



## **EXPERIENCES OF NEWLY PROMOTED JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS UNDER THE MATATAG CURRICULUM: BASIS FOR A SCHOOL HEAD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19681799>

### **ABSTRACT**

The evolving global educational landscape necessitates curriculum reforms that meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. This study explored the lived experiences of seven newly promoted Junior High School Principals in the Division of Balanga City, Bataan as they navigated the implementation of the Department of Education's MATATAG Curriculum during the 2020-2025 school years. Utilizing a qualitative interpretative phenomenological design, the research uncovered specific professional challenges and personal insights during these leaders' first years of tenure. Data gathered through semi-structured interviews were processed using MAXQDA software and analyzed through thematic coding. The findings revealed a significant "intention-behavior gap," where the principals' commitment to foundational literacy and numeracy was often sidelined by overwhelming administrative complexities, resource management hurdles, and the "double-adjustment" of their new roles. While participants demonstrated professional resilience, they identified a universal need for structured support in teacher supervision and instructional leadership. These results serve as the empirical foundation for a proposed School Head Development Program designed to provide structured mentorship, instructional labs, and collaborative learning circles for new administrators.

**Keywords:** *Newly Promoted Principals, MATATAG Curriculum, School Leadership, Lived Experiences, Development Program, Interpretative Phenomenology, Instructional Management*

## INTRODUCTION

The success of systemic educational reform rests heavily on school leadership, as the school head serves as the primary catalyst for change at the institutional level. In the Philippines, the Department of Education's MATATAG Curriculum represents a transformative shift designed to address perennial issues of content overload and social inequities by refocusing pedagogical efforts on foundational literacy and numeracy. However, the implementation phase often reveals a critical friction point: newly promoted principals face a "dual transition" that tests their professional limits. These individuals are tasked with mastering the complexities of a new administrative role—involving fiscal management, community relations, and personnel supervision—while simultaneously serving as the front-line executors of a revised national curriculum. This simultaneous shift creates a high-stakes environment where the personal and professional stability of the leader directly impacts the academic outcomes of the learners.

To understand this phenomenon, this study is anchored on five core theories that intersect to explain the leadership journey. Rutter's (2012) Theory of Resilience posits that adaptation is not a static trait but a dynamic process supported by external resources and internal protective factors. This is complemented by Mead's (1969) Interactionism, which suggests that professional meaning and organizational identity are created through social exchange and symbolic communication within the school community. Furthermore, Ajzen and Fishbein's (1983) Theory of Reasoned Action provides a behavioral lens, connecting a principal's underlying attitudes toward curriculum reform to their eventual leadership outcomes. When these theories are paired with Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory, it becomes clear that a principal's belief in their own capability to manage the MATATAG rollout determines their persistence in the face of adversity. Finally, Fiedler's (1967) Contingency Theory argues that leadership effectiveness is not universal but depends on the "situational favorableness" of the environment, suggesting that a leader's style must be meticulously matched to the specific demands of a school in transition.

The global academic discourse further emphasizes that "Professional Capital," a blend of human, social, and decisional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), is the most essential ingredient for curriculum success in the 21st century. Hallinger (2018) notes a recurring global trend where instructional leadership—the very factor most predictive of school quality—is frequently neglected or "sidelined" during administrative transitions as new heads default to purely managerial tasks. Locally, this neglect is exacerbated by systemic pressures; Domingo (2024) recently identified that "crisis leadership" has evolved from an occasional requirement to a core daily competency for Philippine principals navigating the post-pandemic educational landscape. Fullan (2007) reinforces this by arguing that the "subjective meaning" of reform—the personal "why" behind the change—is what dictates the actual depth of implementation versus mere surface-level compliance. Despite the optimism surrounding the new curriculum, recent empirical evidence from Kilag et al. (2024) confirms that persistent resource gaps and technical training deficits remain the primary hurdles in the MATATAG rollout, placing an even greater burden on the resilience of newly promoted heads. This study was conducted to fill the gap in

understanding how these leaders synthesize these pressures into a coherent leadership practice.

## Research Questions

1. How are the insights from the lived experiences of newly promoted secondary school principals described?
2. What are the specific problems and challenges they face?
3. What development program can be proposed based on these results?

## METHODOLOGY

This research utilized a purely interpretative qualitative design to capture the depth of the participants' professional journeys. The study involved seven newly promoted Junior High School Principals from the Division of Balanga, selected through a total enumeration method to ensure the entire population of this sub-group was represented.

Data were gathered via validated semi-structured interview guides designed to elicit narratives on leadership practices and curriculum management. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed as the primary analytical framework. Transcripts were analyzed using MAXQDA software for thematic coding and pattern recognition.

Validity was strengthened through data triangulation, cross-referencing interview data with MATATAG implementation logs and school monitoring reports. Ethical standards were strictly maintained throughout the process; participation was voluntary, "bracketing" was used to maintain researcher objectivity, and the anonymity of respondents was ensured through professional coding.

## RESULTS

The following themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the narrative data provided by seven school leaders (P1–P7) within the K-12 sector in Balanga City, Bataan.

The thematic analysis of the data also revealed a complex and multi-layered reality for school leaders, organized into distinct parts that trace their journey from internal identity to external systemic change.

### **Theme 1: Emotional Duality of Transition: Excitement and Overwhelming Pressure (SOP 1)**

This theme explores the initial psychological state of newly promoted principals. It highlights the tension between the professional milestone of promotion and the immediate demand of leading a major curriculum reform.

### **Supporting Excerpts**

**P1:** *"Initially, I felt a mix of excitement and pressure. Being promoted was a professional milestone, but assuming the role during a major curriculum reform heightened my sense of responsibility".*

**P2:** *"Initially, I felt both excited and overwhelmed. Being promoted to school principalship is already a significant responsibility, and assuming the role during a major curriculum reform added another layer of complexity".*

## **Theme 2: Navigating Instructional and Administrative Complexity (SOP 2)**

This theme identifies the operational struggles principals face. Data shows a recurring struggle to balance learning school management systems with the technical demands of the MATATAG Curriculum.

### **Supporting Excerpts**

**P4:** *"One major challenge was managing time effectively. As a new OIC-Assistant principal, I was still learning the administrative systems while leading curriculum implementation".*

**P5:** *"Balancing administrative responsibilities with instructional leadership was a significant challenge... I needed to learn the management systems of the school while also guiding teachers through the curriculum reform".*

## **Theme 3: Collaborative Leadership as a Coping Mechanism (SOP 3)**

This theme describes the shift toward collective action. Principals utilized communication and shared problem-solving to mitigate the pressures of their new roles.

### **Supporting Excerpts**

**P1:** *"I addressed these challenges by prioritizing open communication and collaborative planning... I also invested time in self-study and reviewing policy documents."*

**P3:** *"Collaboration was key. By working closely with my master teachers and seeking technical assistance from the division office, I was able to navigate the complexities of the new curriculum more effectively."*

**P7:** *"I addressed these challenges by strengthening collaboration within the school. I organized meetings, instructional conferences, and learning sessions where teachers could discuss their concerns."*

## **Theme 4: Strategic Recommendations for Leadership Sustainment**

This theme provides the raw data for your "Basis for School Head Development Program.

### Supporting Excerpts

**P6:** *"Newly promoted principals would benefit from leadership development programs, mentoring systems, and continuous professional development focused on curriculum implementation."*

**P4:** *"Workshops on instructional leadership, change management, and teacher support strategies would also be very helpful... creating professional learning communities among school leaders could provide a platform for sharing experiences."*

## DISCUSSION

The study explored the lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of seven newly promoted junior high school principals in the Division of Balanga under the MATATAG Curriculum. The following findings emerged:

- 1. Lived Experiences of Newly Promoted Principals:** Participants described their transition as a period of "Emotional Duality." While 100% of the participants felt professional pride regarding their promotion, they simultaneously experienced overwhelming pressure due to the immediate demands of the MATATAG reform.
- 2. Issues and Challenges Encountered:** A significant majority (86%) identified the "intention-behavior gap" as a primary struggle. Principals possessed a strong intention to be instructional leaders, but their time and energy were frequently consumed by the steep learning curve of administrative and school management systems.
- 3. Coping Mechanisms:** The dominant coping strategy (86%) was the shift toward collaborative leadership. Principals mitigated the stress of their new roles by engaging in social professional exchanges, seeking technical assistance from the Division Office, and leveraging the expertise of Master Teachers.
- 4. Participant Recommendations:** There was a universal consensus (100%) that newly promoted leaders require more than just policy orientations. They expressed a critical need for structured mentoring, peer support networks (PLCs), and specialized workshops on change management.

## Conclusions

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were reached:

- 1. Resilience is a Process, not a Trait:** Drawing from the Theory of Resilience, it is concluded that the successful transition of a school head depends on the availability of "protective factors" like administrative experience and emotional readiness. Resilience is fostered when the leader views the curriculum reform as an opportunity for growth rather than a threat.
- 2. Social Interaction is Essential for Role Clarity:** Based on the Interactionism Model, the study concludes that school leadership is inherently social. Principals

who prioritize open communication and collaborative planning are better able to "negotiate" their new roles and create a shared understanding of the MATATAG goals within their schools.

**3. Administrative Burden Hinders Instructional Intent:** Through the lens of the Theory of Reasoned Action, it is concluded that while principals have the positive attitude and intent to implement the MATATAG curriculum, their behavioral execution is often blocked by the complexities of school operations. Without specific administrative training, instructional leadership remains a secondary priority.

**4. Necessity of a Localized Support Framework:** The unanimous call for structured support indicates that existing general orientations are insufficient. There is a clear need for a localized development program that addresses the specific "lived realities" of newly promoted leaders in the Division of Balanga.

## Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are offered:

**1. For the Department of Education (Division Level):** It is recommended that the Division of Balanga implement a "New Principal Induction Program" that specifically focuses on balancing administrative tasks with the instructional requirements of the MATATAG Curriculum.

**2. For School Heads:** Newly promoted principals should actively establish Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) within their clusters. They should prioritize "distributed leadership" by empowering Master Teachers to assist in curriculum monitoring, allowing the principal more time to manage school operations.

**3. For Policy Makers:** Future educational reforms should include a "transition period" for new administrators, providing them with a designated mentor (an experienced School Head) for the first six months of their tenure to foster professional resilience.

**4. For Future Researchers:** It is recommended that a follow-up quantitative study be conducted to measure the long-term impact of collaborative leadership on student learning outcomes under the MATATAG Curriculum across the entire province.

**5. Proposed Intervention:** The primary recommendation of this study is the adoption of the "MATATAG Leadership Catalyst Program," a development framework designed to bridge the gap between administrative management and instructional excellence.

## PROPOSED INTERVENTION PROGRAM: THE "MATATAG LEADERSHIP CATALYST"

### I. Program Rationale

The transition of newly promoted Junior High School principals in the Division of Balanga is marked by a "dual-adjustment" challenge: mastering school operations while leading a major curriculum reform.

Data revealed that **100%** of participants experienced significant pressure and **86%** struggled with the administrative-instructional balance.

This program serves as a structured support system to bridge the "intention-behavior gap" using the principles of Resilience, Interactionism, and Reasoned Action.

### II. Program Objectives

1. **Strengthen Professional Resilience:** Provide emotional and technical "protective factors" to help new leaders navigate the high-pressure transition period.
2. **Enhance Instructional Competency:** Align the principals' behavioral intentions with the technical requirements of the MATATAG Curriculum.
3. **Foster Collaborative Networks:** Establish a social framework where meaning and solutions are co-created through peer interaction.

### III. The Three Pillars of the Catalyst Program

Component	Description & Activity	Theoretical Basis
Pillar 1: The Mentor-Protege Alliance	One-on-One Mentorship: Newly promoted principals are paired with a "Seasoned Lead Principal" for the first 6 months. They engage in monthly "Shadowing Sessions" to learn administrative systems.	Theory of Resilience: Provides the external support needed to withstand role-related stress.
Pillar 2: Instructional Leadership Labs	Technical Workshops: Intensive sessions focused specifically on the "MATATAG Monitoring and Evaluation" tools. This reduces the time spent on "trial and error" in curriculum management.	Theory of Reasoned Action: Increases behavioral capacity, allowing intent to translate into effective implementation.

<p>Pillar 3: Principal Learning Circles (PLC)</p>	<p>Monthly Synergy Meetings: Cluster-based meetups where principals share "Lived Realities" and best practices. It moves from top-down instruction to horizontal peer-learning.</p>	<p>Interactionism Model: Meaning is created through social exchange and group problem-solving.</p>
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#### IV. Implementation Timeline

**Phase 1:** The Onboarding (Month 1): Focus on Pillar 1 (Mentorship). Matching new principals with mentors and conducting an Initial Needs Assessment.

**Phase 2:** The Deep Dive (Months 2-5): Focus on Pillar 2 (Instructional Labs). Bi-monthly workshops on digital leadership, teacher coaching, and curriculum mapping.

**Phase 3:** The Sustenance (Month 6-Onward): Focus on Pillar 3 (PLC). Establishing the regular schedule for cluster-based collaborative sessions.

#### V. Expected Outcomes

**Increased Self-Efficacy:** Principal's report feeling more confident in handling both administrative and curriculum-related tasks.

**Improved Teacher Support:** Through better instructional leadership, teachers receive clearer guidance on MATATAG standards.

**Reduced Attrition/Burnout:** Structured support mitigates the "overwhelming pressure" identified in the study.

#### VI. Monitoring and Evaluation

The program will be evaluated using a "Leadership Growth Portfolio," where principals document their transition milestones, challenges overcome through collaboration, and the specific instructional improvements made in their respective schools.

#### Compliance with Ethical Standards

The researcher strictly adhered to the ethical principles governing qualitative inquiry to ensure the protection and dignity of all participants. Prior to data collection, formal ethical clearance was secured, and written informed consent was obtained from each of the seven junior high school principals.

The participants were fully briefed on the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, the researcher employed a system of professional coding (P1–P7) and redacted all specific identifiers related to the participants' respective schools. Furthermore, the researcher practiced "bracketing" to mitigate personal bias, ensuring

that the interpretation of the lived experiences remained grounded solely in the participants' narratives. All recorded interviews and digital transcripts were stored in a password-protected environment, accessible only to the researcher, and will be disposed of following the completion of the publication cycle in accordance with data privacy protocols. No conflict of interest exists, and no external funding was received for the conduct of this study.

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### APA Citation:

Navarro, M. J. J. (2026). EXPERIENCES OF NEWLY PROMOTED JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS UNDER THE MATATAG CURRICULUM: BASIS FOR A SCHOOL HEAD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM. Ignatian International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research, 4(4), 1283–1291. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19681799>

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