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Making It Happen: Educational Skills, Leadership, and Management Graduates in Actual School Work in the Philippines

Gilbert S. Arrieta*, Inero V. Ancho & Caridad N. Barrameda

Philippine Normal University-Manila, Metro Manila, 1000 Philippines

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Abstract

School leaders and teachers take graduate studies to become relevant and better educators. Aside from promotion in their rank, they believe that enrolling in graduate school will develop their skills in their respective fields of specialization. A teacher education university in the Philippines offers graduate programs in educational skill, leadership and management (EDSLM). True to its mission of nurturing innovative teachers and education leaders, many school leaders and teachers in the country are graduates of the university. Recently, enrollment in the masteral and doctoral educational leadership and management program is moderately high which may mean that graduate students believe in the course. Having more graduate students taking EDSLM courses is encouraging but finding if the program prepares effectively and develops holistically the skills of current or future school leaders brings a sense of fulfillment. The aim of this study is to find out the relevance and usefulness of the EDSLM program in terms knowledge and skills, communication skills, human relation skills, leadership skills, research skills, problem-solving skills and information technology skills in their current work. Moreover, the study identifies the needs and challenges of school leadership today and what must be given emphasis in the EDSLM courses. Based on the findings of the study, the graduates agree that the aforementioned skills that they acquired through the program are relevant to a great extent in their current work. They suggested that leadership in the new normal, people skills and technology skills should be given emphasis in the current EDSLM program.

Introduction

As legendary American football coach Vince Lombardi once said: “Leaders aren’t born, they are made. And they are made just like anything else, through hard work.” In school, no new or young teacher is given a leadership responsibility in his/her first two years of

service. However, potential school leaders from the pool of teachers are identified based on their performance, initiatives, commitment and willingness to learn. An educational institution with a good succession plan in place is always a step ahead in honing future leaders of their institution. Potential school leaders are identified

* Corresponding Author
e-mail: arrieta.gs@pnu.edu.ph

and sent to graduate school and other professional development programs to prepare them for leadership and management roles in the future. However, schools with no succession plan observe a replacement process disregarding the development process. In the Philippines, a study pointed out that private schools are governed by corporation laws and have their own Board of Trustees. They are either sectarian or non-sectarian institutions owned by individuals, corporations or foundations. Sectarian schools or those run by religious congregations and recruit principals from the pool of their members. These religious principals are appointed for a period of three years in a school run by the congregation, depending on the needs of the community. Many if not all of these religious sisters/priests come from different academic backgrounds (for example, Accounting, Pharmacy, Business Administration, Chemistry prior to their entry as nuns/priests) are given the appointment to run congregational schools without a solid background in school management. In some cases, these religious principals run the school while they are enrolled in some graduate programs related to educational administration, management and leadership (De Guzman & Guillermo, 2007).

It is arguably a common perception that sending a future school leader to graduate school is the best option in preparing them for school leadership tasks and in some cases current school leaders who have no background in educational leadership and management to gain more knowledge and skills as they carry out their tasks. Likewise, it is a requirement that school heads must have at least a master's degree particularly for accreditation. Regardless of the purpose, it is believed that taking graduate studies prepares and makes a teacher or a school leader an expert in his/her field of specialization. In fact, private and public schools partner with universities that offer graduate teacher education programs to prepare and qualify their current and future school leaders.

A reputable teacher education university in the Philippines offers in its graduate program masteral and doctoral degrees in educational skill, leadership and management (EDSLM). For more than three decades, it has produced graduates who were already in school leadership positions before they graduated and graduates who eventually became school heads. The masteral and doctoral EDSL program underwent review, evaluation and revision in order to adapt and respond to the school leadership needs and challenges. A study on university principal preparation programs found that the course of

study at preparation programs does not always reflect principals' real jobs. It suggests the need for action in: redesigning principal preparation by building on what we know from research and high-quality programs. It also found that many university programs seem to be open to change and they benefit from having a number of strong programs to look to as models (Mendels, 2016).

Graduate courses, like graduate teacher education programs, must be responsive to the needs of the present times. Moreover, there should be a strong connection of the theories and concepts taught in the graduate school with the realities and experiences of graduate students who are also school leaders and teachers. After completing their graduate studies, they must be able to find the relevance and usefulness of their skills in their actual field of work.

Objective

It is the objective of this study to inquire if the educational leadership and management programs helped and enhanced the skills of the graduates in carrying out their duties and responsibilities as school leaders and teachers; including finding out if the educational skill, leadership and management promote working skills. Likewise, it aims to identify the present challenges and needs of school leaders that should be included or be given more emphasis in the educational leadership and management curriculum.

Conceptual framework

Aspiring and current school leaders enroll in graduate school to acquire and enhance their leadership knowledge and skills. Their performance in actual school work is the best manifestation of what they learned in the graduate school. It also speaks of the relevance of the graduate school program. In order to make the program relevant and responsive to the needs and challenges in educational leadership, the program should be enhanced based on the inputs and experiences of the EDSL graduates in applying the knowledge and skills they acquired in the graduate school.

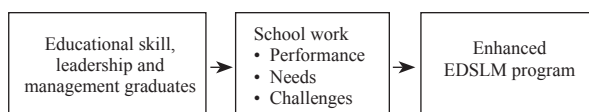


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

Research methodology

This study used a survey method, particularly a tracer study, to find the relevance and effectiveness of the educational leadership and management program in the graduate school of a teacher education university in the Philippines. A survey design provides a plan for a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population. Furthermore, survey research provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The ILO Thesaurus 2005 defines a tracer study as an impact assessment tool where the “impact on target groups is traced back to specific elements of a project or programme so that effective and ineffective project components may be identified.” In educational research the tracer study is sometimes referred to as a graduate or alumni survey since its target group is former students. Graduate surveys are popular for “analysis of the relationship between higher education and work.” They provide quantitative-structural data on employment and career, the character of work and related competencies and information on the professional orientation and experiences of their graduates (Millington, 2008).

1. Population and samples

The participants of the study are educational leadership and management masteral and doctoral graduates from 2017-2021. Table 1 shows the profile of the participants.

Table 1 The Profile of the participant

Profile of Participants	n
PhD Graduates	7
MA Graduates	19
Working in Public School	17
Working in Private School	9
In School Leadership Position	15
In a Teacher III Position or Its Equivalent	11
Average Number of Years as School Leader	6
Average Number of Years in the Teaching Profession	12.28

2. Research instrument

The survey instrument used in this study is the Alumni Survey Form of the teacher education university. Over the years, experts have reviewed and validated the instrument. For the purpose of this study, experts in educational leadership and management of the graduate school checked and validated its appropriateness for this

study. The graduate school faculty were granted permission to use the instrument in conducting tracer study particularly the graduates of their respective programs. The following questions were asked :

A. Survey questions

(5-To a Great Extent; 4-To Some Extent; 3-Limited; 2-Very Limited; 1-Not At All)

1. To what extent are the knowledge and skills you acquired applied in your current work?
2. To what extent are the communication skills you acquired applied in your current work?
3. To what extent are the human relation skills you acquired applied in your current work?
4. To what extent are the leadership skills you acquired applied in your current work?
5. To what extent are the research skills you acquired applied in your current work?
6. To what extent are the problem-solving skills you acquired applied in your current work?
7. To what extent are the information technology skills you acquired applied in your current work?

B. Open-ended question

What are the current needs and challenges of 21st school leaders that the educational leadership and management program should focus on and give more emphasis? Why ?

3. Collection of data

To gather the data needed for the study, the survey questionnaire was sent through email and messenger of the participants. They were informed of the objectives of the study and their participation is voluntary. Their names and workplace were not mentioned in the study and other details were kept with utmost confidentiality.

4. Data analysis

In analyzing the quantitative data, the mean was computed for every indicator. It is also known as the arithmetic average, is found by adding the values of the data and dividing by the total number of values (Bluman, 2009). For the qualitative data, coding was used to determine the themes that emerged. In coding, the researcher organized data collected into segments and assigned a word or phrase to them as labels (Creswell, 2014).

Table 2 Scale, mean range and interpretation

Range	Descriptive rating
4.50 – 5.00	To a great extent
4.00 – 4.49	To some extent
3.50 – 3.99	Limited
3.00 – 3.49	Very limited
1.00 – 2.99	Not at all

Results

The educational leadership and management graduates of a teacher university have the following perceptions on how the graduate programs (masteral and doctoral) have assisted, guided and prepared them for actual school leadership and teaching tasks :

1. Knowledge and skills

The graduates said that they have acquired the needed knowledge and skills in school leadership that helped them in carrying out their tasks as school leaders or head teachers. It can be gleaned in Table 3 that the weighted mean is 4.68 which means “To a Great Extent.” It is important that future school leaders are equipped with school leadership knowledge and skills so that they will be able to manage and supervise the teaching and non-teaching staff more effectively. Future school leaders need leadership training or other similar preparatory programs in order to be prepared. It was found that in terms of readiness for leadership roles, taking graduate studies help in enhancing leadership competencies. Future leaders who had taken graduate-level courses in educational administration showed more readiness to address problems of practice than those who have not taken graduate-level courses in educational administration (Arrieta & Ancho, 2020).

2. Communication skills

As shown in Table 3, the graduates have developed their communication skills through the EDLM masteral and doctoral programs “To a Great Extent” with a mean of 4.68. One of the most important skills that school leaders have to develop and apply in the fulfillment of their responsibilities is communication. School leaders must use language appropriate to different stakeholders. They have to employ appropriate multimedia to communicate with different stakeholders. More importantly, they have to ensure clear, consistent and interactive communication to receive buy-in from the school community (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2014).

3. Human relation skills

The EDLM graduates said that their human relation skills were developed through the graduate

programs as indicated in the weighted mean of 4.64 which is “To a Great Extent.” Leadership is not about authority. In schools, transformational leadership is promoted which focuses on giving importance to the faculty and staff. School leaders do not only maintain high visibility by doing the rounds during classes but more importantly by taking time to talk with teachers and students. They compliment teachers for their performance, shows fairness in affirming teachers and sets aside time for everyone to be able to share their ideas and knowledge (Hallinger, 2015). The development of the leaders interpersonal skills is relevant to one’s role and responsibilities which lead to a better working environment. A study showed that based on teacher interviews, it clearly identified the importance of principal interpersonal skills with regard to student performance in elementary schools. The principal’s interpersonal skills, based on trend data collected from teacher interviews, indicated that teacher morale and retention were based on the skills of the school leader (Justice, 2018).

4. Leadership skills

Primarily, the EDLM program aims at developing education leaders who are competent with knowledge, skills and attitudes, values and ethics to lead and manage high quality education programs. Moreover, they have to manifest professional expertise in analyzing, designing, developing and implementing and evaluating educational programs, practices and policies in educational leadership and management. They are expected to exhibit commitment to and advocacy for transformational leadership. The graduates confirmed that their leadership skills were developed to a great extent by the EDSLM program which yielded a mean of 4.68. In today’s situation, particularly in school organizations, transformational leadership is important. The transformational leadership style, though not a cure all for school leadership, is supported by decades of research on the considerable positive impact of the leadership style in enhancing the performance of business organizations and the last ten years in school settings. Education leader training and development programs should educate and train in the application of the leadership style, as well as look to integrate the approach with traditional school leadership practices that will continue to be applicable to managing and leading schools in an era of change (Anderson, 2017).

5. Research skills

A key component in the program outcomes in

the EDSLM program is research scholar. It aims to train school leaders who are able to demonstrate ability to design and conduct scientific research, studies and investigations that contribute to the advancement of knowledge of theory and practice in educational leadership and management. The graduates believed that the EDSLM program had enhanced their research skills which they are able to do in their workplace. With the mean of 4.80, the graduates said that to a great extent they are able to manifest competence in conceptualizing a research problem that is shaped by theoretical or practical issues in educational leadership and management. Moreover, they are able to demonstrate competence in the use of quantitative and qualitative research data and findings in analyzing trends, practices and prospects on advancing educational leadership and management. School leaders ought to undertake ‘research’ when they have a question or a problem that requires resolution. Too often, school leaders may think they know the answer to the question already, that it is obvious, or ‘common sense’. However until the problem is subjected to rigorous scrutiny, common sense ‘knowledge’ remains little more than guesswork or at best, intuition, even if based on many years of ‘experience’ (Turner & Lynch, 2020).

6. Problem-solving skills

One of the most challenging tasks of school leaders is resolving conflicts. According to the graduates, the EDSLM program prepared them to become school leaders who have good problem-solving skills. The results showed “To a Great Extent”, they are able to understand and deal with the school problems because of their problem-solving skills. One of the domains in the SEAMEO Innotech Competency Framework (2014) is personal excellence which points out that school leaders should exhibit decisiveness in addressing challenges. They must be able to exercise sound judgement based on facts, experience and functional knowledge. They must be able to demonstrate the ability to make timely and effective decisions based on prescribed national policies, appropriate tools and processes. More importantly, they take responsibility for the decisions made. With the Covid-19 pandemic forcing schools to forego physical classes and shifting to online classes, school leaders need to have better problem-solving skills. Crisis and change management are now essential skills of a school leader. Running an effective school in disruptive times will require more than routine problem solving or occasional firefighting. Instead all school

leaders will need to be engaged in constant crisis and change management which will require support and collaboration from all staff. The speed of change in this pandemic is unprecedented, hence a high degree of trust will be needed, as the collective glue, to ensure that issues are addressed collectively as they arise (Harris & Jones, 2020).

7. Information technology skills

The rapidly expanding use of technology in education requires principals to be prepared as technology leaders; however, many are not currently prepared for this role. It is crucial that principals are prepared in order to lead schools in successful technology integration and support (Esplin, Stewart, & Thurston, 2018). In fact, this is one of the skills found in the different standards for school heads and supervisors globally. Courses on developing technological skills of students are found in the EDSLM program. The graduates perceived that the EDSLM program had developed their information technology skills “To a Great Extent” with a mean of 4.72. This skill has to be developed for it is already one of the domains in the Philippine Professional Standards for Supervisors. Domain 3 which is fostering a culture of continuous improvement, it underpins supervisors’ organization and technical skills in providing support for instructional leadership, technology-based innovation including ICT, a culture or research, communities of practice and the use of communication platforms (Philippine Professional Standards for Supervisors-Department of Education, 2020).

Table 3 Weighted means in different school leadership skills

Skills	Mean	Interpretation	Rank
Knowledge and skills	4.68	To a great extent	4
Communication skills	4.68	To a great extent	4
Human relation skills	4.64	To a great extent	7
Leadership skills	4.68	To a great extent	4
Research skills	4.80	To a great extent	1
Problem-solving skills	4.76	To a great extent	2
Information technology skills	4.72	To a great extent	3

To enhance the EDSLM program, the graduates informed the reserachers that there are needs and challenges today in school leadership that must be discussed and given emphasis to in the program. Eventually, it will lead to the enrichment or development of new school leadership skills which can be gleaned on Table 4.

Table 4 Skills to be enhanced and developed in the EDLM Graduate Programs

Skills to be enhanced	Needs and challenges
Supervisory and leadership skills in the new normal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leadership in the new normal • Leading during uncertainties • Flexibility
People skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers' wellness • Mentoring • Adaptability
Technology skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online classes • Future teaching and learning modalities

Discussion

Based on the results of the study, it can be gleaned that all masteral and doctoral EDSLM program graduates were able to apply their graduate education to a great extent in their current work. It implies that the EDSLM program is effective and very helpful in preparing current or future school leaders for leadership. The graduates considered their research skills were strongly developed and used in their work as school leaders and teachers. In Table 3, research skills was ranked 1 among the seven skills which validates the strength of the graduate education program of the university.

The results are definitely very encouraging, especially to the EDSLM professors. However, it suggests that they must not sit on their laurels and ignore what the data shows between the lines. To make the program more effective, relevant and meaningful, the study implies that leadership skills, knowledge and skills, communication skills and human relation skills should be further developed in the program. These four skills are important in developing school leaders who will be transformational leaders. According to Kenneth Leithwood, a guru on school leadership, he pointed out that transformational leaders should be able to set direction, develop people, redesign the organization and manage the instructional program. A school will grow with a school leader who is equipped with the key educational leadership and management skills which are influenced by transformational leadership. Based on a study, transformational leadership influences the capacity for school innovation. Also, this type of transformational leadership affects the organizational learning and organizational structure, while the organizational learning and organizational structure affect the capacity of innovation (Waruwu et al, 2020).

Based on the identified skills that need to be enhanced and developed in the EDSLM Program, the

following are discussed:

1. Supervisory and leadership skills in the new normal

It was never imagined that face-to-face classes would be suspended globally for at least one school year and online classes would be the new modality. The Covid-19 pandemic forced everyone to stay home, study at home and work from home. Though the digital culture was becoming a significant part of one's life, it was not fully embraced because social interaction is considered very important. Likewise, our laws, rules, policies, procedures and other processes are mostly designed and developed for physical engagement. With practically no basis to begin, school leaders and teachers used their creative minds and experiences to develop new plans and programs in order to address the challenges for a new normal in education. Aside from holding classes, one of the concerns that came out is monitoring, managing, supervising and leading teachers and students in an online environment. With practically no literature on school leadership in the new normal, the participants pointed out that experts in educational leadership and management should find ways to develop the supervisory and leadership skills of school leaders for the new normal. A graduate shared that :

"As we are living in a volatile world, the program should give more emphasis on how its current graduate students who will eventually become school leaders are able to adapt to highly improbable yet significantly impactful events that may disrupt the current learning system."

Similarly, another graduate pointed out that :

"For me, educational leadership and management should give more emphasis on subjects that could help school leaders to lead effectively through uncertainty. The course should equip school leaders ability to adapt quickly to a rapidly changing situation."

With a year of experience in online teaching and learning, education leaders will have to start conceptualizing, studying and creating theories on school leadership in the new normal. They also have to be flexible and open-minded for online supervision and leadership which is a totally new ballgame. Most school leadership preparation and training programmes prior to Covid-19 are likely to be out of step with the challenges facing school leaders today. In many cases, the existing preparation and training programmes, along with the models of leadership they espouse, will require a radical re-think and significant modification to remain relevant

for aspiring and practising school leaders. It would be a mistake to simply re-configure or re-badge what was relevant before Covid-19, as much of this training and development may no longer be fit for the purpose. New programmes will be required that fully and adequately encompass the leadership skills, practices and actions suited to the current and potentially ongoing, Covid-19 situation (Harris & Jones, 2020).

2. People skills

Pandemic or not, business and school leaders should have great people skills in order to lead all stakeholders to the organization's vision. There is a general notion that leadership is about power and authority which pushes aside people, the most important component in any organization. A graduate opined that :

"I think most leaders (EDSLM students or not) need to have more people skills. Many leaders fail to connect to their subordinates. They seem to have built a wall which make them unreachable in times of needs. Their teachers hesitate to tell them what is wrong with the processes or even to share their ideas."

In relating with teachers and staff, it is important that school leaders look after their needs and concerns or their wellness. During this time of uncertainty, with a lot of people experiencing physical and mental illnesses, school leaders must show more concern to teachers and students. A graduate shared that :

"With all that is happening in the system, being positive, pro-active and caring is needed. A lot of changes or adjustments are needed to have a better system; having these set of values would build better and authentic relation to each member of the school community. We should prioritized the well-being of each member."

Another graduate said that :

"It is teachers' wellness because teachers nowadays are very exhausted in all aspects of health like mental and emotional."

Though working from home, teachers experienced more problems in online learning. They felt that there were new responsibilities and tasks that had to be accomplished. It became more stressful than expected. Teachers experienced considerable stress as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, which was related to poorer mental health, coping and teaching. At the same time, teachers reported resiliencies, which were related to better coping and teaching. Supporting teachers' well-being is critical to prevent significant adverse consequences for teachers, their students and the

education system as a whole (Baker et al, 2021). School leaders need to be more flexible, understanding, compassionate and visible even in an online environment. Teachers will look for them because they need to be listened and mentored with a heart, mind and hand most especially during this online engagement in teaching and learning.

3. Technology Skills

The Covid-19 pandemic became an opportunity to learn new skills. Many did it willingly while others were forced because their work required the new skills . Though school leaders and teachers have developed their technological skills, online teaching and learning required more skills than what they had.. They started developing their technology skills by attending webinars, watching youtube and asking their fellow teachers to teach them. Doing online classes through different platforms like google classroom and zoom were challenging but many were able to adjust; though there are still a lot to come. With blended learning as the possible new modality in the future new normal, technology will be here to stay. Therefore, according to the graduates, the EDSL program should provide opportunities to enhance the graduate student's technology skills. A graduate shared that :

"There is a need to become familiar with the application of technology in teaching and redesigning the process of teaching to provide a balance work between teaching and clerical tasks for educators."

Another graduate pointed out that :

"The current pandemic changed the way we give instructions to students and address concerns of parents. While face to face may return in the near future the use of technology in providing distance education and how to communicate with parents both in admin and teachers' online can be explored. Embracing the benefits of using technology post-pandemic. Looking forward to hybrid form (face to face/online/modular) of instruction."

With graduate classes being conducted online, EDSL graduate students are hitting two birds with one stone. As they study, they also develop their technology skills both as a student and a teacher. In fact, their creativity and patience in online learning are evident for they were able to manage and survive online teaching and learning for one school year. In today's pandemic situation, Filipino graduate students have explored numerous ways and means in dealing with the effects of the pandemic. While some took the situation as a usual occurrence as they proceed with their usual tasks, the majority of them migrated to online means and platforms.

It is also worthy to know how some view the experience as a source of opportunity. Particular challenges faced are related to technology and internet access (Ancho, 2020).

As every graduate student struggles but eagerly wants to acquire new technology skills in teaching or leading fellow teachers, the aim is to be always better and adapt to the new situation.

Even before the pandemic, developing technology skills of school leaders and teachers have been emphasized. Incidentally, the pandemic situation reiterated its importance and educators have to relearn new technology skills. With this, research on technology skills before pandemic became significant. A study revealed that future principals' preparatory programmes should emphasize leadership based on technology to enhance school leaders confidence in using technology and integrate ICT in classrooms. Professional development for principals should be designed so that they can be exemplary models as well as have the ability to supervise Teachers' Technology Integration. Teachers must be innovative to integrate IoT in the classrooms in order to make 21st century education a reality and they must continue to accommodate the needs of Z generation students. Principal preparatory training and programmes should emphasize the use of 21st century knowledge pedagogical skills and leadership style such as the Technology Leadership to enhance and hasten the implementation of ICT for more effective teaching and learning in the classroom (Raman, Thannimalai, & Ismail, 2019).

Suggestions

School leaders and teachers enroll in educational leadership and management graduate programs not only to meet the required qualifications for academic positions but more importantly to be equipped with the different skills and competency in leading the stakeholders to realize the school's vision. The masteral and doctoral EDSLM program aims to produce graduates who are educational leader, research scholar and expert practitioner. Based on the findings of the study, the EDSLM graduates affirmed that the current masteral and doctoral EDSLM courses have prepared them for their current work as school leaders and teachers. The programs are very relevant and helpful in the discharge of their duties and responsibilities. However, the university officials and professors should continue to enhance the skills of the graduate students focusing on

knowledge and skills, communication skills, leadership skills and human relation skills.

The graduates believe that EDSLM program is effective but there are emerging concerns and situations where new skills should be developed and existing skills in the program need to be enhanced. The Covid-19 pandemic forced most organizations to do the work at home including holding online classes. The current situation in schools requires school leaders to look into supervision and leadership for the new normal, particularly in the virtual environment. School leaders need to develop new skills in managing and supervising teachers and students in an online environment. Furthermore, current and future school leaders should enhance their people and technology skills in order to adapt to the present and future needs of schools. Henceforth, the EDSLM professors should seriously look into these concerns and suggestions of the graduates so that the EDSLM program will continue to be relevant, helpful, meaningful and responsive to the needs and challenges of the times.

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