Leadership as a Dynamic and Multifaceted Process: A Phenomenological Study on Non-BEED School Heads' View on Leadership Styles in Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the leadership styles of Non-BEED school heads managing elementary schools in the Division of Ilocos Sur, employing a qualitative phenomenological research design. Through in-depth interviews with six school heads, the research explores their lived experiences, highlighting themes such as leadership development, variation of approaches, adaptability, collaborative decision-making, effective communication, essential personal qualities, interpersonal skills enhancement, and challenges faced. Findings suggest that these leaders predominantly adopt democratic leadership styles, emphasizing inclusivity and adaptability in managing school environments. The study contributes to filling a gap in literature regarding leadership styles among non-traditional educational leaders and provides insights for enhancing leadership practices and school management strategies.

KEYWORDS: non- BEED School heads, leadership styles, democratic leadership, adaptability, collaboration, effective communication, interpersonal skills, leadership challenges

INTRODUCTION

The term leadership style refers to the blend of different attributes, actions, and qualities that leaders use to interact with their teachers. The leadership styles of principals and administrators in schools play a crucial role in shaping the educational environment, influencing teacher performance, and ultimately impacting student outcomes. According to Bass & Avolio (1993) in Udovita (2020), leadership styles are the behaviors or processes that leaders engage in, which facilitate the achievement of extraordinary results within an organization. Additionally, Rivai (2014) cited by Astuti et.al (2020), stated that leadership style is a set of characteristics used by leaders to influence their subordinates in order to achieve organizational goals. In other words, leadership style encompasses the behavior patterns and strategies that leaders prefer and frequently employ. These styles reflect a leader's direct or indirect expression of confidence in the abilities of their subordinates. And although leadership has been one of the most popular topics among researchers and academicians from a long time ago up to the present times (Adangabe & Boateng, 2022; Donkol et al. 2021; Andoh & Ghansah, 2019 in K. Obeng-Asare and V. Korang 2024), there are very limited studies about leadership styles specifically among the Non-BEEd School Heads who are managing elementary schools.

The research gap concerning the leadership styles of non-BEED school heads managing elementary schools in the Division of Ilocos Sur is significant because it addresses a unique and underexplored demographic, whose distinct educational backgrounds and leadership approaches could provide valuable insights for improving school management and student outcomes. Traditionally, leadership in elementary educational settings has been closely associated with individuals possessing a Bachelor in Elementary Education (BEE). However, a growing number of schools are being managed by leaders who do not hold this specific degree. This study explores the various leadership styles adopted by these non-BEED school heads and administrators and examines their effectiveness in managing elementary schools.

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Over-all, understanding the leadership styles of elementary school administrators without a Bachelor in Elementary Education degree is essential for recognizing the full spectrum of effective leadership in education. This study aims to fill a gap in the existing literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of these leaders' practices and

Their impact on the educational environment. The insights gained from this research could lead to more inclusive leadership models and improved outcomes for schools managed by non-traditional leaders.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers shall use qualitative phenomenological research design. This is because the primary focus of the study is about the lived experiences of the Non-BEEd school heads in terms of leading and managing elementary schools. The researchers believed this approach is the best choice in answering the research question: "How do Non-BEED school heads managing elementary schools view leadership styles." According to Creswell, (2007) a phenomenological study delineated the meaning of lived experiences for several individuals. The objective was to focus on what participants had in common, such as shared and lived experiences (Creswell, 2007).

Two types of phenomenological approaches were identified in qualitative research. The first approach was known as hermeneutical phenomenology in which the research was adjusted toward participants' lived experiences (Van Manen as cited in Creswell, 2007). The second approach was known as transcendental phenomenology in which the researcher identifies a phenomenon to be studied, bracketed the researcher's own experiences, and collected data from several individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas as cited in Creswell, 2007).

For this study, hermeneutical phenomenology will be utilized because the researchers are also leaders in various ways (instructional leaders, curriculum leaders, etc.) at different school sites of the participants. According to Hatch (2002), hermeneutical phenomenology combines both interpretive/hermeneutic methods and descriptive/phenomenological methods for the purpose of examining the lived experiences or life worlds of people, in which in this studied the school administrators or heads.

The locale of the study will be at Santa Maria District, Schools Division of Ilocos Sur, located in the Province of Ilocos Sur, Region 1. For the key informants, the researchers will employ criterion sampling. Like in many or usual qualitative studies, the choice of a sampling strategy depends on the research problems and questions that the researcher wants to answer (Creswell, 2008). According to Creswell (2007), It is essential that all participants have experience of the phenomenon being studied. Criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied are representative of people who have experienced the phenomenon. Hence, six (6) informants identified as school heads who shall comprise a mixed demographic profile such as age, position/item, length of service, educational attainment, etc. will be selected for this study. These participants are employed in different schools in the same division.

Data collection for this phenomenological study will be made through open-ended, face-to face, twenty to thirty (20 - 30) minutes interviews with study participants in their schools or sites designated to them. The interview questions were prepared by the researchers through Aide Memoire (Interview Guide) Development. Prior to the interview, participants were given print-out of the questions that they will be asked to answer. As researchers progress through the interview, they shall ask follow-up questions to obtain more details regarding their experiences. Interview(s) will be recorded and transcribed in which study participants had the opportunity to review and check for accuracy. By asking open-ended questions, the researchers provided study participants with the opportunity to share their lived experiences (as school heads) without restraint from other past research findings (Creswell, 2008).

This research was conducted in an ethical and responsible manner. Hence, the same will follow these research ethics: Informed Consent, Confidentiality and Privacy.

One of the most important ethical considerations in qualitative research is informed consent. This means that participants must be fully informed about the research and participation must be voluntary. This includes informing them of the purpose of the study, the methods that will be used, and any potential risks or benefits. It's also important to ensure that participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Another important ethical issue is confidentiality and privacy. It's crucial that the researchers protect the identity and personal information of our participants. This includes not disclosing their names or any other identifying information in any publications or presentations. Ensure the security and protection of collected data by taking steps to prevent unauthorized access.

In qualitative research, data analysis must be done with concurrence to data collection. This is in contrary to pure quantitative research in which data analysis only follows the data collection. Data analysis will be completed with the first interview. This allows for making any adjustments and have the most reliable and valid data. During this time, a tentative

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comprehensive list of themes will be established. By employing the phenomenological approach, researchers will read all written transcripts three (3) times to attain an overall feeling for them.

To prepare for data analysis, Creswell (2008) stated, initial preparation of the data for analysis requires organizing the vast amount of information, transferring it from spoken or written words to a typed file and making decisions about whether to analyze the data by hand or by computer. The researchers organized data according to interviews of study participants. Multiple copies of the data is maintained (Creswell, 2008). Next, they will complete the transcriptions by typing the text files collected during interviews (Lichtman, 2012). From each transcript, they shall identify key phrases or sentences which related to study participants' experiences and then formulated meanings from these significant phrases and sentences which allowed common themes to surface (Creswell, 2007). This approach was defined as interpretive phenomenological analysis which involved the detailed examination of the lived experience of individuals (Lichtman M., 2012).

After reading each participant's transcribed interview, the researchers will create a table in Microsoft Word program. A code will be defined as a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldana, 2009). These codes originated from the actual statements of the study participants. Next, themes will also emerge from the combination of preliminary writing, actual statements or raw data, and codes. Themes surfaced because of the repeating ideas which study participants had similarities (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003). Initially, the same begins with ten (10) themes, but could be reduced if found later in that this is an excessive number. Then the same could pair each theme with another theme as opposed to viewing them as separate entities. When doing this, the pairings strengthened the expressions of lived experiences of each study participant. Although responses are expected to be varied among participants, themes provided a more vivid picture of their lived experiences.

According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) most effective qualitative analytic techniques involve generating emergent themes that evolve from the study of specific pieces of information that the investigator has collected. Robinson, (2013) states that after identifying themes, next process of data analysis is to be able to connect them with actual statements from participants' transcribed interviews. All data must be secured at home. In summary, Cool and Warm Analysis will be utilized to describe the school heads' leadership experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The primary theme that emerged from the data analysis was the perception of Non-BEED school heads regarding their leadership styles as a dynamic and multifaceted process. Non-BEEd school heads believe in the development of leadership abilities, embrace a variety of leadership approaches with a strong preference for democratic styles, and prioritize adaptability and flexibility. Collaboration and effective communication are seen as essential, alongside key personal qualities and the ability to manage interpersonal challenges. They are also aware of the negative aspects that can impact their leadership and actively work to mitigate them.

This is further illuminated in the following sub-themes:

Sub-theme 1: Having Foundation of Leadership

Non-BEED school heads believe that effective leadership is cultivated through a strong foundational understanding of leadership principles, suggesting that leaders are made rather than born. They emphasize the importance of continuous learning and development in shaping their leadership capabilities. This belief underscores their commitment to personal growth and the ongoing refinement of their leadership skills.

As one of the participants verbalized:

"Leaders are made. Because leaders are exposed to different kinds of situations, different kinds of factors that will determine how well they become a leader. So, if they are successfully exposed to different kinds of situations, the better leaders they become."

This was further supported by another participant who claimed:

"Leaders are made because of the need, passion and commitment to be a leader. It is learned starting from small steps to gigantic ones. It is not just inherited."

According to Rohr (2016) as cited by Worlu & Elenwo (2024), fostering goal focus, developing a clear leadership identity, and practicing self-regulation are crucial factors that nurture leadership growth. These elements collectively shape leaders by honing their ability to set and achieve goals, define their leadership roles authentically, and manage themselves effectively in various contexts, ensuring continuous development and impact.

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Sub-theme 2: Variation of Approaches

The leadership styles of Non-BEED school heads are characterized by a wide variation of approaches tailored to different situations and challenges. They adapt their methods based on the unique needs of their schools and the diverse backgrounds of their staff and students. This flexibility allows them to effectively address a broad range of issues and foster a supportive learning environment.

As one of the participants stated:

"Well, I'm more on the transformative leadership style. And on the transactional as well. Because if you are transforming and you know how to transact well, naturally you can make change."

The interview excerpt indicates that Non-BEED school heads do not adhere strictly to a single approach to leadership, but rather integrate multiple approaches as needed. Baroudi and Hojeij (2020) in Dhingra, D. et al (2024) suggested that the effectiveness of school administration depends on principals' ability to adapt their leadership strategies to meet the specific needs of the school and its stakeholders. Thus, the diversity in leadership styles among the participants reinforces Akudo's (2020) assertion that there is no universally superior leadership style; rather, each style is contingent upon the circumstances and context within a school.

However, most of the participants are inclined to demonstrate democratic leadership style. As they have revealed:

Participant 3: *"Well for me, I should say it is a democratic."*

Participant 4: *"Democratic ako."* (I am democratic.)

Participant 5: *"From the beginning, when I lead these schools that I am talking about, I am using the model of democratic."*

Participant 6: *"I prefer democratic style of leadership most of the time because collaboration is needed in every organization."*

This finding supports the study of Jaafar et al (2021) who underscored that most program leaders prefer to use democratic approach. Democratic leadership, as influenced by Dewey's pragmatic philosophy, fosters an atmosphere that encourages participation and idea-sharing as noted by Starratt (2001) as cited in Kilicoglu (2018). One of the participants expressed this saying that:

"Because in a democratic way of leadership, you have shared leadership."

Non-BEED school heads see the strength of democratic leadership in shared governance. They have reiterated the value of encouraging participation and using feedback as an opportunity to welcome fresh perspectives. Syamsidar et al. (2021) pointed out that activities should be based on a mutually determined and approved agreement between leaders and subordinates. As expressed by one participant:

"There are times that you can learn also from the experiences of other school heads. So by considering fresh perspective you can always modify of you can always improve your leadership style. We can always draw inspiration or learn from others."

Sub-theme 3: Adaptable and Flexible

Adaptability and flexibility are key traits exhibited by Non-BEED school heads, allowing them to navigate the everchanging landscape of elementary education. They adjust their strategies as they believe it depends on the kind of teachers they handle.

As verbalized by one of the participants:

"Isu nga agchange latta ti leadership style. From medio strict to agloosen-up ka no madlawmo a ti masapulda ket love and care." (The leadership style will change. From being a bit strict to loosening up if you see that what they need is love and care.)

This statement illustrates the flexibility and adaptability of a leader by demonstrating their willingness to adjust their leadership style based on the needs of those they lead. Rad and Yarmohammdian (2006) as cited by Obasan & Hassan (2014) stated that there is no one leadership style that is ideal for every situation because a leader's knowledge and skills to address one situation may not be as effective in a different situation. This shows that the leader recognizes when a more nurturing and supportive approach is beneficial, indicating a responsiveness to the dynamics within their team or organization. This adaptability ensures that the leader can effectively meet varying needs and situations, fostering a more positive and productive environment.

Still another participant said:

"Having led two schools, my leadership styles have changed depending on the kind of teachers you handle and depending on the situations in that school."

This statement clearly suggests that successful leadership involves recognizing and adjusting to the unique needs, challenges, and dynamics present within different educational settings.

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Furthermore, another participant stressed that making tasks simpler for her teachers helps to prevent unnecessary challenges for them. She sated:

"Oh yes, leadership is really hard. Now, how can I make it not quite hard? Simply by simplifying tasks. Do not expect too much from teachers. I understand where they come from. Depending on the context of every teacher. May mga personal problems yan. So dapat kilala mo yung mga teachers mo so that you can adjust their assignments. Para naman hindi sila mahirapan." ("They have personal problems, so it's important to get to know your teachers well enough to adjust their assignments. And ensure they don't face unnecessary difficulties.")

Acknowledging the difficulties faced by teachers, it becomes imperative to adopt an adaptable approach that tailors assignments and support based on individual contexts. Irizarry (2023) cited by Dhingra et al. (2024) believed that a school head who show   adaptability in their leadership approaches based on the emergent demands of their schools, demonstrate their capacity to mold healthy, cooperative teams and able to navigate hindrances. By understanding the personal challenges of each teacher and making necessary adjustments, leaders can create a supportive environment where needless difficulties are minimized.

Sub-theme 4: Collaborative Decision Making

Collaborative decision-making is a cornerstone of the leadership styles of Non-BEED school heads. They actively seek input from teachers, staff, and other stakeholders to ensure that decisions are well-informed and inclusive. This approach not only strengthens trust and cohesion within the school but also leads to more innovative and effective solutions.

Conversely, the inclination of Non-BEED school heads towards a democratic style of leadership promotes collaborative decision-making. Several researchers postulated the relevance of collective decision-making between school leaders and employees in an organization:

According to Francisco SR (2020) in Dhingra et al. (2024), democratic leadership, which involves collaborative decisionmaking, increases teacher involvement and promotes a favorable school environment.

Jaafar et al. (2021) stated that in a democratic leadership style, one person takes control but remains open to group input, often allowing the group to make decisions and collectively assign tasks.

According to Buriro et al. (2023) in Jilani et al. (2024) the democratic style of leadership enables teachers to actively participate in decision-making processes and contribute their insights to collective and administrative discussions.

Akudo et al. (2020) reiterated that principals adopting a democratic style of leadership will ensure teacher participation in decision-making, particularly in matters that directly concern them.

Moreover, Agu (2005) in Worlu and Elenwo (2024) added that the democratic leadership approach involves a leader consulting with employees and allowing them to participate in the decision-making process to achieve the organization's desired objectives.

These claims are highlighted by one of the participants saying that:

"As I have said, I gather information. I gather the opinions of my teammates and other teachers so that we could come up with an effective and efficient decision."

Likewise, another school head expressed:

"In a school community there should be collaboration with everyone."

Uy (2024) referencing Leithwood & Mascall (2008) stated that proponents of democratic leadership contend that involving all stakeholders in decision-making processes enables schools to more effectively meet the varied needs of their communities and foster a culture of accountability and transparency. Saleem, Batool & Khattak (2017) as cited by Mir et al (2019) also reported that democratic leadership would provide autonomy to employees and encourage them to participate in decision making. This belief emphasizes that leadership involves collaborative decision-making rather than relying solely on one individual's approach. It underscores the importance of fostering a team-oriented environment where decisions are made collectively, drawing on the diverse perspectives and expertise of team members. This collaborative approach not only enhances the quality of decisions but also promotes a sense of ownership and commitment among stakeholders, ultimately contributing to the overall effectiveness and consistency of the leadership team.

Sub-theme 5: Displaying Effective Communication

Effective communication is a vital component of the leadership exhibited by Non-BEED school heads. They prioritize clear and open channels of communication to foster transparency and build strong relationships within their school community.
By actively listening and responding to the concerns of others, they create an environment of mutual respect and collaboration.

Concomitant to this, one of the participants articulated:

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"Communication is always important. Especially so kailangan kung minsan written din. Kasi pag verbal lang they do not comply. Lalo na kung casual lang ang pagkakasabi." (Effective communication is crucial, particularly when it is documented in writing, as verbal agreements may not always be adhered to, especially in informal contexts.)

Furthermore, another participant shared that:

"Communication is the key to keep us connected in all the undertakings."

Martinez et al. (2023), as cited by Uy et al. (2024), highlighted that democratic leaders foster an inclusive environment by engaging students, parents, teachers, and community members in significant school decisions, ensuring that every voice is acknowledged and respected. This underscores that clear and consistent communication fosters understanding and alignment among team members, facilitating smooth collaboration and successful outcomes in various undertakings. Furthermore, according to Shafie et al. (2013) referencing Grawford (2005), effective leadership is crucial to organizational effectiveness, as evidenced by the critical factors of leadership, communication skills, and information management skills identified in assessing organizational performance.

Sub-theme 6: Revealing Essential Personal Qualities of Leaders

Obasan and Hassan (2014) stated that leadership is often seen as a transaction between a leader and their subordinates. The leadership style exhibited by an individual is a blend of traits, characteristics, skills, and behaviors. Non-BEED school heads view their traits to have significantly contributed to their leadership effectiveness. Traits such as being motivational, positive, communicative, and adaptable are consistently highlighted as essential to their success. These qualities enable them to connect deeply with their teachers, fostering a positive and motivating school culture. As uttered by one participant:

"When somebody is hesitant to change, you must motivate them, encourage him. It's up to the leader to encourage the teacher."

Rival and Sagala (2014), as cited by Syamsidar et al. (2021), asserted that motivation plays a crucial role in prompting individuals to engage in specific activities, as every action is driven by motivating factors. Moreover, Jaafar (2021) claimed that leadership techniques can significantly influence employee motivation and enhance their performance. Furthermore, Mallarangan et al. (2024) suggested that teachers require guidance, direction, and motivation to effectively manage the numerous responsibilities and challenges they face.

This finding was further exemplified by another head who claimed:

"And that as a leader you do not need to be talking too much. You must be calm. You let them understand what you are telling them. And if they cannot understand you by just talking, you must do it. That's why a leader must know the way and show the way."

The statement above defines that a leader must be able to reinforce his words with actions. Effective leadership involves not only clear communication but also leading by example to inspire and motivate others to achieve common goals. Ansari and Anshori (2024) defined leadership as the process of guiding others to understand and agree on the tasks that need to be completed and the most effective ways to accomplish them.

Sub-theme 7 : Enhancing Interpersonal Skills and Facing Challenges

Enhancing interpersonal skills is a continuous process for Non-BEED school heads as they face various challenges in their leadership roles. They focus on building strong relationships and effective conflict resolution techniques to traverse difficult situations. This commitment to personal growth and development ensures they remain effective and inspiring leaders.

According to Smylie and Hart (1999), as cited by Uy et al. (2024), school leaders may benefit from specialized training in facilitation, conflict resolution, and consensus building to skillfully navigate the complexities of participatory decision-making. This approach underscores the importance of enhancing interpersonal skills and adeptly facing challenges by fostering close relationships with teachers, treating them like family, and ensuring that all voices are respected and heard within the school community. Effective leadership not only requires the ability to lead and mediate but also the capacity to create a collaborative and inclusive environment conducive to mutual understanding and collective achievement.

As one of the participants emphasized"

"Befriend your teachers. Treat them like your brothers and sisters."

And another participant also noted:

"Sa school level, I make sure na may boses yung bawat isa." (In the school level I make sure that all voices are head.)

Sub-theme 8: Exhibit Negative Aspects of Leadership

Non-BEED school heads are not immune to the negative aspects of leadership, which can manifest in various forms such as stress, burnout, and resistance to change. However, they actively recognize and address these challenges to minimize their impact on

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their leadership effectiveness. By confronting these issues head-on, they demonstrate resilience and a commitment to continuous improvement.

This is highlighted by one of the participants in her statement:

"No adda problema a makitak iti maysa a teacher ayabak ditoy opisina. I never scold them in front of other people." (When there is a problem with one teacher, I call him in my office. I never scold them in front of other people.)

Non-BEED school heads are aware that conflicts in the workplace can arise from various sources, including differences in opinions, goals, values, expectations, behavior, conduct issues, performance disputes, and relationships between colleagues. Shafie et al. (2013) emphasized that the success or failure of an organization hinges on the effectiveness of leadership across all levels. Hence, as educational leaders they play a critical role in conflict management to create a positive work environment. Santi et al. (2024) highlighted that a comfortable work environment significantly aids employees in performing their tasks, thereby influencing the achievement of organizational goals and creating a sense of comfort in their duties.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of leadership styles among Non-BEED school heads managing elementary schools in the Division of Ilocos Sur reveals a dynamic landscape characterized by adaptability, collaboration, and a strong foundation in leadership principles. Through phenomenological research, insights were gathered into the lived experiences of these leaders, highlighting their varied approaches and the impact of their leadership styles on school environments.

The findings underscore the importance of continuous learning and development in leadership, as well as the flexibility to tailor leadership strategies to meet the diverse needs of schools and stakeholders. Non-BEED school heads demonstrated a preference for democratic leadership styles, emphasizing collaborative decision-making, effective communication, and the cultivation of essential personal qualities such as motivation and interpersonal skills. Despite challenges and negative aspects inherent in leadership roles, these leaders exhibit resilience and a commitment to improving their leadership effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of Non-BEED school heads in managing elementary schools:

1. **Professional Development**: Encourage continuous professional development programs tailored to the specific needs of Non-BEED school heads, focusing on leadership skills, conflict resolution, and communication strategies.
2. **Support for Leadership Styles**: Foster an organizational culture that supports diverse leadership styles, including democratic approaches, to promote collaborative decision-making and inclusivity among school stakeholders.
3. **Interpersonal Skills Training**: Provide training in interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, and team-building to strengthen relationships and improve leadership effectiveness.
4. **Leadership Mentorship**: Establish mentorship programs where experienced Non-BEED school heads can support and guide new leaders in developing their leadership capabilities.
5. **Research and Evaluation**: Encourage further research on leadership styles among Non-BEED school heads in different educational contexts to deepen understanding and inform policy and practice.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study on the critical competencies of democratic leadership has several limitations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. The study primarily relied on qualitative data from interviews, which, while rich in detail, may not capture the full breadth of experiences and perspectives on democratic leadership. Additionally, the participants were selected based on specific criteria that might have introduced selection bias, limiting the applicability of the results to a broader population. The study was also geographically limited, focusing on a specific region that may not reflect the nuances of democratic leadership in different cultural or organizational contexts. Another limitation is the potential for interviewer bias, as the researcher's interpretations and interactions with participants could influence the data collected. Furthermore, the study's reliance on self-reported data can introduce response bias, where participants may provide socially desirable answers rather than candid reflections. The dynamic nature of leadership means that the competencies identified might evolve over time, necessitating ongoing research to keep the findings current. Moreover, the study did not account for external factors such as economic, political, or technological changes that could impact leadership effectiveness. The lack of longitudinal data also means that the study provides a snapshot in time, without insights into how these competencies develop or change over a leader's career. Additionally, while the study identified key competencies, it did not delve deeply into

the training or development processes that might enhance these skills. The interplay between different competencies was also not thoroughly explored, leaving questions about how they interact and influence each other in practice. Finally, while the study offers valuable insights, its conclusions are drawn from a limited dataset, and further research with larger, more diverse samples would be beneficial to validate and expand upon these findings. Despite these limitations, the study provides a foundational understanding of the competencies crucial for democratic leadership and opens avenues for future research.

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