication that the clergy-administrators can handle disappointments and blockages to success than the lay administrators. It proves the usage of their Pastoral Course in the seminary. Regarding leadership development ($P=0.000$), findings imply that the clergy's background on church leadership and management is transferred and applied in managing their respective schools. Church leadership and management are participatory, as reflected by the various organizations composing the council.

This further verifies the truth on the Theory of Transfer of Learning by Thorndike (1901). Hence, this study surmises that since church leadership involves the participation of the members of the congregation, the clergy and lay administrators could be transferring this practice and managerial style when they are governing their respective schools, thus an evident existence of the transfer of learning. Along the vein of Time, Task, and Project Management ($P=0.000$), there is a significant difference because of the current organizational structure of the UMC-run institutions.

It should be noted that most of the UMC-owned institutions are governed by the Board of Trustees, School Board or Education Committee, which acts as the highest governing board of the respective institutions. Such Board or Committee covers the approving and utilizing of expenditures and deciding on financial matters of the institution. On this line, the administrators are bound to decide as to the spending and budgeting of the finances of their respective schools.

This supports the current education policy of the Department of Education emphasizes higher performance standards, school-level accountability, and market-based reform presents important research challenges within the field of school finance. The simultaneous pursuit of both equity and efficiency within this policy context creates an unprecedented demand for rigorous, timely, and field-relevant research on fiscal practices in schools.

This study also finds out the significant difference in the competency of the clergy and the lay administrators along with the use of technology in discharging their duties. In the United Methodist Church, both clergy and laypeople are encouraged to use the technologically-driven approaches in doing the mission of the church. However, in this case, not all UMC-run educational institutions have wholly acquired technological gadgets for education. Hence, it is safe to surmise that the respondent groups are only proficient in basic technical skills for efficiency and effectiveness.

Finally, a significant difference in the competency of the educational leaders in terms of learning and professional development exists. This implies that in imbibing professional development in their respective schools, both the clergy and the lay administrators emphasize collaboration among teachers and subordinates toward professional development and student achievement.

It further implies that the administrators can still come up with more stringent measures to ensure that their teachers and subordinates keep abreast with the updated trends in the teaching profession. In this manner, the administrators may be assured of improving the academic performance of the whole educational institution. It should be noted that most of the lay administrators are retired from their previous professions. Hence, they may tend to experience a plateau in learning and professional development.

The significant differences among the respondents have something to do with their other current position or job. For instance, the clergy-administrators are expected to show higher levels of resiliency, leadership development, and professional development because their current nature of work is more of administrative other than the lay administrators, who are mostly retired educators. In other words, like in the plateau of learning, there can also be a decline in leadership performance.

This supports the study of Simon (2015) that leadership has an important role in guaranteeing school growth and vitality. But it is also a reality that schools are lacking leadership that can enable them to meet the demands of standards-based reforms. Simon claimed that the solution to this, which may be seen over time, is "through the large-scale improvement of instruction, something public education has been unable to do to date, but which is possible with dramatic changes in the way public schools define and practice leadership."

Overall, the results reflect that the clergy-administrators possess a little higher level of leadership competency. However, based on the range of the competencies, overall findings reveal that lay and clergy-administrators excel in a different manner. This means that although they excel differently, both of their leadership competency levels lie on the range of proficiency. Accordingly, both can be effective in managing and handling their respective preschools.

Conclusion

This study examined the difference of leadership competencies of the clergy and the lay administrators of the United Methodist Church-owned preschools in the Northwest Philippines Annual Conference. It uses the 10-competency model of Reeves (2009). It concludes that both the lay and the clergy-administrators are equipped with the necessary leadership competencies needed in managing their respective preschool institutions. However, the clergy and lay administrators excel differently in terms of their leadership competencies. The levels of leadership competencies may be varied in an educational leadership setting, but the most important value is they complement one another so that proficiency may be achieved eventually. Along this vein, a clergy-lay tandem of leadership may be tried to implement. Eventually, the same kind of study may be done to find out if educational leadership has improved.

Basing on the findings, this study further recommends that the Board of Trustees, the School Board, or the Education Committee of the respective church councils may want to boost further the leadership competencies of the administrators by sending them to various training and conferences where they can be more updated on the current trends of educational administration. The School Board may likewise want to focus on developing potential educational leaders from their existing human resources through "shepherding" and "mentoring."

This study is not without a caveat. The study was conducted in one conference jurisdiction, composed of only 20 preschools. Researchers, therefore, recommend a study with a wider scope of leadership competencies, trying, perhaps, between administrators of private and government-owned schools. The methodology of this study may also be a limitation. Using a qualitative design in replicating this study may yield a more detailed explanation of the phenomenon, producing more reasons, and understanding the findings better.

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