



# Strengthening and Improving the Knowledge Advancement of Aspiring Principal (SIKAP) in the Philippines



Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization  
Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology  
(**SEAMEO INNOTECH**) and Education Center for AI Research (**E-CAIR**)





# Strengthening and Improving the Knowledge Advancement of Aspiring Principal (SIKAP) in the Philippines

Angel Derrickvhel Q. Tan and Rex Gregor M. Laylo

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# Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>AI</b>	Artificial Intelligence
<b>ANOVA</b>	Analysis of Variance
<b>BHROD</b>	Bureau of Human Resource and Organizational Development
<b>CAR</b>	Cordillera Administrative Region
<b>CRLA</b>	Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment
<b>CSC</b>	Civil Service Commission
<b>DBM</b>	Department of Budget and Management
<b>DepEd</b>	Department of Education
<b>DUNONG</b>	Dashboard for Understanding NQESH Outcomes and Grade-generation System
<b>EDCOM II</b>	Second Congressional Commission on Education
<b>ELLNA</b>	Early Language, Literacy, and Numeracy Assessment
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>HRMPSB</b>	Human Resource Management and Placement Selection Board
<b>HT</b>	Head Teacher
<b>IAB</b>	Institut Aminuddin Baki
<b>MLS</b>	Management and Leadership in Schools
<b>MT</b>	Master Teacher
<b>NASH</b>	National Assessment for School Heads
<b>NCEE</b>	National Center on Education and Economy
<b>NCR</b>	National Capital Region
<b>NEAP</b>	National Educators Academy of the Philippines
<b>NIE</b>	National Institute of Education
<b>NPQEL</b>	National Professional Qualification for Educational Leaders
<b>NQESH</b>	National Qualifying Examination for School Heads
<b>NTU</b>	Nanyang Technological University
<b>PQP</b>	Principal's Qualification Program
<b>PPSSH</b>	Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads
<b>QS</b>	Qualification Standards
<b>TIC</b>	Teacher-in-Charge





## AI in Education: Innovations and Governance for Equitable and Accessible Learning



The **Education Center for Artificial Intelligence Research (E-CAIR)** is a specialized center under the Department of Education Philippines and SEAMEO INNOTECH that performs AI research and innovation, capacity-building, and policy development, advancing data science- and AI-driven solutions and applications to support education systems.



***What makes a teacher  
ready to become a  
principal?***



PART 1

# Introduction

---

**What makes a teacher ready to become a principal?** Principal selection is among the most critical decisions any education agency must make (Delgado, 2015). As instructional leaders and administrative managers, principals directly and indirectly shape student learning outcomes. They ensure that academic standards are maintained, curriculum implementation is consistent, and teaching practices in the schools are aligned with national educational goals. They are often cited as the key figure in a school's development, either blocking or promoting change, overseeing the processes of growth, and carrying the school towards its success (Huber, 2009; Sfakianaki, Bakalmpasi, and Dimitriou, 2016).

In the Philippine context, this underscores the challenge to build and sustain a strong pipeline of qualified and competent principals across more than 40,000 public schools. This is particularly acute today, as the DepEd seeks to address the massive shortage of principals. Nearly 25,000 public schools in the Philippines currently lack appointed principals, creating gaps in leadership and straining the educational system (EDCOM II, 2025). Acting school heads and teachers-in-charge (TICs) often shoulder the responsibilities of a principal without the formal authority or support needed for effective leadership. This shortage is driven by two primary factors: the limited availability of permanent positions for principals and the previously low passing rates in the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH), prior to its shift from being an eligibility requirement towards becoming a competency assessment tool.

To better understand trends in DepEd's principalship pipeline and identify opportunities for systemic improvement, this research analyzes the key predictors of leadership readiness by examining teacher attributes strongly associated with leadership readiness, as measured by teachers' performance in the NQESH. It also investigates how the demonstrated readiness of acting school heads influences school learning outcomes and incorporates expert insights and international best practices to shape actionable recommendations for principalship development.

Grounded in robust evidence, the study strengthens the principalship preparation and selection system, offering intelligence to inform policy and practice. Aligned with DepEd's 5-Point Reform Agenda, it enables DepEd to more effectively identify, assess, support, and empower the next generation of principals.



PART 2

# Principalship Development in the Philippines

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MS. JOSEPHINE M. CALANLAM

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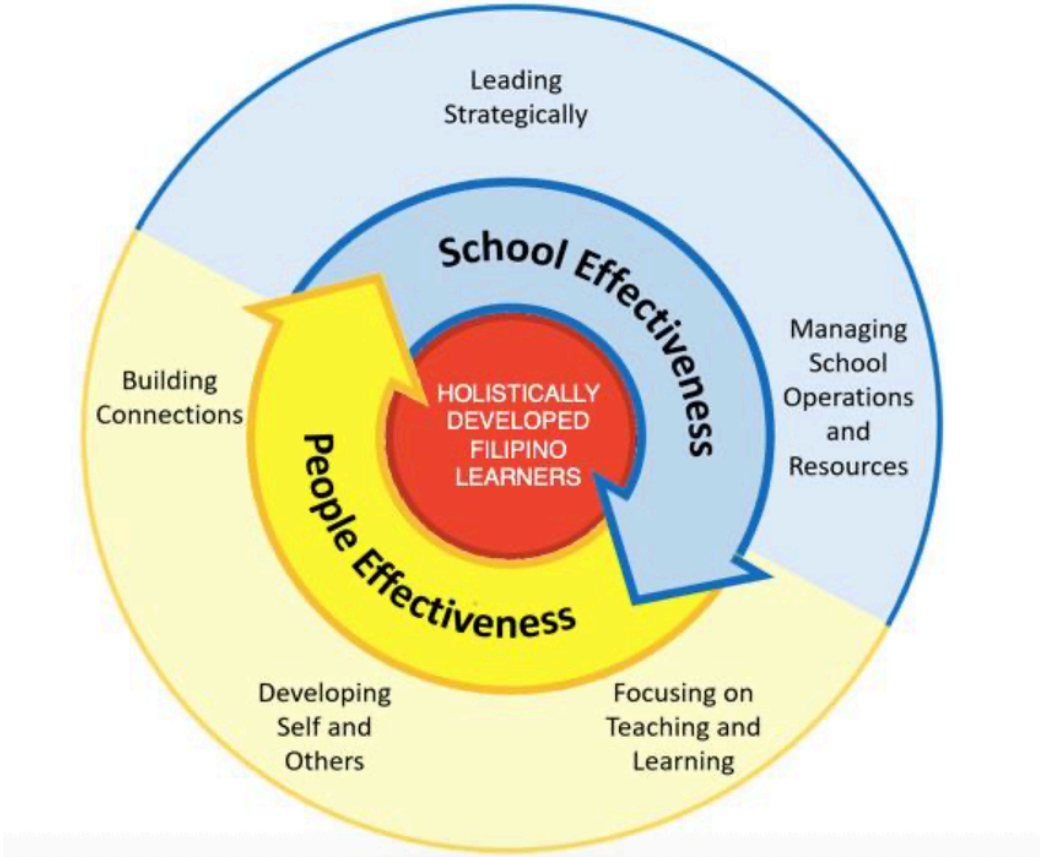
MS. LYNN ZUNIGA-P

Chief Education Supervisor, Dep

**Principals are the brain and backbone of every school.** Under Republic Act No. 9155, every Philippine public elementary and high school must have a designated school head who serves as both instructional leader and administrative manager. The school head is responsible for setting the school’s direction, managing resources, fostering an enabling learning environment, and ensuring inclusive, high-quality learning outcomes, aligned with national education policies and standards. They are entrusted with the administrative authority to lead curriculum implementation, staff development, community engagement, and school improvements.

**What makes an ideal Filipino principal?** The Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH) outlines the standard competencies, skills, and knowledge required of school heads to ensure effective leadership. It is built upon several key domains such as: (1) **Leading Strategically**, which assesses vision-setting and decision-making; (2) **Managing School Operations and Resources**, which focuses on resource and administrative management; (3) **Focusing on Teaching and Learning**, which evaluates instructional leadership and support for teaching excellence; (4) **Developing Self and Others**, which measures personal growth and leadership development; and (5) **Building Connections**, which examines stakeholder engagement and school-community relationships (Figure 1).

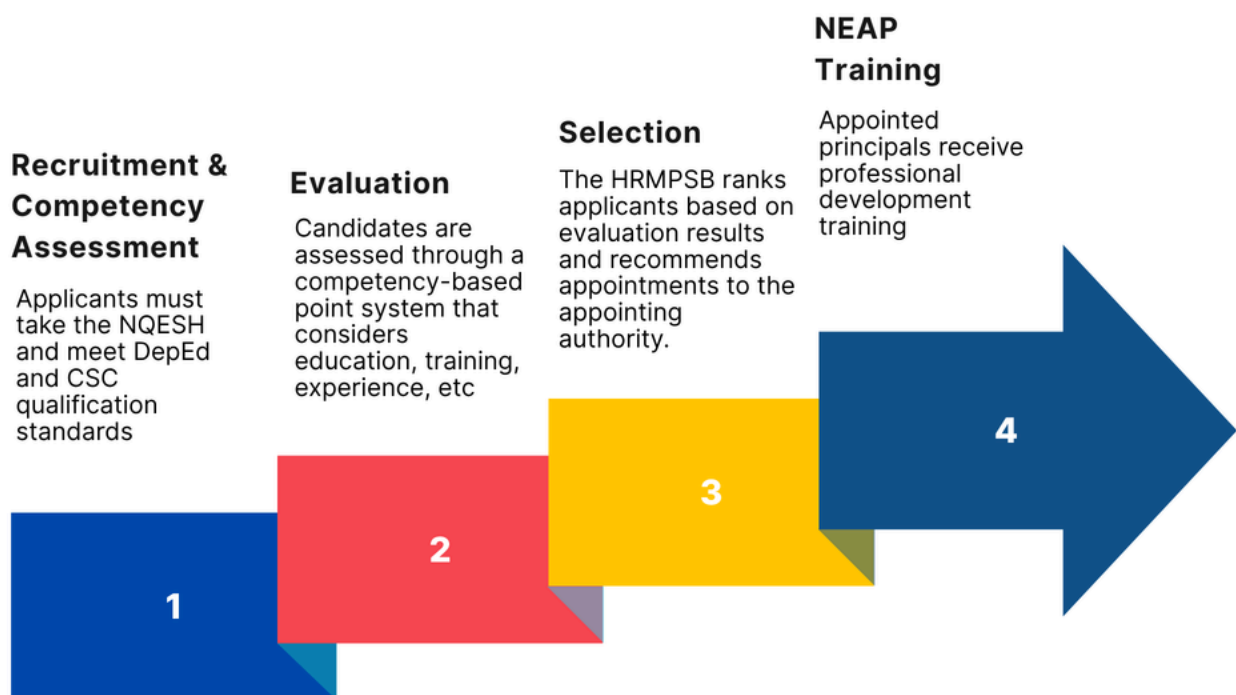
**Figure 1.**  
*The PPSSH Framework*





**In assessing, selecting, and appointing principals, DepEd follows a structured and comprehensive process.** This process begins with an applicant meeting baseline qualification standards and taking the National Qualifying Examination for School Heads (NQESH) as a competency assessment. Following the prescribed qualifications of the DepEd and the Civil Service Commission (CSC), eligible candidates are then evaluated through a merit-based assessment system that considers various aspects of the applicants' background. The Human Resource Management and Placement Selection Board (HRMPSB) of every division oversees the appointment process.

**Figure 2.**  
*The Current Principal Recruitment and Selection Process*



Source: Illustrated by the Author



## 1. RECRUITMENT

The application process for aspiring principals begins with meeting the established eligibility criteria by DepEd and the Civil Service Commission (CSC). According to DepEd Order No. 50, s. 2014 applicants for Principal I positions in both elementary and secondary schools must meet the following specific Qualification Standards (QS):

- **Education:** Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education or Bachelor's degree with 18 professional education units
- **Experience:** Head Teacher (HT) for 1 year; Teacher-In-Charge (TIC) for 2 years; Master Teacher (MT) for 2 years; Teacher for 5 years
- **Training:** 40 hours of relevant training
- **Eligibility:** RA 1080 (Teacher)

**Competency Assessment:** The aspiring applicant must also meet the competencies of PPSSH, as assessed by the NQESH. The NQESH uses multiple-choice items centered on situational judgment and real-world school leadership scenarios to test PPSSH knowledge. Upon calculation of the final score, examiners are classified as follows.

- Category A:** Overall score is 65 and above, and at least 4 of the Domains are 65 and above;
- Category B:** Overall score is 65 and above, and at least 3 Domains are 65 and above; and
- Category C:** Overall score is below 65 or Overall score is 65 and above but only 2 Domains are 65 and above.

Category A takers will be eligible for appointment to entry-level school principal position, while Categories B and C takers will be eligible for appointment after completion of supplementary training.



## 2. EVALUATION

Enclosure No. 3 of DepEd Order No. 007, series of 2023 scores eligible candidates using a competency-based scoring criteria:

**Education** (10 points) considers relevant degrees or education units that exceed the minimum CSC Qualification Standards (QS). **Training** (10 points) includes relevant training hours acquired after the last promotion and within the past five years. **Experience** (10 points) refers to relevant work experience beyond the QS minimum. **Performance** (25 points) is based on at least one year of performance ratings in a current or previous relevant position. **Outstanding Accomplishments** (10 points) recognize notable achievements obtained after the last promotion. **Application of Education** (10 points) measures how educational qualifications have been applied in practice. **Application of Learning and Development** (10 points) assesses how recent training has been utilized on the job. **Potential** (15 points) uses the NQESH score, and the Behavioral Events Interview (BEI).

Once evaluated, the HRMPSB, chaired by the Schools Division Superintendent, proceeds with the appointment of the promising principal.



## 3. TRAINING

As of 2024, the National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP) does not offer a structured and rigorous pre-service or post-service training program that holistically covers the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH). Nonetheless, NEAP provides various training activities for school heads that address select aspects of the PPSSH but do not yet constitute a comprehensive or standardized training framework. There are also regional-specific training programs for school heads. It is worth noting that there are ongoing efforts and plans to develop a more coherent and holistic national training system aligned with the full scope of the PPSSH.





PART 3

# Conceptual Framework and Methodology

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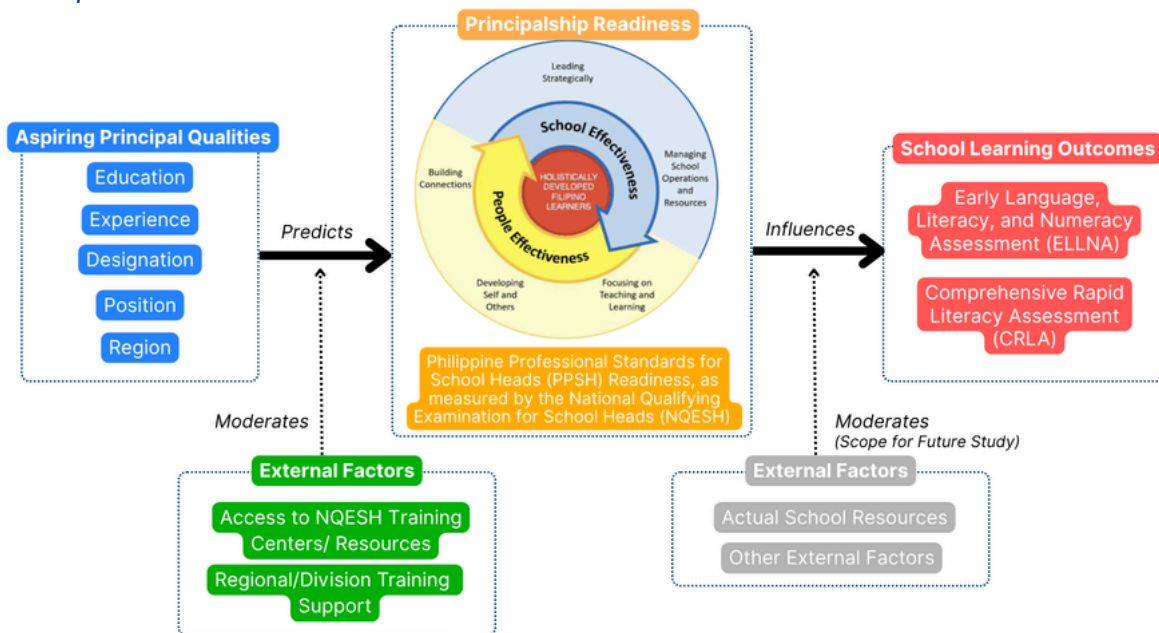
# Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by a conceptual framework that links teacher attributes, leadership readiness, and school learning outcomes, while acknowledging the role of external factors. Aspiring principal qualities—such as education, experience, designation, position, and region—are hypothesized to predict leadership readiness. Leadership readiness, in turn, is expected to influence school learning outcomes.

The study also notes other moderating factors influencing how individual teacher attributes translate into principalship readiness. These include access to NQESH training and institutional support from regional or division offices, which were identified through expert consultations and stakeholder insights given the limited availability of quantitative data. For example, advanced degrees or long years of service may strengthen readiness only when complemented by mentoring, preparatory training, or technical assistance.

Finally, the framework also acknowledges that the extent to which readiness translates into improved school outcomes may also depend on contextual conditions such as school resources. This lies beyond the scope of the present analysis due to data limitations but is highlighted as an important area for future research.

**Figure 3.**  
*Conceptual Framework*



# Methodology

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses to investigate the predictors of leadership readiness among aspiring principals and to examine how demonstrated readiness influences school learning outcomes.

Using the 2023 NQESH results, with 21,803 teachers, descriptive statistics were first generated to summarize the demographic and professional profiles of examinees, including educational attainment, years of experience, designation, position, and region. To identify the key determinants of NQESH performance, logistic regression analysis was conducted to test the extent to which these attributes predict qualification outcomes.



To evaluate the relationship between leadership readiness and school performance, school-level learning outcomes were analyzed by linking NQESH data with results from the Early Language Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (2023)<sup>1</sup>, the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (2024)<sup>2</sup>, and the School Heads Inventory. To test whether learning outcomes varied significantly across different NQESH qualification categories (A, B, and C), both the Kruskal-Wallis test and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were applied. These tests enabled comparison of mean school performance indicators across multiple readiness groups.

To enrich the quantitative results, qualitative data were collected through focus group discussions and stakeholder consultations. These provided deeper insights into contextual factors—such as institutional support and training opportunities—that influence leadership development but are not systematically captured in existing datasets.

Finally, the study examined international practices in school leadership development as benchmarks to inform the Philippine context. Integrating global models into the analysis strengthened the interpretation of findings and supported the formulation of evidence-based, locally relevant policy recommendations.

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<sup>1</sup>A key stage test administered at the end of Grade 3 to measure students' achievement of learning standards in early language, literacy, and numeracy using multiple-choice items in English, Filipino, and Mother Tongue.

<sup>2</sup>A diagnostic tool for Grades 1 to 3 that evaluates reading skills and classifies learners into proficiency levels to guide targeted literacy interventions.





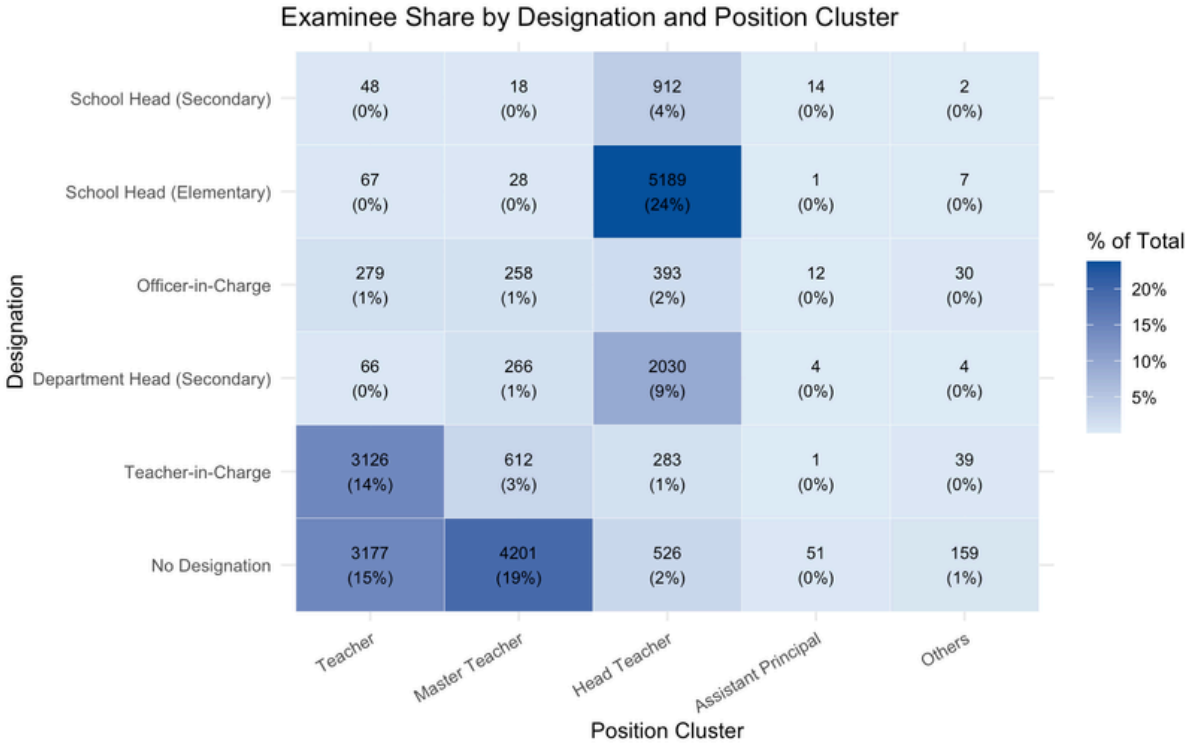
PART 4

# Results and Discussion

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**The 2023 pool of aspiring principals showed a balanced mix of current school leaders and new aspirants, reflecting desires for formal appointments within existing leadership ranks and growing interest from classroom teachers seeking advancement.** The largest proportion of examinees (24%) are Head Teacher applicants who are designated School Heads (Elementary), indicating that many are using the exam to formalize their leadership roles. This is followed by non-designated Master Teachers (19%) and non-designated Teachers I–III (15%), highlighting strong interest among the broader teacher base in entering school leadership. Teachers I–III serving as Teachers-in-Charge make up 14%, signifying that those in interim roles are also seeking formal appointments. Lastly, Head Teachers designated as Department Heads (Secondary) constitute 9%, pointing to a demand from next-in-rank leaders in the secondary school system.

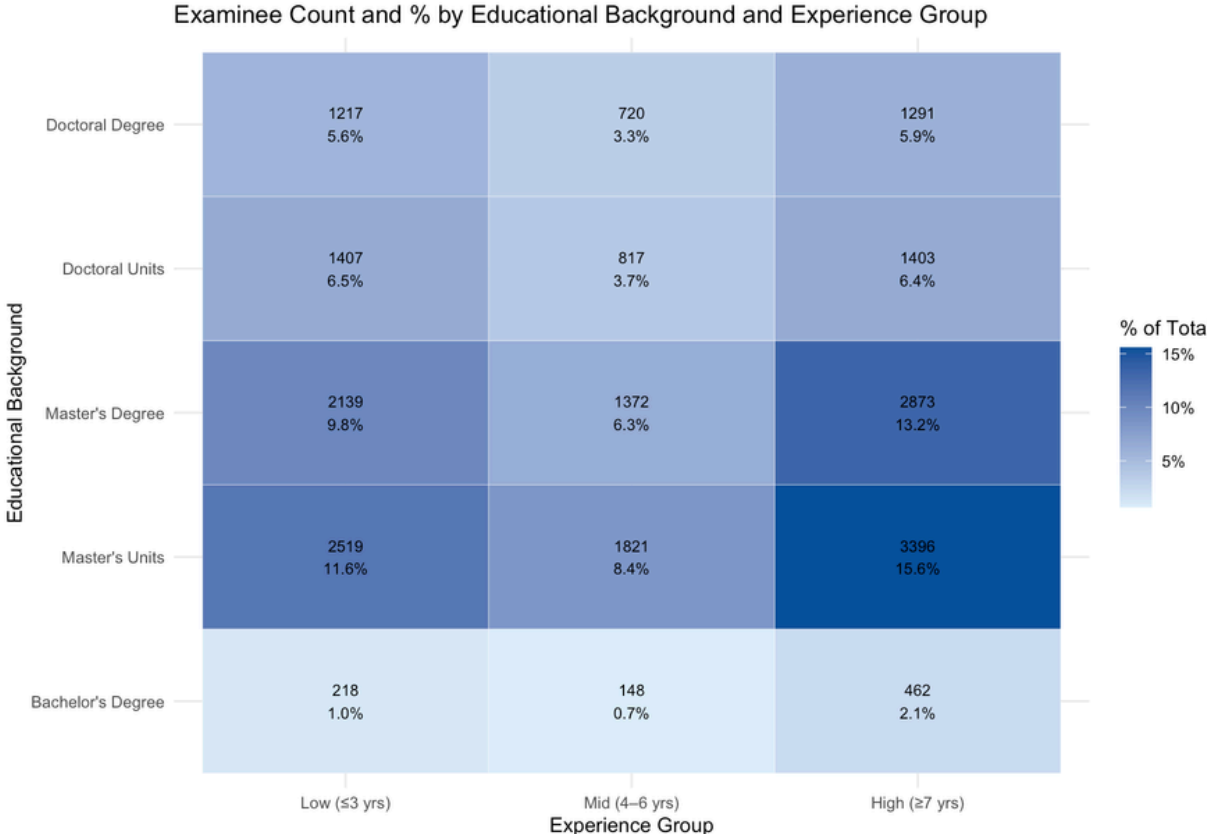
**Figure 4.**  
*NQESH 2023 Takers, by Position and Designation*



**In terms of education and experience in their current positions, aspiring principals are predominantly mid- to high-experienced educators with graduate-level training.** Over 85% of examinees have at least master’s units, with the largest groups being those with master’s units (36%) and master’s degrees (29%). These candidates are distributed fairly evenly across the experience spectrum, but the highest densities appear in the High ( $\geq 7$  years) group, especially for those with master’s units (15.6%) and master’s degrees (13.2%), showing that seasoned professionals are the most represented segment in the pool.

Candidates with doctoral units or degrees also make up a significant portion, suggesting both early and late-career educators are pursuing leadership roles. In contrast, bachelor’s degree holders remain a small share (3.8%), with limited presence across all experience levels, indicating that those without graduate credentials are less likely to pursue or be considered for principalship.

**Figure 5.**  
*NQESH 2023 Takers, by Education and Experience*

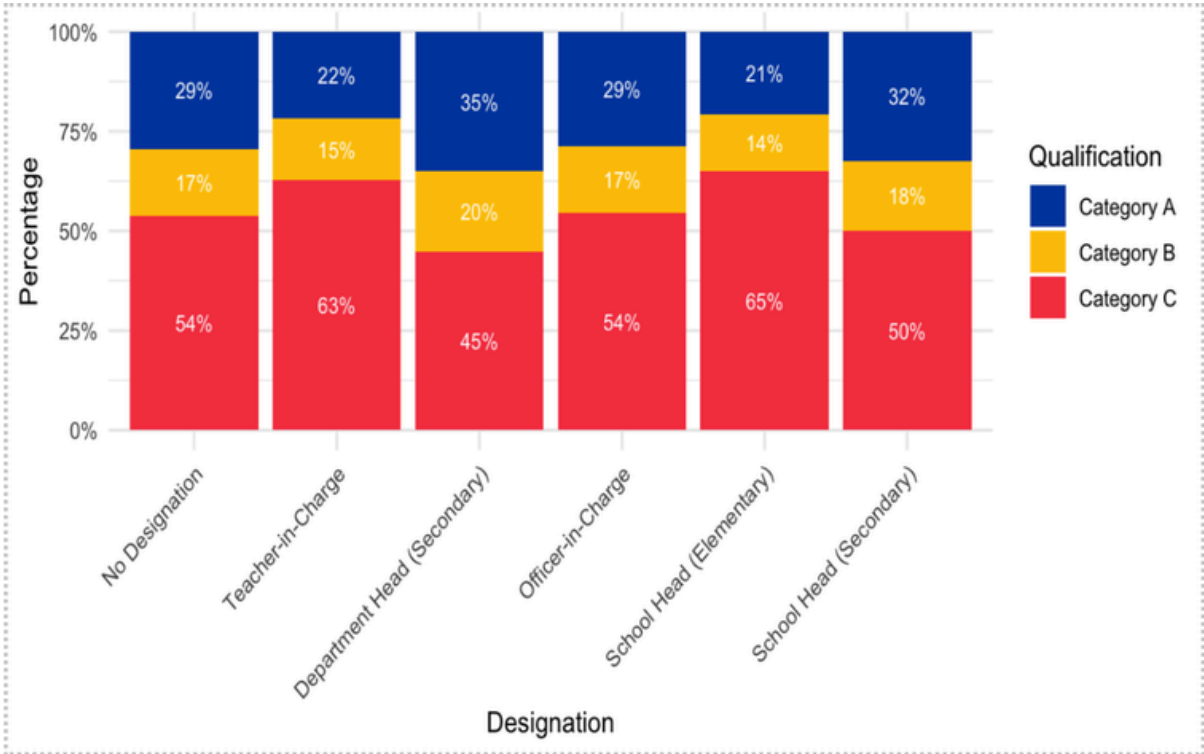


**In terms of current designations, teachers acting as school leaders face challenges in meeting the Category A threshold.** Only 21% of elementary and 32% of secondary school heads qualified under Category A, while the majority—79% and 68%, respectively—fell into Categories B and C. Teachers-in-Charge, despite shouldering interim leadership responsibilities, posted the highest failure rate at 63%. Interestingly, Department Heads (Secondary) outperformed others, with 35% reaching Category A.

**Their low scores on the qualifying exam may reflect the limited opportunities to engage with the strategic dimensions of school leadership of the standards set in the PPSSH.** Many of these acting school heads are already carrying out critical leadership tasks—managing teams, guiding instruction, and making key decisions—often without structured preparation. Insights from the field reveal that while they may demonstrate competence in daily operations, they often lack access to training grounded in the full breadth of the PPSSH domains. Because acting appointments are temporary and often based on superintendents’ trust and confidence, they typically do not require formal leadership training. As a result, some appointees assume the role without prior exposure to the PPSSH or structured preparation.

While some regions complement appointments with structured training and mentorship and contextualizes support through technical assistance by Education Program Supervisors, other regions offer only piecemeal interventions touching on select PPSSH competencies. For those without access to structured and progressive development programs, these acting school heads are left to navigate complex responsibilities without the benefit of foundational frameworks or evidence-based practices.

**Figure 6.**  
*Proportion of Takers by NQESH Categories and Designation*



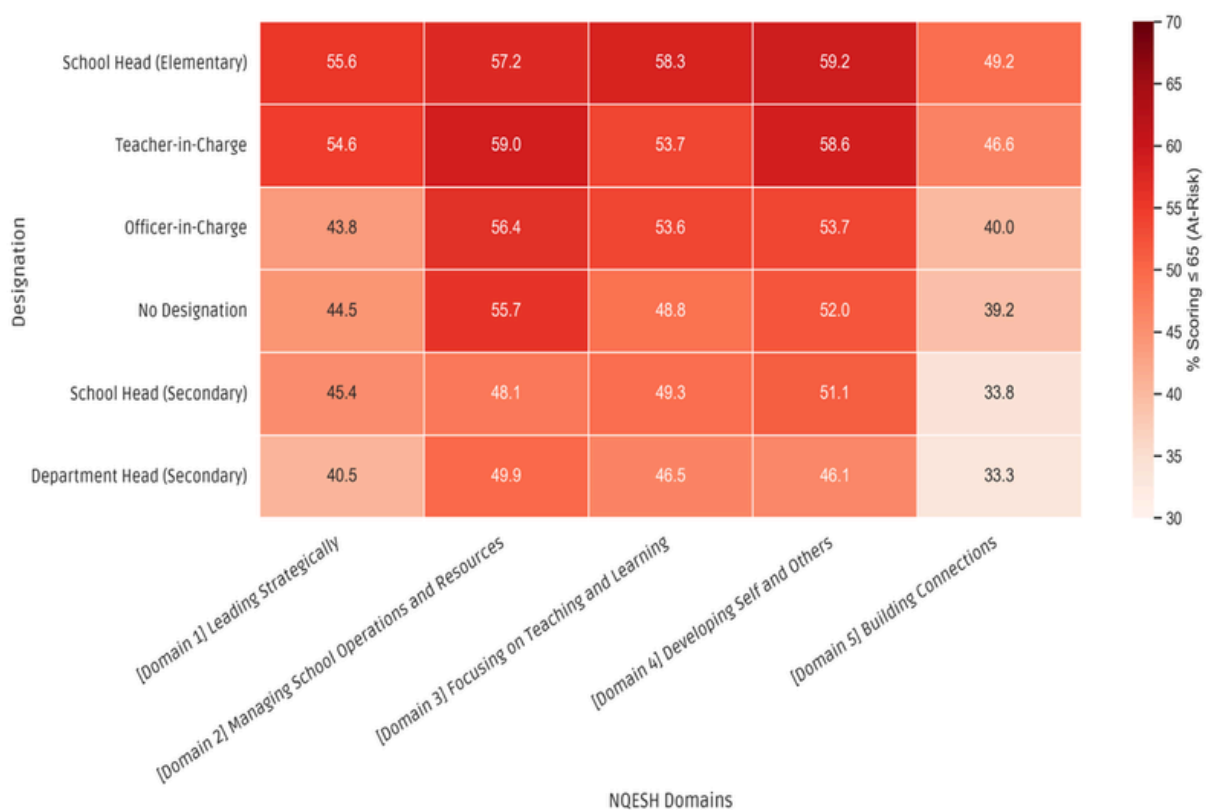
**Designated school leaders generally fall short of a passing score in almost every NQESH domain.** *Elementary School Heads*, who make up the majority of NQESH takers, recorded the highest proportion of examinees scoring 65 and below across all five PPSSH domains. *Teachers-in-Charge* followed closely, posting similarly low exam scores. *Officers-in-Charge* also showed widespread underperformance. In contrast, *Department Heads (Secondary)* posted comparatively better outcomes.

**These findings yield two critical implications.** First, the data further validates that many incumbent school leaders—particularly those designated as *Elementary School Heads*, *Teachers-in-Charge*, and *Officers-in-Charge*—require **systematic and holistic professional development anchored on the PPSSH**. The widespread incidence of low domain scores suggests that the assigned leadership responsibilities may have not been matched with adequate preparation in the standards-based competencies expected of school heads.

Second, **Domains 2, 3, and 4** emerged as the top areas of concern. Domain 2 reflects challenges in managing school operations—such as budgeting, staffing, and resource allocation—where many designated leaders lack formal training. More critically, underperformance in Domain 3, which directly influences teaching quality and student learning outcomes, points to a gap in instructional leadership. Without strong competencies in guiding teacher practice, school heads could struggle to drive improvements in learning. Domain 4, which focuses on Developing Self and Others, also showed a significant proportion of low scores. This indicates a lack of readiness among many aspiring principals to support professional growth—both their own and that of their teachers—through coaching, mentoring, and collaborative learning.

**Figure 7.**

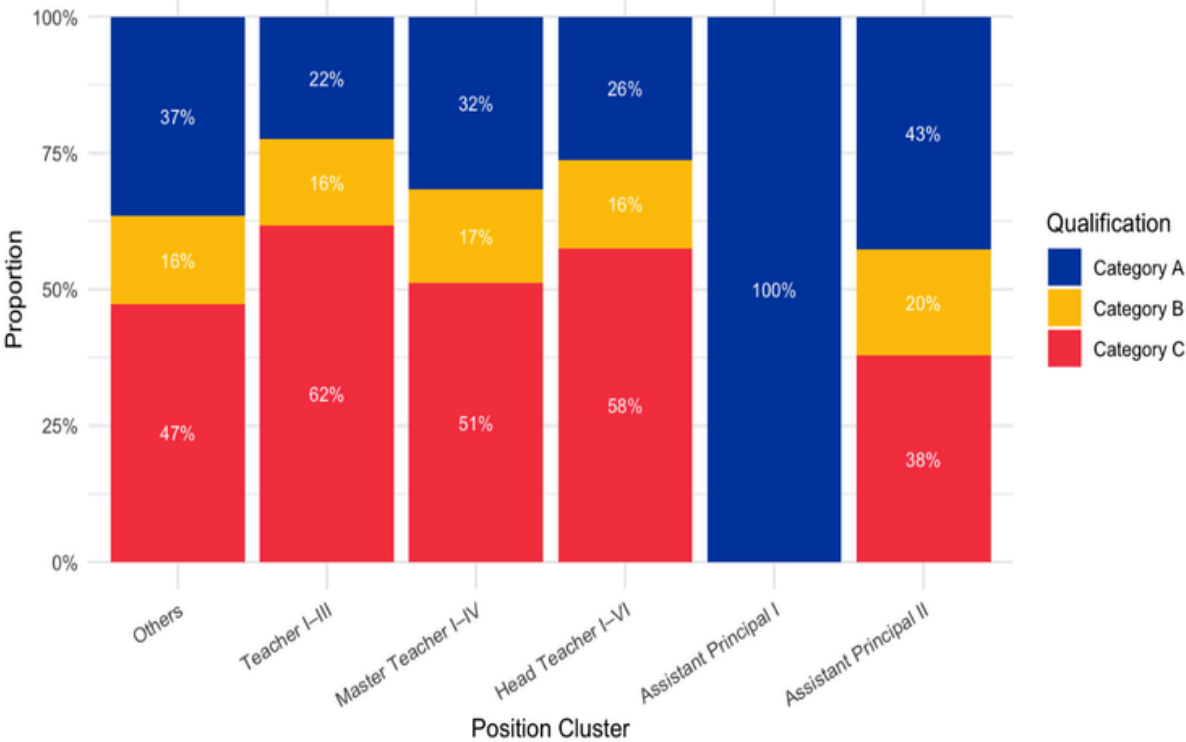
*Proportion of Failed Takers by NQESH Domain and Designation*



**In terms of position, only 43% of Assistant Principal II examinees qualified under Category A, while the remaining 57% fell into Categories B and C.** This is noteworthy given that Assistant Principals are typically next in line for principalship and are already entrusted with a high level of managing instruction, overseeing staff, and supporting school operations. This reveals that many may not have undergone the kind of structured, progressive preparation that would help them connect their experience with the conceptual and strategic competencies demanded by the PPSSH.

**Head Teachers also recorded low rates of Category A takers with only 26% reaching the benchmark, despite most of them serving as school heads.** Interestingly, Master Teachers performed slightly better, with 32% qualifying under Category A—despite being less embedded in formal school management structures. Their performance on the NQESH may likewise reflect the limited opportunities they’ve had to develop the broader strategic and instructional leadership competencies required by the PPSSH. Interestingly, those in the “Others”, such as Special Education Teachers, posted the highest success rate, with 37% qualifying under Category A.

**Figure 8.**  
*Proportion of Takers by NQESH Categories and Position*

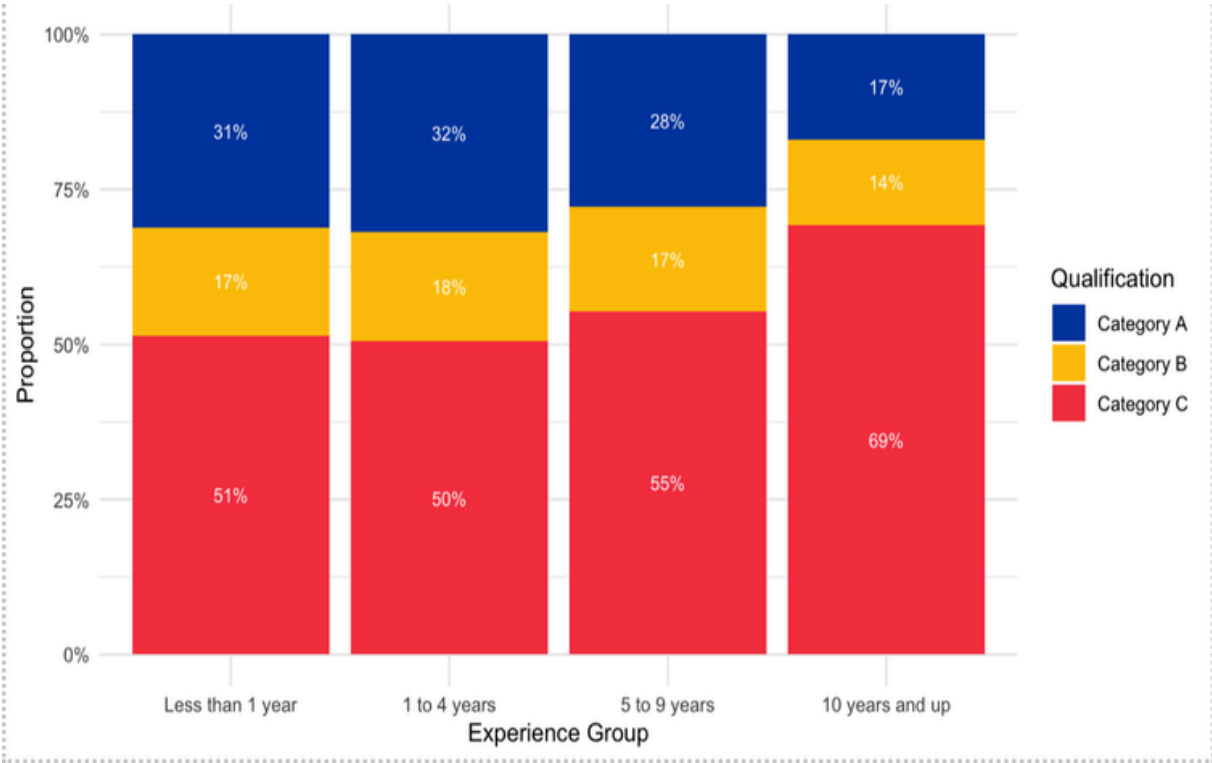


**In terms of experience in their current positions, the data reveals an important trend: longer tenure does not necessarily translate into higher success in the NQESH.** Those with less than one year and 1 to 4 years of experience had the highest proportion qualifying under Category A (31% and 32%, respectively), while those with 5 to 9 years dropped to 28%, and those with 10 years and up had the lowest success rate at just 17%.

These patterns suggest that while extended service may build operational familiarity, it does not always develop the strategic competencies emphasized in the PPSSH. Many long-serving teachers have built their leadership practice around older frameworks, with limited opportunities to align with current DepEd policies and standards.

This was affirmed during the regional validation sessions, where participants noted that school heads often rely on localized leadership approaches that, while contextually responsive, diverge from formal expectations. Post-exam debriefings further revealed that some acting school heads only became aware of the PPSSH and relevant DepEd orders after taking the NQESH, underscoring a critical need to strengthen policy literacy early in their leadership journey.

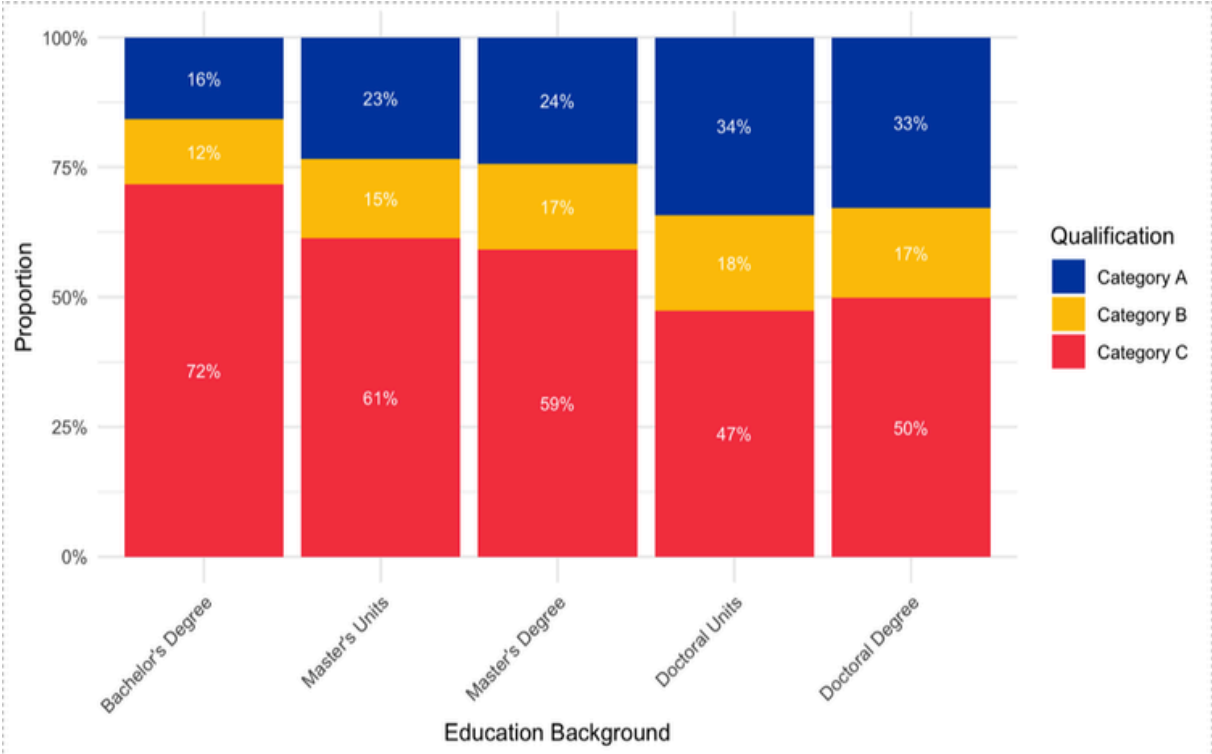
**Figure 9.**  
*Proportion of Failed Takers by NQESH Categories and Experience*



**In terms of educational attainment, teachers with advanced academic preparation show a greater likelihood of qualifying under Category A, suggesting that graduate education plays a meaningful role in strengthening leadership readiness.** Success rates were highest among those with doctoral units (34%) and full doctoral degrees (33%), followed by master’s degree holders (24%) and those with master’s units (23%), compared to just 16% among bachelor’s degree holders. This positive correlation is encouraging—graduate studies can provide a solid foundation in research, policy, and critical thinking that supports school leadership.

At the same time, the fact that many of those highly educated takers still do not meet the Category A—67% among doctoral degree holders and 76% among those with master’s degrees—presents an opportunity to leverage these advanced education programs to cultivate leadership readiness by enhancing their quality and alignment with the applicable dimensions from the PPSSH.

**Figure 10.**  
*Proportion of Takers by NQESH Categories and Education*



**Across regions, the proportion of examinees qualifying under Category A varies significantly, revealing regional disparities in leadership readiness as assessed by the NQESH.** Region 1 recorded the highest share of Category A qualifiers at 38%, followed closely by NCR (33%) and Region 4A (32%), suggesting stronger alignment with the competencies outlined in the PPSSH in these areas.

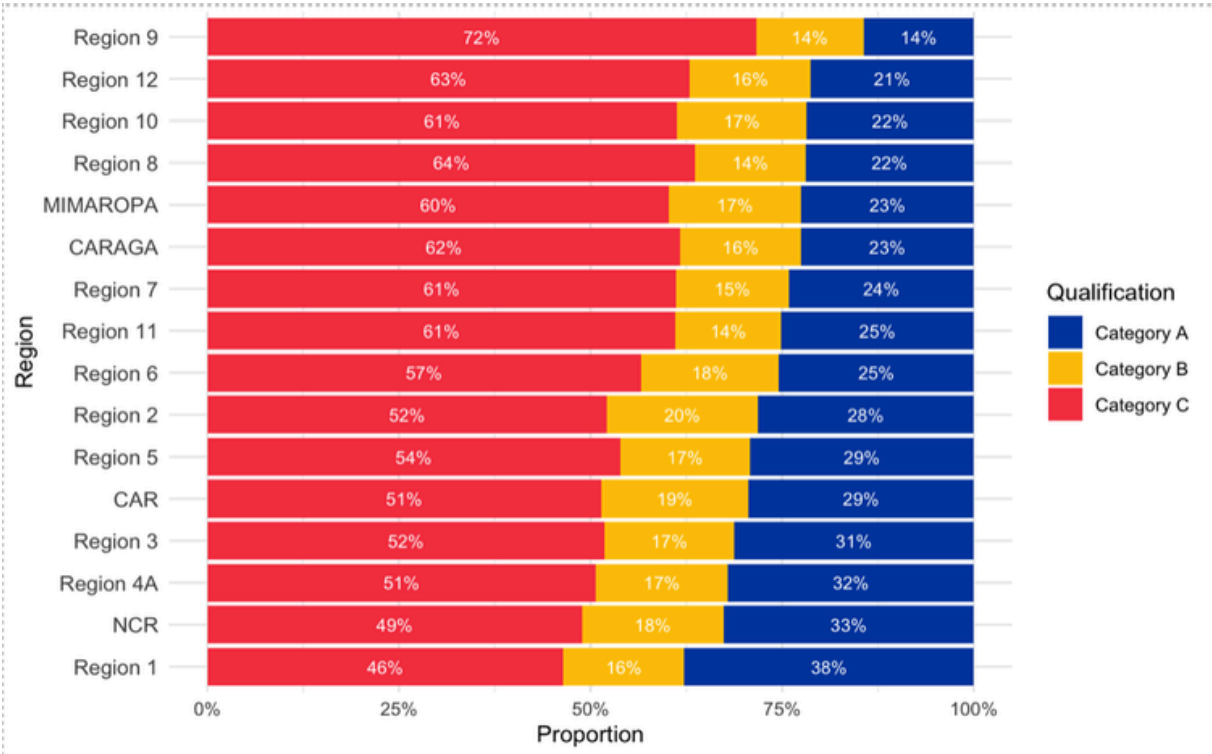
Region 1 highlighted a critical success factor of its performance which is their regular conduct of school heads training aspiring principals, emphasizing alignment with the PPSSH. The region’s “*Becoming a School Head*” program provides structured training to TICs, OICs, and designated school heads. This investment in capacity building was strongly cited as a critical factor to better performance in NQESH.

In general, these regions may have more robust access to preparatory programs, review centers, support systems, or graduate education opportunities that help aspiring principals meet the benchmark.

On the other hand, regions such as Region 9, Region 12, and Region 8 posted the lowest Category A proportions, with just 14% to 22% qualifying, and with Category C rates as high as 72%. These patterns may reflect gaps in access to leadership development programs, fewer training opportunities, or limited exposure to the standards and expectations introduced under the PPSSH. For the least performing regions, the regional offices see this as a clear call to action—particularly in strengthening support mechanisms at the division level. There was recognition that improving localized mentoring and technical assistance is critical to addressing capacity gaps on the PPSSH.

The data highlights a critical opportunity to strengthen regional support systems, particularly in historically under-resourced areas. Expanding access to PPSSH-aligned training, coaching, and mentoring programs—tailored to the local contexts of each region—can help level the playing field and ensure that all educators, regardless of location, are equally prepared for formal leadership roles. These insights reinforce the need for a more equitable and responsive leadership development system that proactively supports aspiring principals across the country.

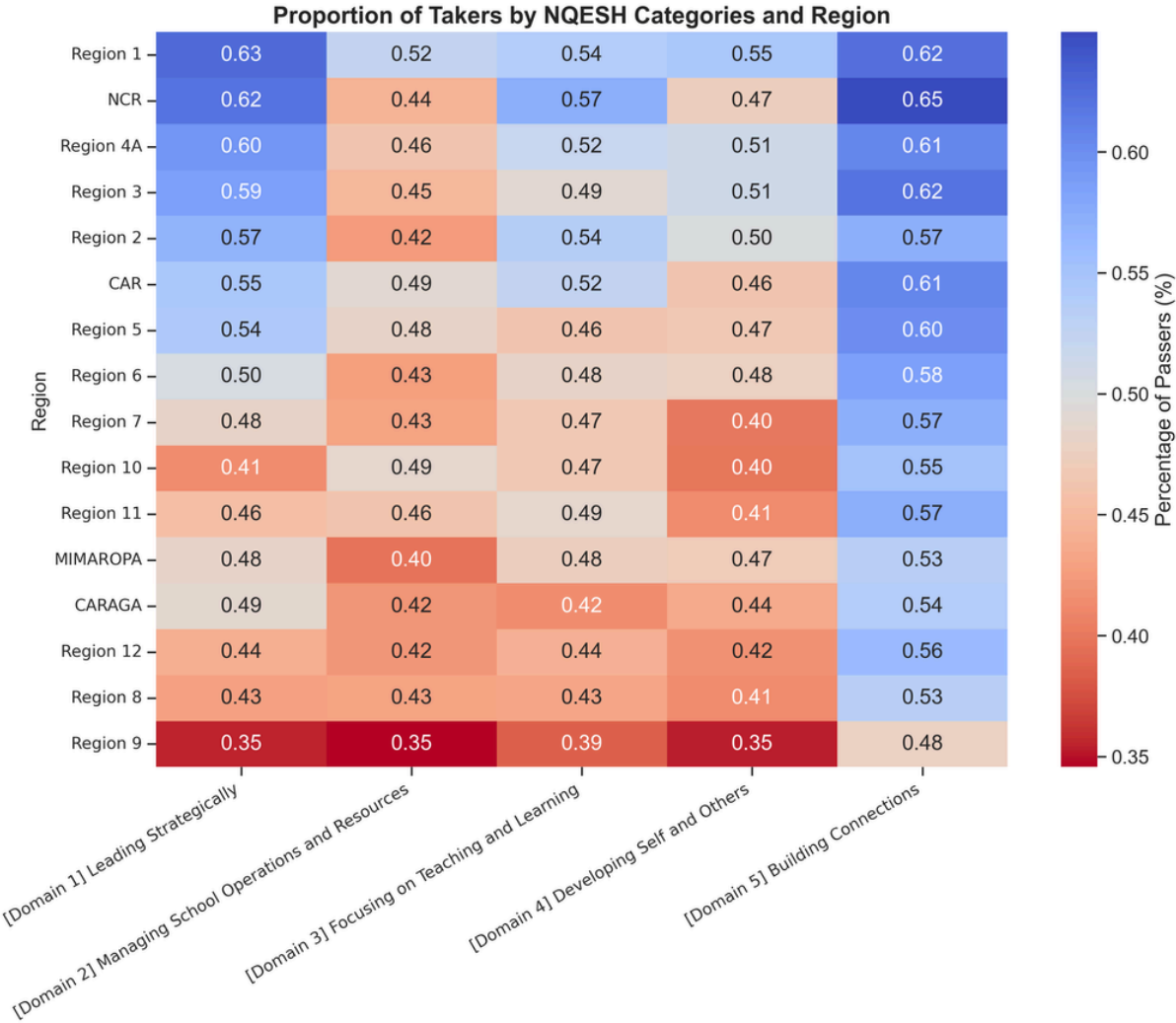
**Figure 11.**  
*Proportion of Takers by NQESH Categories and Region*



**Regions demonstrate varying performance across PPSSH domains.** Across the country, school leaders generally perform well in **Domain 5 (Building Connections)**, reflecting strong familiarity with stakeholder engagement, community involvement, and inclusive leadership practices. **Domains 1 (Leading Strategically)** and **3 (Focusing on Teaching and Learning)** show mixed performance, with about half of the regions scoring above the midpoint and the rest falling behind—suggesting uneven readiness in strategic planning, instructional leadership, and curriculum-focused decision-making. In contrast, **Domain 2 (Managing School Operations and Resources)** and **Domain 4 (Developing Self and Others)** are consistently weak across nearly all regions. This indicates a nationwide challenge in equipping future school heads with the competencies required for operational management, staff development, and performance management—key functions of school leadership that are often underdeveloped in existing training pipelines.

These trends point to the need for tailored, domain-specific interventions for every region. Leadership development efforts must reinforce strengths while addressing persistent gaps—ensuring all school heads receive focused training and support aligned with the PPSSH.

**Figure 12.**  
*Proportion of Takers by NQESH Categories and Region*



**Table 1 presents the results of a logistic regression model examining the likelihood of attaining Category A status**, based on the teacher’s educational background, years of experience, current designation, and position cluster.

**Table 1.**  
*Logistic Estimation Results for Category A Qualification*

	Odds_Ratio	std.error	statistic	p.value
(Intercept)	0.34	0.123	-8.763	0***
EducBGMaster's Units	1.503	0.1	4.062	0 ***
EducBGMaster's Degree	1.495	0.101	3.979	0 ***
EducBGDoctoral Units	2.228	0.103	7.755	0 ***
EducBGDoctoral Degree	2.016	0.105	6.708	0 ***
ExperienceGroupMid Experience	0.838	0.042	-4.232	0 ***
ExperienceGroupHigh Experience	0.575	0.038	-14.58	0 ***
DesignationDepartment Head (Secondary)	1.07	0.069	0.985	0.32
DesignationOfficer-in-Charge	0.739	0.08	-3.768	0 ***
DesignationTeacher-in-Charge	0.709	0.052	-6.628	0 ***
DesignationSchool Head (Elementary)	0.607	0.069	-7.199	0 ***
DesignationSchool Head (Secondary)	1.029	0.09	0.318	0.75
PositionGroupOthers	1.632	0.141	3.474	0 ***
PositionGroupMaster Teacher	1.191	0.047	3.738	0 ***
PositionGroupHead Teacher	1.135	0.065	1.953	0.05*
PositionGroupAssistant Principal	1.479	0.229	1.714	0.09.

	Odds_Ratio	std.error	statistic	p.value
RegionGroupGreater Manila Area	1.036	0.069	0.515	0.61
RegionGroupBalanced Luzon	1.069	0.069	0.964	0.33
RegionGroupMindanao	0.692	0.07	-5.276	0 ***
RegionGroupVisayas	0.82	0.07	-2.808	0 ***

Notes:

1. McFadden's Pseudo R<sup>2</sup>: 0.036 This indicates that the model explains only about 3.6% of the variation in the outcome; a modest improvement over no predictors. This weak explanatory power suggests that there are additional factors that influence Category A qualification eg NQESH training.
2. \*\*\* =  $p \leq 0.001$ , \*\* =  $p \leq 0.01$ , \* =  $p \leq 0.05$ , . =  $p \leq 0.1$
3. Variables were grouped into clusters: **ExperienceGroup** as *Low* ( $\leq 3$  years), *Mid* (4–6 years), and *High* ( $\geq 7$  years); **PositionGroup** as *Teacher I–III*, *Master Teacher*, *Head Teacher*, *Assistant Principal*, and *Others*.
4. Reference Groups: results are interpreted relative to the reference levels: “Bachelor’s Degree” for EducBG, “**Low Experience**” for ExperienceGroup, “**Teacher I–III**” for PositionGroup, and “**No Designation**” for Designation.
5. Regions were grouped as follows: NCR (reference), Greater Manila Area (Regions III and IV-A), Balanced Luzon (MIMAROPA, Regions I, II, V, and CAR), Visayas (Regions VI, VII, VIII), and Mindanao (Regions IX–XII and CARAGA).

## Education

**Teachers with higher academic attainment were significantly more likely to qualify under Category A.** Compared to those with a bachelor’s degree, the odds of qualifying were 1.5 times higher among those with master’s degrees or units, and more than twice as high among those with doctoral degrees or units. All coefficients were statistically significant at the 0.001 level. These findings reinforce the positive relationship between advanced education and leadership readiness, as captured by the NQESH.

**The positive trend can be further leveraged by enhancing graduate education programs as vehicles for leadership development.** Embedding PPSSH-aligned competencies into existing master’s and doctoral programs could significantly strengthen the readiness of future principals.

## Experience

**Longer years of experience in their current positions was associated with lower odds of qualifying under Category A.** Compared to teachers with low experience ( $\leq 3$  years), those with mid-level experience (4–6 years) had 16% lower odds (OR = 0.84), and those with high experience ( $\geq 7$  years) had 43% lower odds (OR = 0.58) of qualifying. Both effects were statistically significant at the 0.001 level.

This finding highlights the need for retraining and upskilling programs that are inclusive of veteran educators who may be used to older systems and aspiring to take on leadership roles without recent, PPSSH-based preparation.

## Designation

**Teachers currently designated in formal or interim leadership roles showed significantly lower odds of qualifying under Category A compared to those with no designation.** For instance, Elementary School Heads had 39% lower odds (OR = 0.607), and Teachers-in-Charge had 29% lower odds (OR = 0.709), both statistically significant at the 0.001 level. Officers-in-Charge also showed a significant disadvantage (OR = 0.739). In contrast, Secondary School Heads and Department Heads showed no statistically significant difference from the reference group.

**This finding points to a critical gap: many of those already performing leadership functions are not meeting the competency threshold assessed by the NQESH.** Their underperformance likely reflects limited exposure to structured training grounded in the PPSSH and raises concern about the adequacy of current aspiring principal capacity building and development systems prior to appointment. As a short-term goal, the data underscores the need to invest in structured leadership development for those already in these positions.

## Position

**These results suggest that progression along the formal leadership ladder—particularly into Master Teacher or Head Teacher roles—is positively associated with leadership readiness.** Master Teachers (OR = 1.19) and Head Teachers (OR = 1.14) are more likely to meet the Category A benchmark compared to Teacher I–III. Both effects were statistically significant ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). Assistant Principals (OR = 1.48) also had higher odds of qualifying, though the result was only marginally significant ( $p = 0.09$ ). Interestingly, those in the "Others" category had the highest odds (OR = 1.63,  $p < 0.001$ ).

**However, the modest odds ratios and the marginal significance for Assistant Principals also indicate that position alone is not a guarantee of preparedness.** These findings highlight the importance of complementing positional promotion with formal, structured training aligned to PPSSH domains to ensure that role elevation translates into capability.

## Geographic Location

**Regional differences reveal meaningful disparities. Compared to NCR, teachers from Mindanao and the Visayas** had significantly lower odds of qualifying under Category A (OR = 0.69 and OR = 0.82, respectively; both  $p < 0.001$ ). In contrast, there were no statistically significant differences for those in Greater Manila Area or Balanced Luzon.

**These results echo the descriptive findings and might point to geographic inequities in access to leadership preparation, review programs, and institutional support.** The lower performance in Mindanao and Visayas suggests that aspiring principals in these regions may have fewer opportunities for PPSSH-based leadership development. Addressing these disparities will require targeted interventions that expand access to training, mentorship, and exam preparation programs in underperforming regions, ensuring that leadership potential is not limited by geography.



PART 5

# Examining the Influence of Leadership Readiness in School Learning Outcomes

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**When compared to learning outcomes, aspiring principals even in the lower qualification categories are capable of facilitating measurable improvements.** In the ELLNA results, the median scores of the schools who were headed by acting school heads who took the NQESH were as follows: 70.8 for Category A, 77.1 for Category B, and 83.7 for Category C. Similarly, the mean scores were 77.1 for Category A, 78.9 for Category B, and 86.1 for Category C.

**Similarly, in the CRLA data, all three categories posted nearly equal learning gains in reading, with Category A improving by 93.6 points, Category B by 92.8, and Category C by 95.5.** These findings affirm that aspiring and designated school heads—despite varying degrees of formal preparation—are able to drive comparable substantial student learning and support classroom improvement in meaningful ways.

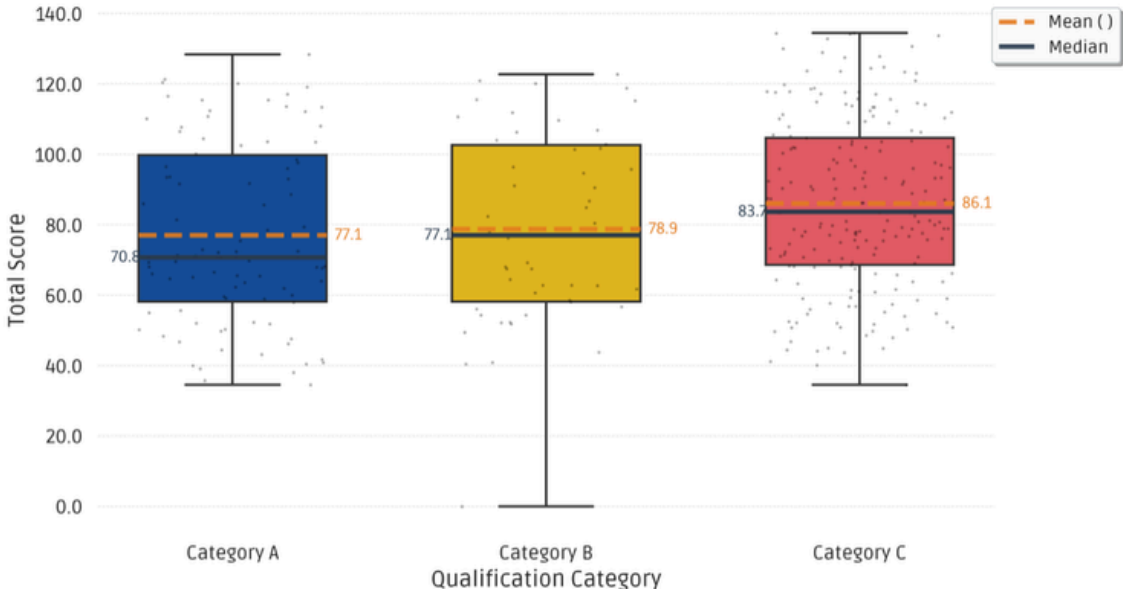
**However, when interpreted against their NQESH qualification results, it appears that these practices, while effective in the field, are not necessarily aligned with formal leadership standards.** Despite delivering improved learning outcomes, many of these leaders fall short in assessments of the PPSSH domains, particularly in critical areas such as school operations and focusing on teaching and learning. In these contexts, many school heads may be doing what works based on experience and intuition, but without formal training or alignment to the national standards. This suggests that their effectiveness may stem from adaptive, experience-based practices rather than competencies defined by policy. In these cases, the challenge here lies in bridging what they are already doing well with the expectations of formal leadership.



However, the need for capacity development becomes more urgent for instance when school leaders demonstrate both low readiness in the PPSSH domains and limited gains in student learning outcomes. In such cases, the issue goes beyond misalignment—it reflects a deeper capacity gap. These school heads are often teachers whose professional exposure and leadership experience may not have been sufficiently broad or robust to prepare them for the complex demands of school management and instructional leadership, without a formal and structured training program. This highlights the critical importance of structured, standards-based development interventions to build foundational competencies where both performance and readiness are lacking.

Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that learning outcomes are shaped by more than principal readiness alone. External factors—such as school resources, teacher quality, student background, and division-level support—act as **moderating influences** that can either amplify or weaken the relationship between readiness and outcomes.

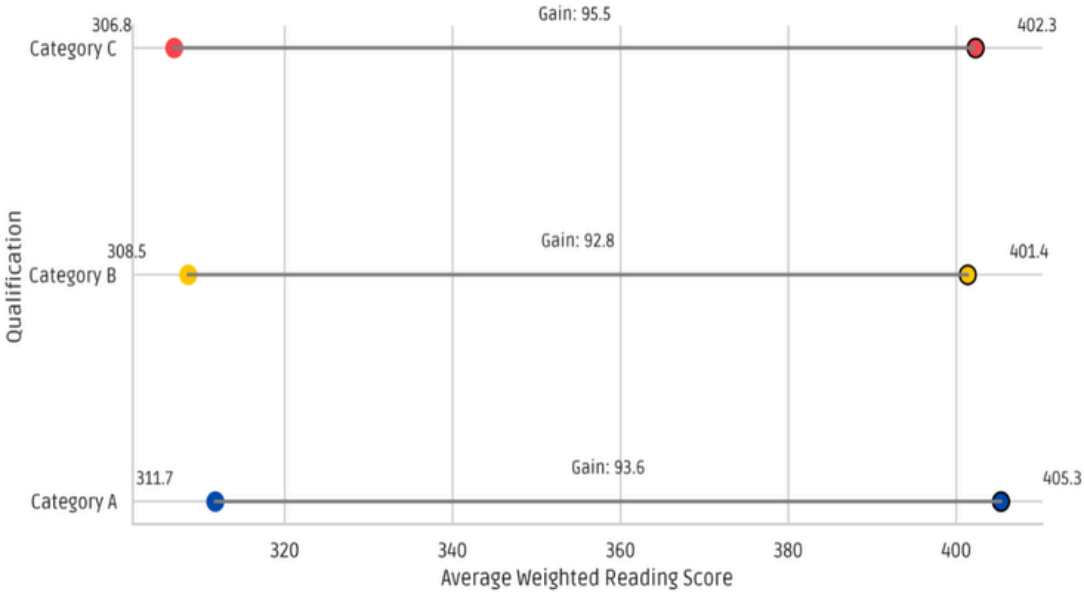
**Figure 13.**  
*ELLNA Score Distribution by NQESH Qualifications*



Notes: (a) 345 schools were matched; (b) p-value using Kruskal-Wallis test is 0.010552688 (Statistically Significant)

Notes: (a) 5,297 schools were matched; (b) p-value using One-Way ANOVA is 1.31E-05 (Statistically Significant)

**Figure 14.**  
*CRLA Score Distribution by NQESH Qualifications*



Notes: (a) 5,297 schools were matched; (b) p-value using One-Way ANOVA is 1.31E-05 (Statistically Significant)

A middle-aged man with dark hair, wearing a white polo shirt, stands in a library. He is holding a white envelope in front of his chest with both hands. The background is filled with bookshelves containing many books. The entire image has a blue color overlay.

PART 6

# Summary

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**The current leadership pipeline reflects a growing demand for formal principal appointments.** The 2023 NQESH examinees represent a diverse group—both designated school leaders and new aspirants—reflecting interest in formalizing leadership roles and advancing within the system. These aspiring principals are, for the most part, well-educated and experienced: 85% hold at least a master's degree or graduate-level units, 55% have seven or more years of teaching experience, and over 70% currently hold leadership designations such as Head Teacher, Teacher-in-Charge, or designated School Head.

**Yet, readiness levels remain alarmingly low revealing a systemic readiness gap.** Only 21% of designated Elementary School Heads and 32% of Secondary School Heads qualified under Category A. Among Teachers-in-Charge, failure rates reached 63%, while 79% of Elementary School Heads and 68% of Secondary School Heads fell into Categories B and C. The same trend holds across roles: 74% of Head Teachers and 68% of Master Teachers did not meet the qualification threshold. These figures point to a large segment of leaders who are already performing the role of principal but lack the competency alignment required by national standards.

**Core leadership competencies that are closely linked to school performance and learning outcomes remain significantly underdeveloped.** Designated school heads generally failed to meet the 65% benchmark across nearly all domains of the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), signaling widespread gaps in foundational competencies. Among these, **Domains 2 (Managing School Operations and Resources) and 3 (Focusing on Teaching and Learning) emerged as the most critical areas of concern**, posting the highest rates of underperformance. This means they lack strong capabilities in key leadership functions: overseeing budgets, staff deployment, and resource management on one hand, shaping instruction, guiding teacher practice, and using learning data on the other. **Domain 4 (Developing Self and Others)** also showed consistently low scores, highlighting gaps in professional growth, mentoring, and capacity-building—key functions for sustaining improvement across the school. These are core to effective school leadership, and weaknesses in these areas severely constrain efforts to improve school performance and student outcomes.

**Despite their advanced education and long years of service, many teachers did not demonstrate sufficient leadership readiness.** Among those with master's degrees, 76% fell into Categories B and C, while 67% of doctoral degree holders also failed to qualify under Category A. Teachers with only a bachelor's degree performed the least, with 84% not meeting the benchmark. A similar pattern emerged with experience: only 17% of teachers with 10 or more years of experience in their current position reached Category A, while 83% remained in Categories B and C.

**Aspiring principals' readiness varies significantly based on education, position, experience, designation, and region, with only a few factors showing strong and consistent associations with success.** Regression analysis confirms that advanced education is the strongest predictor of qualification: those with master's or doctoral degrees had significantly higher odds of qualifying under Category A. Position also matters. Master Teachers and Head Teachers were more likely to succeed than classroom teachers, though the margins were modest. In contrast, teachers with high experience ( $\geq 7$  years) had 43% lower odds of qualifying, reflecting declining readiness over time without continuous development. Teachers-in-Charge and Elementary School Heads had significantly lower odds of success—despite holding leadership positions.

**Regional disparities further compound the challenge.** Only 14% of examinees from Region 9 and 22% from Region 12 qualified under Category A, while Category C rates reached 72% in these regions. In contrast, regions like NCR and Region 1 performed better, with 33–38% qualifying under Category A. Region 1 attributed its strong performance to the regular conduct of training programs for aspiring principals, with a clear emphasis on alignment with the PPSSH. These results indicate that leadership readiness is not evenly distributed—and is shaped by access to learning opportunities, not just formal roles.

**Despite low levels of demonstrated readiness based on the PPSSH standards, school learning outcomes appear comparable across qualification categories.** ELLNA and CRLA data show that many aspiring leaders can still deliver positive learning outcomes regardless of formal readiness. However, this misalignment between effectiveness and standards becomes more problematic when school heads also underdelivers in terms of learning outcomes. These cases point to a deeper capacity gap—where leaders lack both the competencies outlined in the PPSSH and the contextual strategies to drive learning. These are often teachers with limited exposure to formal leadership development.

**This underscores the urgent need to level up all aspiring and designated school leaders based on a common and consistent leadership training program.** While some may succeed through intuitive or experience-based practices, long-term systemic improvement requires equipping every school head with the same core set of competencies defined in the PPSSH. Doing so ensures that leadership effectiveness is not incidental or unevenly distributed but systematically cultivated across the education system.





PART 7

**Policy**

**Recommendations**

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## 1. Fund and institutionalize a holistic and targeted leadership development program for incoming principals.

DepEd is about to develop and implement a standardized national training program for school heads, hence the varying levels of leadership preparation and competency across regions so far. As evidenced by the top-performing regions, access to standardized preparation and training is key to NQESH success. This will address the preparation issues that were faced by appointed acting school heads who struggled to meet the PPSSH readiness benchmarks

- **Pre-training Phase:** Aspiring school leaders complete online self-paced modules on foundational PPSSH domains. These act as a prerequisite and filter to gauge commitment and initial readiness.
- **Diagnostics Phase:** Candidates nominated by the Schools Division Superintendent, based on a principal pipeline ratio, take the National Assessment for School Heads (NASH), the recalibrated NQESH, and undergo diagnostics. Using the Dashboard for Understanding NQESH Outcomes and Grade-generation System (DUNONG) application developed by DepEd, through ECAIR, interventions on each trainee will be based on data-driven insights on leadership readiness and competency gaps, ensuring early identification of strengths and areas for development.
- **Core Training Phase:** Participants undergo an intensive blended training program that combines in-person workshops, case-based learning, role-playing, and strategic planning simulations. This core phase should be scaffolded around the five PPSSH domains.
- **Immersion and Practicum Phase:** Trainees are embedded in a shadow principalship experience, working under a mentor-principal in real school settings. They will complete capstone leadership projects focused on improving learning outcomes, teacher development, or community partnerships.
- **Assessment and Certification Phase:** Participants undergo a comprehensive assessment based on performance tasks, principal simulation assessments, and portfolio submissions evaluated by certified leadership assessors.

International practice shows that high-performing systems combine structured training, mentorship, and staged qualification rather than relying solely on eligibility exams.

- **Malaysia** implements the National Professional Qualification for Educational Leaders (NPQEL), which is a mandatory in-service training programme for aspiring school heads conducted by the Ministry of Education through the Institut Aminuddin Baki (IAB). The latest version, NPQEL 2.0 (2018), is structured as a three-month and three-week blended programme that combines face-to-face sessions, e-learning, and practical school-based components. Its mechanics include intensive coursework built around ten core leadership competencies across four domains—visionary thinking, managing change, creating excellent organisations, and personal competence—delivered through modules, online activities, and assessments (Singh, 2019). Participants also undergo two forms of practical immersion: a five-day leadership apprenticeship to experience school leadership first-hand, and a six-week job-shadowing placement in a nearby school, requiring at least 18 days of engagement (Singh, 2019).
- **Canada** (Ontario) requires aspiring principals to complete the Principal’s Qualification Program (PQP), a mandatory course focused on leadership theory, instructional supervision, and school management before becoming eligible for the role. The PQP includes 250 hours of content organized around the Ontario Leadership Framework, plus a 60-hour in-school leadership practicum requiring the aspiring principal to lead a collaborative inquiry project with support from a principal mentor. Once on the job, the Ontario Ministry of Education provides funding to support new principal mentoring for the first two years (NCEE, n.d).
- While **South Korea** requires a national qualifying exam, aspiring principals are not immediately thrust into high-stakes assessments without preparation. Those who accumulate enough points through experience, evaluations, and service qualify to undergo a principal training program and must pass an exam to receive a principal qualification certificate (Kim and Parkay, 2004).
- **Taiwan** requires aspiring principals to undergo a 2- to 3-month pre-service orientation program before they can be appointed. This lengthy, prolonged, experience-driven pathway emphasizes on-the-job learning, mentorship, and relationship-building within the school environment.



## 2. Set a standard Principalship Pipeline Ratio to guide supply and demand interventions.

A uniform benchmark for how many trained aspiring principals should be in the pipeline relative to projected vacancies will be helpful to avoid oversupply or undersupply of qualified principals ready to take on principalship roles. DepEd can introduce a standardized Principalship Pipeline Ratio, which is the ratio of qualified aspirants to expected principal vacancies within an identified horizon (e.g. 3 years). This ratio would be based on division-specific vacancy projections, retirement trends, and other parameters. It would allow each division to maintain a pool of trained and qualified school head candidates that is sufficient at a given time. Such a planning parameter ensures that training resources are efficiently used and that readiness is tightly aligned with demand.

In **Malaysia**, the Ministry of Education has set a 1:3 ratio policy for NPQEL-qualified candidates, meaning that for every school headship vacancy, there should be three trained and certified candidates available for consideration (Singh, 2019). This deliberate move shifts away from the earlier 1:1 system, where almost all graduates were appointed regardless of performance, and instead introduces healthy competition among aspiring leaders.



## 3. Identify high-potential teachers for principalship training and preparation early.

Superintendents should lead a systematic selection process to identify early teachers with strong leadership potential. Using a standardized principalship adequacy ratio, applicants within a division can be ranked to create a prioritized and data-driven pool of aspiring principals who will be trained. The ranking may also be guided by the existing CSC structured merit-based framework, using indicators such as education, training, experience, performance, outstanding accomplishments, application of education and training, and potential.

In **Singapore**, the government employs a "select then train" rather than a "train then select" model (Jayapragas, 2016). Singapore proactively identifies and nurtures leadership talent, ensuring promising individuals are retained in the system. Young teachers are regularly evaluated for leadership potential and offered chances to build their skills and gain experience. Those who perform well and show promise are developed into middle management roles (Stewart, 2012). Similarly, Taiwan follows an experience-based model where teachers ascend through school administrative ranks before becoming eligible for the principal qualification exam (Fwu and Wang, 2008).



#### **4. Prioritize Master Teacher I and above for principalship preparation, consistent with the Career Progression system.**

Today, the aspiring principal pool includes a wide mix of junior and senior teachers with varying experience, positions, and qualifications due to the open nature of the NQESH call. SIKAP findings show that teachers in higher-ranking positions—particularly Master Teachers and Head Teachers— demonstrate significantly higher levels of readiness compared to lower-ranked peers. With the issuance of DepEd-DBM Joint Circular No. 01, s. 2025, DepEd now has a clear framework to operationalize structured career pathways for both teachers and school leaders. Once fully implemented, DepEd can adopt a more targeted approach by prioritizing Master Teacher I and above for principalship preparation, consistent with the Career Progression system, to ensure more experienced, higher readiness among those entering the leadership pipeline.

For reference, Singapore’s principal preparation process focuses on capacitating middle managers, ensuring future principals will come from a pool of highly capable talents. Aspiring principals move up the ranks—first to department head, then to vice principal—acquiring administrative experience along the way (NCEE, n.d). To support them, Singapore’s National Institute of Education (NIE) implements the Management and Leadership in Schools (MLS) Programme which trains middle managers through a 17-week full-time leadership course designed to prepare them for increasingly complex educational environments (NTU, n.d). Participants undergo a blend of synchronous and asynchronous online sessions, case studies, cooperative learning, group discussions, and presentations.



#### **5. Integrate PPSSH Educational Programs in Advanced Education.**

Teachers with advanced degrees show significantly higher odds of qualifying under Category A, indicating a strong correlation between academic attainment and leadership readiness. However, absolute results reveal that many master’s and even doctoral degree holders still fail to meet the readiness threshold. Integrating PPSSH-aligned competencies—such as instructional leadership, strategic planning, and school management—into master’s curricula will ensure that advanced education translates into concrete leadership capability.

Teachers pursuing graduate degrees—often as a pathway to promotion—must develop leadership competencies, if their interests are aligned with the principalship track. Embedding PPSSH into master’s curricula ensures academic progress translates into practical leadership readiness, especially for those aiming for school head roles.



## **6. Promote conducive training development for teachers.**

Promote a culture of professional advancement among our teachers, ensuring there are supportive policies and systems at the national and school level, that will encourage and incentivize teachers, especially those in the leadership ladder, to gain new knowledge and skills. National and school-level policies must continue to strengthen incentives, protected time, and accessible pathways for teachers to gain new knowledge and leadership competencies. For example, some teachers report that attending training often requires extensive documentation that is difficult to complete alongside regular workloads. In some schools, participation in external training is even discouraged or frowned upon, creating a culture where professional growth is deprioritized in favor of routine tasks.



## **7. Provide open standardized online courses to allow aspiring principals to build foundational competencies ahead of formal training.**

Readiness varies widely, and not all aspiring leaders have equal access to development opportunities. Online courses—aligned to PPSSH and designed for self-paced learning. These courses can serve as a primer for those aspiring to become principals and a leadership awareness tool for teachers still exploring their career direction. Hosting the modules on accessible DepEd platforms ensures scalability and equity, while micro-credentialing can recognize teacher effort and progress. Making these learning opportunities open and flexible fosters a wider culture of leadership readiness and encourages more teachers to consider and prepare for future principalship roles.



## **8. Support sustained career development through periodic refreshers, retooling, and leadership coaching.**

Many designated leaders fall short of the competency benchmark due to gaps in continuous professional learning. Creating systems for refresher courses, leadership retooling, and post-appointment coaching will ensure that initial readiness is sustained and deepened over time. These interventions should be embedded in the career stages of the PPSSH and tied to annual performance development plans.



## 9. Establish an information sharing platform to promote excellent local leadership development practices.

Some division offices have already piloted various innovative approaches—such as mentoring systems, localized onboarding, and contextualized technical assistance—that respond directly to the needs of their schools. These local initiatives offer valuable insights that can inform and strengthen broader national strategies. Conducting local/regional/national knowledge sharing events for sharing best practices among division offices would not only promote cross-learning but also surface scalable models that can feed into national policy development. In addition, by uploading and documenting these practices in a standardized digital format, DepEd can build an accessible repository that allows division offices to share, search, and adapt strategies more effectively across the country. NEAP can play a critical role by issuing guidance on how these local innovations can supplement and align with the national leadership development program, fostering a more coherent and responsive system of professional growth.



## 10. Strengthen performance monitoring mechanisms for principals.

DepEd should strengthen the system of **evaluation and accountability** that links leadership practices to school outcomes and teacher development. This system should combine clear standards with regular feedback and provide actionable information for both support and accountability. More importantly, monitoring should not only measure performance but also guide continuous improvement, ensuring that principals are supported to grow in their roles while maintaining high levels of leadership effectiveness across the system.



PART 8

# Turning Insights into Action

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The implementation of the SIKAP policy recommendations spans across each stage of the principalship development process – from identification, selection, to driving action. It requires sequencing reforms in a way that balances urgency, feasibility, and long-term impact.

**Figure 15.**  
*Implementation Roadmap*



The first stage, **Preparing the Pipeline**, focuses on foundational imperatives. By setting a Principalship Pipeline Ratio, identifying high-potential teachers early, and embedding PPSSH competencies in advanced education, DepEd can rapidly strengthen the supply of aspiring leaders. These are reforms that are technically feasible, deliver visible results, and create momentum for broader system change.

Once the pipeline is stabilized, the next stage involves **Professionalizing the Pathway**. This requires moving beyond ad hoc or uneven preparation practices toward a standardized and institutionalized leadership development program.

The third stage, **Promoting Excellence**, ensures that development does not stop at appointment. Conducive training policies, structured career-long development opportunities, and information-sharing platforms to surface local innovations are essential to sustaining leadership quality. These initiatives reinforce the principle that principals are not just appointed but continually supported and retooled to meet evolving challenges.

Finally, **Profiling Performance** closes the loop by embedding robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms. This stage positions performance monitoring not only as a tool for evaluation but also as an enabler of continuous support, coaching, and system learning.

The recommendations were further classified into **action priorities** to guide implementation sequencing. **Immediate imperatives and quick wins** are those that are high impact yet feasible to deliver in the short term, creating early momentum. **Strategic levers** are medium-term reforms that require more effort and coordination but are critical for unlocking systemic improvements. **Transformational imperatives** are high-impact, resource-intensive initiatives that demand long-term investment and sustained leadership commitment. This prioritization framework provides DepEd with a roadmap to act decisively, build capacity progressively, and sustain reform impact over time.



## Annex A – Strategic Consultations, Validation Sessions, and Knowledge Sharing Sessions

The research team conducted several strategic consultations and brainstorming sessions with senior officials from the **Office of the Undersecretary for Human Resource and Organizational Development (OUHROD)**, the **Bureau of Human Resource and Organizational Development (BHROD)**, and the **National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP)**. These included Undersecretary **Wilfredo Cabral of OUHROD**; current NEAP Director **Michael Cabauatan**, former NEAP Director **Jennifer Lopez**, Chief **Marife Morcilla**, and **Mr. Dustin Troy Joson**; former BHROD Director **Mar Bermudez**, along with Chief **Cecille Anyayahan** and Ms. **Fatima Angeles**. Their perspectives ensured that the study was firmly grounded in DepEd’s leadership development priorities and reform directions.

SEAMEO INNOTECH provided expert advice on principalship development and the study’s research framework and methodologies during a strategic consultation with the research team on May 13, 2025.

A **field validation session on June 27, 2025** was also conducted with **DepEd regional offices**, engaging NEAP regional focal persons and representatives from **Region I, Region IV-A, Region IX, and Region XII**. This session surfaced valuable perspectives from the field and highlighted the diverse contextual realities shaping leadership preparation and readiness across regions.

In addition, the study was enriched through **Southeast Asia knowledge sharing sessions facilitated by SEAMEO INNOTECH on August 5 and August 27, 2025**. These engagements provided comparative perspectives from neighboring education systems, offering valuable lessons on leadership preparation pathways that informed the study’s policy recommendations and situated them within a broader regional context.

Finally, this study was made possible through the leadership of ECAIR – **Dr. Rafaelita Aldaba, Dr. Erika Fille Legara, and Dr. Sebastian Ibañez** – and the support of **SEAMEO INNOTECH Center Director Majah Leah Ravago, Deputy Center Director Kochakorn Acidre, and Raphael Cada**, whose guidance and collaboration were instrumental in shaping the study’s direction, scope, and overall development.





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