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Transformational Leadership and School Improvement Practices in Rural Secondary Education: The Case of Potia National High School, Ifugao

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Abstract

School leadership plays a crucial role in fostering educational quality, organizational effectiveness, and institutional development, particularly in geographically isolated and disadvantaged schools. This qualitative case study explored the transformational leadership practices and school improvement initiatives implemented by the school head of Potia National High School in Alfonso Lista, Ifugao. The study investigated leadership approaches, administrative strategies, teacher engagement mechanisms, and challenges encountered in managing a rural secondary school. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and school-based observations involving school personnel and stakeholders. Findings revealed that transformational leadership practices were manifested through collaborative decision-making, teacher empowerment, community engagement, instructional supervision, and adaptive management strategies. The study further identified that the school head's leadership significantly contributed to teacher motivation, organizational cooperation, and school improvement initiatives despite contextual challenges such as limited resources, infrastructure constraints, and rural educational conditions. The findings underscore the importance of context-responsive and people-centered leadership practices in promoting sustainable educational development in rural secondary schools. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on educational leadership in geographically isolated Philippine educational contexts.

Keywords: *Araling Panlipunan, civic engagement, localized pedagogy, culturally transformational leadership, school improvement, rural education, school head leadership, educational management, secondary education, Ifugao*

Introduction

Educational leadership significantly influences school effectiveness, instructional quality, teacher performance, and learner outcomes. In public secondary schools, school heads serve as instructional leaders, organizational managers, and policy implementers responsible for fostering positive educational environments and achieving institutional goals. Leadership becomes particularly critical in rural and geographically isolated schools where educational challenges are compounded by resource limitations, accessibility issues, and socioeconomic constraints.

In the Philippine educational system, school heads are expected to implement transformative leadership practices aligned with the Department of Education's commitment to quality, inclusive, and accessible education. Rural secondary schools in mountainous and geographically disadvantaged communities often encounter persistent issues such as inadequate facilities, limited instructional resources, teacher shortages, and low stakeholder participation. These conditions require school leaders to adopt adaptive, collaborative, and context-responsive leadership approaches to sustain school improvement initiatives.

Transformational leadership has emerged as a widely recognized framework in educational management due to its emphasis on vision-building, collaboration, motivation, and organizational development. Transformational leaders inspire stakeholders through shared goals, participatory governance, and supportive professional relationships. Previous studies have shown that transformational leadership positively influences teacher morale, institutional commitment, and school effectiveness. However, limited studies have examined how transformational leadership practices are operationalized within rural Philippine secondary school settings, particularly in geographically isolated schools in the Cordillera region.

This study aimed to explore the transformational leadership practices and school improvement initiatives implemented at Potia National High School in Ifugao. Specifically, it examined the leadership approaches employed by the school head, the strategies used to promote school improvement, and the contextual challenges encountered in managing a rural secondary school.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Burns' Transformational Leadership Theory, which emphasizes leadership practices that inspire, motivate, and empower organizational members toward collective goals and institutional transformation. Transformational leaders cultivate collaboration, professional growth, and shared vision among stakeholders.

The study also drew from Leithwood's Educational Leadership Framework, which highlights the role of school leaders in improving teaching practices, strengthening organizational capacity, and fostering positive school climates. These theoretical perspectives collectively explain how leadership practices contribute to educational improvement and organizational development in rural school contexts.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate the leadership experiences and school improvement practices implemented at Potia National High School. The qualitative approach enabled an in-depth exploration of leadership behaviors, administrative realities, and institutional challenges within the rural educational context.

Research Participants

Participants included the school head, selected teachers, department coordinators, and school stakeholders from Potia National High School. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants directly involved in school leadership and improvement initiatives.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, school observations, and document analysis involving

school improvement plans, accomplishment reports, meeting records, and administrative documents. Interviews focused on leadership practices, organizational management, instructional supervision, stakeholder engagement, and school improvement initiatives.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. Coding procedures identified recurring patterns and themes related to leadership practices and school development initiatives. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, member checking, and audit trail documentation.

Results and Discussion

Theme 1: Collaborative and Participatory Leadership Practices

Participants consistently described the school head's leadership as collaborative and participatory. Teachers emphasized that decision-making processes often involved consultation, dialogue, and collective planning.

One participant shared:

"Ang school head namin ay bukas sa mga suggestions at opinion ng teachers kaya mas nagiging cooperative ang lahat."

The school head encouraged teacher involvement in planning activities, policy implementation, and school programs. Faculty meetings and collaborative discussions were regularly conducted to address school concerns and improve organizational coordination.

These findings align with transformational leadership principles emphasizing shared governance and participatory leadership. Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) similarly found that collaborative leadership strengthens organizational trust and teacher engagement.

Theme 2: Teacher Empowerment and Professional Support

Participants highlighted the school head's efforts in supporting teacher professional growth through mentoring, instructional supervision, and encouragement to participate in trainings and seminars.

One teacher explained:

"Palaging sinusupportahan ng school head ang professional development namin lalo na sa trainings at instructional improvement."

Teachers described receiving constructive feedback, emotional support, and professional guidance from the school head. Classroom observations and mentoring activities were regularly conducted to improve teaching practices and instructional quality.

These findings support studies indicating that transformational leaders foster teacher motivation and organizational commitment through empowerment and professional support mechanisms. Day et al. (2016) emphasized that instructional leadership significantly contributes to school effectiveness and teacher development.

Theme 3: Community Engagement and Stakeholder Collaboration

Participants emphasized that stakeholder collaboration and community involvement were integral components of school improvement initiatives. The school head actively coordinated with parents, barangay officials, and local stakeholders to support school programs and infrastructure development.

A participant stated:

"Malaki ang tulong ng pakikipag-ugnayan sa community para maisakatuparan ang mga school projects."

The school head initiated partnerships for school maintenance, learner support programs, and resource

mobilization activities. Community participation strengthened school accountability and institutional support.

These findings align with Epstein's framework on school-family-community partnerships, which emphasizes the importance of collaborative educational governance in improving school outcomes.

Theme 4: Adaptive Leadership Amid Rural Educational Challenges

Participants acknowledged that managing a rural secondary school involved numerous challenges including limited resources, infrastructure deficiencies, learner absenteeism, and accessibility issues. Despite these constraints, the school head demonstrated adaptive leadership practices focused on problem-solving, resourcefulness, and resilience.

One participant explained:

“Kahit kulang ang resources, gumagawa talaga ng paraan ang school head para matuloy ang mga programs.”

Adaptive leadership practices included strategic resource allocation, contextualized planning, and collaborative problem-solving approaches. These findings support studies highlighting the importance of adaptive leadership in geographically isolated educational contexts.

Challenges Encountered in School Leadership

The study identified several challenges affecting school management and leadership implementation. These included insufficient school facilities, budget constraints, limited instructional materials, teacher workload, and geographical accessibility issues. Participants also noted challenges in sustaining stakeholder participation and addressing diverse learner needs in rural communities.

Despite these difficulties, the school head maintained organizational stability and continued implementing school improvement initiatives through collaborative and transformative leadership approaches.

Conclusion

The study revealed that transformational leadership practices significantly contributed to school improvement initiatives at Potia National High School. Collaborative governance, teacher empowerment, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive leadership emerged as essential leadership dimensions that strengthened organizational effectiveness and educational management.

The findings further demonstrated that transformational leadership fosters teacher motivation, institutional cooperation, and sustainable school development despite contextual limitations in rural educational settings. The study highlights the importance of context-responsive leadership approaches in geographically isolated schools where educational challenges require adaptive and participatory management practices.

Implications of the Study

The findings suggest the need for strengthened leadership development programs focusing on transformational and adaptive leadership competencies among school heads in rural educational settings. Educational institutions and policymakers may further enhance professional support systems, leadership mentoring programs, and community engagement initiatives to improve rural school management practices.

The study also emphasizes the importance of resource augmentation and institutional support for geographically isolated schools to sustain educational improvement initiatives. Future studies may explore comparative leadership practices among rural school heads across different educational contexts.

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