

Inclusive School Leadership Styles and Practices in Public Elementary Schools

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Abstract:

Inclusive school leadership plays a vital role in ensuring equitable and effective implementation of inclusive education in public schools. This study examined the inclusive school leadership styles and practices of public elementary school heads in Region I as perceived by school heads and teachers. Using a descriptive–correlational research design, data were collected from 50 school heads and 50 teachers through a validated questionnaire measuring the level of manifestation of leadership styles, level of implementation of inclusive leadership practices, and challenges encountered in implementation. Descriptive and inferential statistical tools, including weighted mean, Pearson Product–Moment Correlation, Spearman Rank–Order Correlation, and independent samples t-test, were employed in the analysis.

Results revealed that transformational, transactional, democratic, and gender-responsive leadership styles were very highly manifested, while autocratic leadership was moderately manifested. Both school heads and teachers perceived the level of implementation of inclusive school leadership practices as very high across all dimensions, including equity and fairness, collaboration and shared decision-making, cultural and linguistic inclusivity, and support for learners with diverse needs. No statistically significant differences were found between the perceptions of school heads and teachers. Challenges encountered in implementation were rated as moderately serious. The findings suggest that a balanced integration of inspirational, structured, participatory, and equity-oriented leadership practices contributes to the effective implementation of inclusive education. The study provides empirical evidence to inform leadership development programs and policy initiatives aimed at strengthening inclusive school leadership in public elementary schools.

Keywords –: inclusive school leadership; transformational leadership; inclusive education; public elementary schools; educational leadership

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive school leadership has emerged as a critical factor in ensuring equitable access to quality education for all learners, particularly those with diverse needs. School heads play a pivotal role in shaping inclusive cultures through leadership styles, decision-making processes, and implementation of inclusive practices. In the Philippine basic education context, inclusive education is institutionalized through national policies emphasizing equity, fairness, collaboration, and learner-centered leadership. However, the effectiveness of these policies largely depends on how school leaders translate them into practice at the school level.

Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020) emphasized that effective school leadership significantly influences teaching practices, teacher motivation, and student outcomes, particularly in inclusive settings. Similarly, Northouse (2021) explained that leadership effectiveness in schools depends on the leader's ability to adapt leadership styles to organizational needs and contextual demands. These perspectives suggest that inclusive school leadership requires flexibility and responsiveness rather than reliance on a single leadership approach.

The literature reviewed also emphasizes the growing importance of gender-responsive leadership in inclusive education. Gender-responsive leadership ensures fairness, equity, and sensitivity to gender-related issues within the school community and supports the creation of safe and inclusive learning environments for all learners (UN Women, 2020). Studies included in this research

suggest that school heads who demonstrate gender responsiveness are more likely to implement inclusive policies effectively and foster respect for diversity among teachers and learners.

The purpose of conducting this study was to make comparisons of the usage of Ilocano language between municipalities of Bani, Pangasinan and Itogon, Benguet. The researchers investigated the usage of Ilocano in these municipalities to understand the underlying complexity of the language. The historical background of the Ilocano language spoken in the two places was studied to give sufficient data about the Ilocano language spoken in these municipalities despite the fact that they were not native speakers of the language. Also, the researchers made use of survey-questionnaire in gathering data about the differences in lexicon and semantics of the participants, while a voice recording was utilized in analyzing the phonology of the participants. In addition, the researchers provided the implications of the findings of this study to the common people, educators, and LGUs of the two places. The material that was gathered in this study was analyzed to provide sufficient understanding, basis, and explanation about Ilocano that answered the problem of the study. Moreover, the study used the comparative method to show the comparisons of the two different Ilocano speaking municipalities. Comparative research method can be defined as a research methodology in which aspects of social science or life are examined across different cultures or countries. It is a form of qualitative approach or analysis in which different types of methods like case study analysis are used by the researchers to elucidate the similarities and differences between the entities or countries (Given, 2008). In connection, this study made sense through comparing two different speakers using the same Ilocano language to find its areas of similarities and differences.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to examine the inclusive school leadership styles and practices of public elementary school heads in Region I as perceived by school heads and teachers. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Determine the level of manifestation of inclusive school leadership styles of public elementary school heads in terms of transformational, transactional, democratic, autocratic, and gender-responsive leadership;
2. Assess the level of implementation of inclusive school leadership practices in public elementary schools in Region I;
3. Identify the degree of seriousness of the challenges encountered in the implementation of inclusive school leadership practices;
4. Examine the relationship between selected profile variables of the respondents and the level of manifestation and implementation of inclusive school leadership practices; and
5. Determine whether there are significant differences between the perceptions of school heads and teachers regarding the level of manifestation of leadership styles and the level of implementation of inclusive leadership practices.

The findings of the study served as an empirical basis for strengthening leadership development initiatives and informing policy directions aimed at sustaining inclusive education in public elementary schools.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed a descriptive–correlational research design. This design was appropriate in describing the level of manifestation and implementation of inclusive school leadership practices and in examining relationships and differences among variables without manipulating them.

The respondents consisted of 100 participants, composed of 50 public elementary school heads and 50 teachers from selected public elementary schools in Region I. The participants were selected

using purposive sampling to ensure that respondents had direct experience and involvement in school leadership and inclusive education practices.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire grounded in inclusive leadership literature and validated by experts in educational leadership and research. The instrument consisted of four parts: (1) demographic profile of respondents; (2) level of manifestation of inclusive leadership styles (transformational, transactional, democratic, autocratic, and gender-responsive); (3) level of implementation of inclusive school leadership practices; and (4) degree of seriousness of challenges encountered in implementation. A five-point Likert scale was used.

Permission to conduct the study was secured from relevant educational authorities. After approval, questionnaires were distributed personally and through official school channels. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Completed questionnaires were retrieved, checked, and prepared for analysis.

Data were coded and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Frequency counts, percentages, weighted means, and standard deviations were used for descriptive analysis. Pearson Product–Moment Correlation and Spearman Rank-Order Correlation were used to determine relationships among variables. Independent samples t-tests were employed to determine significant differences between the perceptions of school heads and teachers. All tests were conducted at a 0.05 level of significance

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Level of Manifestation of Inclusive Leadership Styles

Table 1 presents the level of manifestation of inclusive leadership styles of public elementary school heads in Region I as perceived by teachers.

Table 1
Level of Manifestation of Inclusive Leadership Styles of Public Elementary School Heads

Leadership Style	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Transformational	4.95	Very Highly Manifested
Transactional	4.89	Very Highly Manifested
Democratic	4.72	Very Highly Manifested
Autocratic	2.75	Moderately Manifested
Gender-Responsive	4.88	Very Highly Manifested

Results show that transformational leadership obtained the highest weighted mean, indicating strong motivation, collaboration, and empowerment practices among school heads. Autocratic leadership was only moderately manifested, suggesting selective use of authority.

The findings demonstrate that transformational, transactional, democratic, and gender-responsive leadership styles are strongly manifested among public elementary school heads. The predominance of transformational leadership highlights the role of school heads in motivating teachers, fostering collaboration, and promoting professional growth, which is consistent with transformational leadership theory.

The moderate manifestation of autocratic leadership implies a balanced leadership approach, where authority is exercised without undermining teacher participation. This balance supports contemporary leadership models advocating flexibility and shared governance.

According to Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020), democratic leadership enhances teacher commitment and instructional improvement by empowering teachers to take part in school-wide decisions. Similarly, Bush (2018) posited that participative leadership models foster ownership and accountability, which are essential for sustainable school improvement. In inclusive education contexts, Ainscow and Sandill (2010) stressed that leadership which promotes dialogue and collective problem-solving is crucial in responding to diverse learning needs. The high ratings for open communication and collaborative problem-solving in this study affirm this assertion.

Local studies further support these findings. Dayagbil et al. (2021) found that Filipino school heads who practiced democratic leadership created positive school climates that encouraged teacher collaboration and innovation.

Level of Implementation of Inclusive School Leadership Practices

Table 2 presents the level of implementation of inclusive school leadership practices as perceived by school heads and teachers.

Table 2

Level of Implementation of Inclusive School Leadership Practices

Dimension	School Heads (WM)	Teachers (WM)	Verbal Interpretation
Equity and Fairness	4.88	4.88	Very Highly Implemented
Collaboration and Shared Decision-Making	4.82	4.88	Very Highly Implemented
Cultural and Linguistic Inclusivity	4.80	4.88	Very Highly Implemented
Support for Learners with Diverse Needs	4.83	4.87	Very Highly Implemented
Overall Implementation	4.84	4.88	Very Highly Implemented

Findings indicate consistently very high levels of implementation across all dimensions, with minimal variation between school heads' and teachers' perceptions.

The very high implementation of inclusive leadership practices across equity, collaboration, inclusivity, and learner support indicates effective translation of inclusive education policies into school-level actions.

These results imply that school heads recognize the importance of shared decision-making and actively integrate collaborative practices in their leadership roles. Research has demonstrated that participatory leadership positively influences teacher motivation, trust, and professional efficacy

(Vázquez-Toledo et al., 2025; Palmera & Baguio, 2025). By empowering teachers to lead initiatives and maintaining transparency in programs and budgets, school heads foster a sense of ownership and accountability, which supports a culture of continuous improvement and innovation. Engaging teachers in decision-making enhances collaboration, reduces hierarchical barriers, and improves collective problem-solving, all of which are essential for effective school leadership (Stosich, 2024).

Difference in Perceptions Between School Heads and Teachers

Table 3 shows the results of the independent samples t-test on differences in perceptions between school heads and teachers.

Table 3

Difference in Perceptions on Implementation of Inclusive Leadership Practices

Dimension	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Equity and Fairness	0.045	0.964	Not Significant
Collaboration	-0.849	0.398	Not Significant
Cultural and Linguistic Inclusivity	-1.507	0.135	Not Significant
Support for Diverse Learners	-0.860	0.392	Not Significant
Overall Implementation	-0.935	0.352	Not Significant

The results reveal no statistically significant differences between the perceptions of school heads and teachers across all dimensions.

The absence of significant differences between school heads' and teachers' perceptions reflects shared understanding and alignment in leadership practices. However, the presence of moderate challenges signals the need for continuous support, capacity building, and resource allocation.

This finding is consistent with the studies of Kachchhap and Horo (2021) and Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2019), which examined teachers' sense of belonging in relation to leadership support. Their findings emphasized that supportive, fair, and inclusive leadership practices strengthen teachers' feelings of connection, commitment, and belonging within the school community. Moreover, these studies revealed that when such leadership practices are evident, teachers tend to exhibit greater alignment with school goals and values. However, this alignment is influenced by the quality of leadership support and the overall organizational climate, underscoring the necessity of continuous leadership support, capacity building, and structured professional development to sustain shared understanding and effective school practices.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings indicate that inclusive leadership practices in Region I public elementary schools are generally well implemented, particularly in terms of fairness and collaboration. However, school heads consistently rated leadership manifestation and implementation higher than teachers,

revealing perceptual gaps and inconsistencies at the classroom level, especially in supporting culturally, linguistically, and learner-diverse needs. Demographic variables were not significantly associated with leadership manifestation or implementation, except for training and experience, which showed modest influence. Persistent challenges related to instructional support, resources, and stakeholder engagement highlight the need for a structured instructional support program to strengthen capacity building, align leadership practices with classroom realities, and sustain inclusive school leadership.

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