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Transformative Leadership and Educational Management Practices in Rural Secondary Schools: Exploring School Effectiveness, Organizational Culture, and Instructional Improvement in Tadian District, Mountain Province

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Abstract

Educational leadership plays a crucial role in shaping school effectiveness, organizational culture, and instructional quality, particularly in rural educational settings where school leaders face unique contextual challenges. This study explored the transformative leadership and educational management practices of school administrators in rural secondary schools in Tadian District, Mountain Province. Employing a qualitative multiple-case study design, the research gathered data from school principals, department heads, teachers, and community stakeholders from selected secondary schools through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Thematic analysis revealed six major themes: visionary and transformative leadership, participatory decision-making and shared governance, culture-building through trust and collaboration, instructional leadership for teaching improvement, adaptive resource management in resource-constrained environments, and community-centered leadership for sustainable school development. Findings indicate that transformative leadership practices significantly contribute to school effectiveness by fostering positive organizational cultures, enhancing teacher commitment, promoting instructional innovation, and strengthening community engagement. School leaders demonstrated resilience and creativity in addressing challenges associated with geographical isolation, limited resources, and diverse learner needs. The study concludes that transformative leadership serves as a catalyst for organizational improvement and instructional excellence in rural schools. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, educational leaders, and teacher education institutions in designing leadership development programs responsive to the realities of rural education

Keywords: *transformative leadership, educational management, school effectiveness, organizational culture, instructional leadership, rural education*

Introduction

Educational leadership has increasingly become a focal area of educational reform due to its significant influence on school performance, teacher effectiveness, learner achievement, and organizational development. Contemporary educational systems recognize that successful schools are often characterized by leaders who can articulate a compelling vision, inspire stakeholders, foster collaboration, and create environments conducive to learning and continuous improvement.

Transformative leadership extends beyond traditional administrative functions by emphasizing empowerment, shared responsibility, innovation, and social transformation. According to Leithwood and Jantzi (2020), transformative school leaders influence organizational performance by motivating teachers, promoting professional growth, and establishing a culture of trust and collaboration. Such leadership practices are particularly important in rural schools where administrators frequently encounter challenges related to limited resources, geographic isolation, teacher shortages, and socio-economic disparities.

In the Philippine context, rural secondary schools play a critical role in ensuring equitable access to quality education. However, school leaders often navigate complex environments requiring both managerial competence and transformational leadership capacities. The Department of Education continues to emphasize leadership excellence through policies aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), recognizing leadership as a key driver of school effectiveness and learner success.

Tadian District in Mountain Province represents a unique rural educational context characterized by diverse cultural communities, mountainous terrain, and geographically dispersed schools. Despite these challenges, many schools continue to demonstrate positive educational outcomes through effective leadership and management practices.

This study explores how transformative leadership and educational management practices contribute to school effectiveness, organizational culture, and instructional improvement in rural secondary schools in Tadian District.

Review of Related Literature

Transformative Leadership in Education

Transformative leadership focuses on inspiring organizational members to pursue collective goals while fostering personal and professional growth. Bass and Riggio (2019) describe transformative leaders as individuals who motivate followers through vision, intellectual stimulation, individualized support, and inspirational motivation.

Research indicates that transformative leadership positively influences teacher morale, organizational commitment, instructional quality, and school performance (Hallinger, 2020).

Educational Management and School Effectiveness

Educational management encompasses planning, organizing, directing, and evaluating educational resources to achieve institutional goals. Bush (2021) argues that effective educational management provides the structural foundation necessary for successful teaching and learning.

School effectiveness studies consistently identify leadership as one of the strongest predictors of school success after classroom instruction (Day et al., 2020).

Organizational Culture in Schools

Organizational culture refers to the shared beliefs, values, norms, and practices that shape behavior within educational institutions. Schein (2017) emphasizes that leaders play a critical role in creating and sustaining organizational culture.

Positive school cultures promote collaboration, innovation, trust, and continuous improvement, contributing to improved educational outcomes.

Instructional Leadership and Teacher Development

Instructional leadership focuses on improving teaching and learning processes. Hallinger and Murphy (2018) note that instructional leaders actively monitor curriculum implementation, support teacher development, and promote data-informed instructional decisions.

Studies suggest that strong instructional leadership contributes significantly to teacher effectiveness and learner achievement.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Transformational Leadership Theory developed by Burns (1978) and expanded by Bass (1985). The theory posits that effective leaders inspire followers to transcend self-interest for the collective good by promoting shared vision, intellectual stimulation, and personal development.

The study is likewise supported by Distributed Leadership Theory, which emphasizes collaborative leadership practices involving multiple stakeholders in organizational decision-making and school improvement processes.

Together, these frameworks explain how leadership practices influence organizational culture, teacher engagement, and school effectiveness.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design to examine leadership and management practices in selected rural secondary schools in Tadian District, Mountain Province. The research involved School Principal I, department heads, master teachers, classroom teachers, and selected community stakeholders from Balaoa National High School, Bunga National High School, Lubon National High School, Mabalite National High School, and Tadian School of Arts and Trades.

Purposive sampling was utilized to identify participants possessing extensive leadership and organizational experiences. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, field observations, and document reviews. Interview questions explored leadership practices, organizational culture, instructional management, stakeholder engagement, and school improvement initiatives.

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework involving familiarization, coding, theme development, review, and interpretation. Ethical standards including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were strictly observed.

Findings and Discussion

Theme 1: Visionary and Transformative Leadership Drives School Improvement

One of the most dominant themes that emerged from the study was the presence of visionary and transformative leadership among school administrators. Participants consistently described school leaders as individuals who establish a clear direction for the school, articulate meaningful goals, and inspire stakeholders to work collectively toward school improvement. Rather than merely managing day-to-day operations, principals were viewed as catalysts for change who foster optimism, innovation, and commitment despite the challenges commonly experienced in rural educational settings.

One principal explained:

"Our responsibility is not only to manage the school but to inspire everyone to believe that improvement is possible despite our limitations."

Another school administrator shared:

"Leadership means helping teachers and learners see opportunities even when resources are limited. We focus on possibilities rather than constraints."

Teachers similarly recognized the motivational role of school leaders.

One teacher remarked:

“The principal encourages us to innovate and continuously improve our teaching.”

Another participant noted:

“Whenever challenges arise, our principal reminds us of our vision and encourages us to remain focused on our goals.”

These narratives suggest that transformative leadership fosters a shared sense of purpose and collective efficacy among school personnel. Through vision-setting and inspirational motivation, school leaders create an environment where teachers feel empowered to contribute to school development initiatives. Such leadership is particularly important in rural schools where limited resources, geographical isolation, and socio-economic challenges may negatively affect morale and organizational performance.

The findings support Transformational Leadership Theory, which posits that effective leaders inspire followers to exceed expectations by cultivating a shared vision and fostering personal growth (Bass & Riggio, 2019). Similarly, Leithwood and Jantzi (2020) argue that visionary leadership strengthens organizational commitment, teacher motivation, and school effectiveness. Studies by Day et al. (2020) further indicate that transformative leaders positively influence teacher engagement and learner achievement by creating a culture focused on continuous improvement. The findings therefore suggest that visionary leadership serves as a foundational element in promoting sustainable school improvement within rural secondary schools.

Theme 2: Participatory Decision-Making Strengthens Organizational Commitment

Another prominent theme was the practice of participatory decision-making. Participants emphasized that school leaders actively involve teachers, department heads, students, and community stakeholders in important school decisions. This collaborative approach fostered a sense of ownership, accountability, and commitment among stakeholders.

One participant stated:

“Important decisions are discussed collectively. Everyone has an opportunity to contribute.”

A teacher further explained:

“Before implementing major programs, the administration consults teachers and asks for suggestions.”

Another respondent shared:

“Being consulted makes us feel valued and responsible for school outcomes.”

School leaders also highlighted the importance of inclusive governance.

One principal stated:

“We believe that better decisions emerge when different perspectives are considered.”

These findings indicate that participatory leadership promotes transparency and strengthens trust between administrators and school personnel. When teachers are involved in planning and decision-making processes, they are more likely to support institutional initiatives and demonstrate greater commitment to organizational goals.

The findings align with Distributed Leadership Theory, which emphasizes the sharing of leadership responsibilities across organizational members (Spillane, 2018). According to Harris (2020), collaborative decision-making enhances organizational capacity by utilizing the expertise and experiences of multiple stakeholders. Similarly, Bush (2021) notes that participatory management fosters professional engagement and strengthens institutional effectiveness. Research by Nguyen et al. (2022) further demonstrates that schools practicing shared governance exhibit higher levels of teacher satisfaction, organizational commitment, and school improvement outcomes.

The findings suggest that participatory leadership practices strengthen organizational commitment by fostering collective responsibility and encouraging stakeholder engagement in educational decision-making.

Theme 3: Trust and Collaboration Shape Positive Organizational Culture

The findings revealed that trust and collaboration constitute essential elements of a positive organizational culture. Participants consistently described their schools as environments characterized by mutual respect, open communication, teamwork, and professional support.

One teacher shared:

“There is openness and mutual respect among administrators and teachers.”

Another participant remarked:

“We work as one team because there is trust.”

A department head explained:

“Teachers feel comfortable sharing concerns because the administration listens and responds appropriately.”

Several participants also emphasized the role of collaboration in addressing school challenges.

One teacher stated:

“Whenever problems arise, we solve them together instead of blaming one another.”

These findings suggest that trust functions as a social resource that facilitates collaboration and collective problem-solving. Positive organizational cultures encourage professional dialogue, teamwork, and knowledge sharing, which ultimately contribute to school effectiveness.

The findings support Schein’s (2017) theory of organizational culture, which argues that leaders influence organizational values, norms, and behaviors through their actions and decisions. A positive organizational culture promotes employee commitment, innovation, and organizational learning. Similarly, Fullan (2021) emphasizes that collaborative cultures enhance school improvement efforts by fostering professional relationships and collective efficacy. Research by Bryk and Schneider (2019) likewise highlights relational trust as a critical factor in successful school reform and sustained educational improvement.

The findings therefore indicate that school leaders play a significant role in cultivating organizational cultures characterized by trust, collaboration, and mutual respect, thereby enhancing institutional effectiveness.

Theme 4: Instructional Leadership Enhances Teaching Quality

Instructional leadership emerged as a critical factor influencing teaching effectiveness and learner outcomes. Participants reported that school leaders actively monitored classroom instruction, provided mentoring, facilitated professional development opportunities, and supported curriculum implementation.

A teacher explained:

“Classroom observations are not for fault-finding but for helping us improve.”

Another participant stated:

“The principal regularly provides feedback and learning opportunities.”

A master teacher shared:

“Professional development sessions are aligned with our instructional needs.”

School administrators described instructional improvement as one of their primary responsibilities.

One principal noted:

“We focus on helping teachers improve because quality teaching directly affects student learning.”

These findings demonstrate that instructional leadership extends beyond supervision and evaluation. Effective school leaders serve as instructional coaches who provide guidance, mentorship, and professional support to teachers.

The findings support Hallinger and Murphy (2018), who emphasize that instructional leadership contributes significantly to teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Robinson et al. (2020) found that school leaders who prioritize instructional improvement generate stronger educational outcomes than those focusing solely on administrative functions. Likewise, Kraft and Papay (2018) argue that supportive leadership practices positively influence teacher growth and instructional quality.

The findings suggest that instructional leadership serves as a crucial mechanism for promoting teaching excellence and improving educational outcomes in rural secondary schools.

Theme 5: Adaptive Resource Management Promotes School Effectiveness

Participants frequently discussed the challenges associated with limited resources and highlighted the importance of adaptive resource management. School leaders demonstrated creativity and resilience in maximizing available resources to sustain educational programs and services.

One principal explained:

“We rely on partnerships, resource-sharing, and community support.”

Another participant remarked:

“Limited resources do not stop us from implementing programs.”

A teacher added:

“We maximize what we have and continuously seek support from stakeholders.”

School leaders described various strategies, including collaboration with local government units, alumni associations, private organizations, and community partners to supplement school resources.

These findings indicate that adaptive resource management is an essential leadership competency in rural educational settings. Rather than viewing resource constraints as barriers, school leaders adopt innovative approaches to ensure program continuity and school improvement.

The findings support Bush (2021), who argues that effective educational management requires strategic allocation and utilization of available resources. Similarly, Mulford (2020) notes that adaptive leadership enables schools to navigate uncertainty and overcome contextual challenges. Research by Hargreaves and Fullan (2020) further emphasizes that resourcefulness and innovation are critical leadership characteristics in under-resourced educational environments.

The findings suggest that adaptive resource management contributes significantly to school effectiveness by enabling institutions to sustain educational initiatives despite financial and material limitations.

Theme 6: Community-Centered Leadership Sustains Educational Development

The final theme highlights the importance of community-centered leadership. Participants consistently emphasized the active involvement of parents, local government units, alumni, non-government organizations, and community members in supporting school programs and development initiatives.

A stakeholder shared:

“The school involves the community in planning and development activities.”

A teacher noted:

“Community support has greatly contributed to our programs.”

Another participant explained:

“Parents and local leaders regularly participate in school projects and activities.”

School administrators viewed community partnerships as essential to achieving educational goals and sustaining school improvement efforts.

One principal stated:

“The school cannot succeed alone. Community participation is essential for long-term development.”

These findings demonstrate that community-centered leadership strengthens social capital and fosters shared responsibility for educational success. Through collaborative partnerships, schools gain access to additional resources, expertise, and support networks that enhance institutional capacity.

The findings support Epstein’s (2019) framework of school-family-community partnerships, which highlights the positive impact of stakeholder engagement on educational outcomes. Similarly, Sanders (2018) found that schools with strong community partnerships demonstrate higher levels of student achievement, parental involvement, and organizational effectiveness. UNESCO (2022) also emphasizes that sustainable educational development requires meaningful collaboration among schools, families, and communities.

The findings suggest that community-centered leadership promotes sustainable educational development by strengthening partnerships, enhancing stakeholder engagement, and fostering collective ownership of school improvement initiatives.

Across all themes, the findings reveal that transformative leadership functions as the central mechanism connecting school effectiveness, organizational culture, instructional improvement, resource management, and community engagement. School leaders in Tadian District demonstrate leadership practices that empower teachers, cultivate collaborative cultures, support instructional excellence, and mobilize community resources. These practices collectively contribute to the development of resilient and effective rural secondary schools capable of responding to contemporary educational challenges while maintaining a strong commitment to learner success.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that transformative leadership and effective educational management significantly influence school effectiveness, organizational culture, and instructional improvement in rural secondary schools. School leaders in Tadian District exhibit visionary leadership, collaborative decision-making, instructional support, adaptive resource management, and community engagement practices that contribute to organizational success.

Despite challenges associated with rural educational contexts, transformative leadership enables schools to foster positive cultures, strengthen teacher commitment, and improve learning outcomes. The findings affirm that leadership remains a critical determinant of educational quality and institutional sustainability.

Implications of the Study

The study highlights the importance of leadership development programs emphasizing transformative and instructional leadership competencies. Educational policymakers should strengthen professional learning opportunities for school leaders serving rural communities.

Teacher education institutions may integrate transformative leadership concepts into educational management

programs to prepare future administrators for complex educational environments.

Furthermore, school systems should promote collaborative governance structures that encourage stakeholder participation and community engagement.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen leadership training programs focusing on transformative and instructional leadership.
2. Enhance mentoring systems for emerging school leaders.
3. Expand professional learning communities to support collaborative leadership.
4. Strengthen community partnerships to address resource limitations.
5. Develop context-responsive leadership frameworks for rural schools.
6. Conduct further studies examining the relationship between transformative leadership and learner achievement.

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