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Leadership Styles and School Management Practices: A Qualitative Exploration of Educational Leadership at Bisag Elementary School

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Abstract

Educational leadership plays a critical role in shaping school effectiveness, teacher performance, and learner outcomes. This study explored the leadership styles and school management practices employed at Bisag Elementary School and examined how these leadership approaches influence school operations, instructional delivery, teacher collaboration, and stakeholder engagement. Anchored on Transformational Leadership Theory and Distributed Leadership Theory, the study utilized a descriptive qualitative research design. Participants included school heads, teachers, parents, and selected stakeholders of Bisag Elementary School. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, observation notes, and document analysis. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was employed in analyzing the gathered data. Findings revealed that educational leadership at Bisag Elementary School was characterized by collaborative decision-making, instructional support, relational leadership, and community-centered management practices. School leaders emphasized participatory governance, open communication, teacher empowerment, and learner-centered initiatives in managing school programs and operations. The findings further revealed that effective leadership practices strengthened teacher motivation, organizational collaboration, and stakeholder participation. However, challenges such as limited resources, workload demands, administrative constraints, and geographical limitations affected the implementation of leadership and management practices. The study concludes that adaptive and participatory leadership approaches contribute significantly to positive school management and organizational effectiveness in rural school settings. Strengthening leadership development programs and institutional support mechanisms is recommended to sustain effective educational leadership practices in elementary schools.

Keywords: educational leadership, school management, leadership styles, school governance, instructional leadership, qualitative research, elementary education



Introduction

Educational leadership remains a fundamental component of effective school management and organizational success. School leaders influence instructional quality, teacher performance, learner achievement, school climate, and stakeholder engagement through their leadership approaches and management practices. In contemporary educational settings, school leadership extends beyond administrative supervision and encompasses collaborative governance, instructional support, community engagement, and organizational development.

The increasing demands in educational systems require school leaders to demonstrate adaptive leadership styles capable of addressing complex instructional, administrative, and social challenges within schools. Effective educational leadership promotes collaborative school cultures, empowers teachers, strengthens stakeholder relationships, and enhances the overall quality of teaching and learning processes. Leadership practices significantly shape school environments by fostering trust, communication, accountability, and innovation among educational stakeholders.

In the Philippine educational context, school heads play vital roles in implementing educational reforms, curriculum standards, inclusive education initiatives, and school-based management programs under the supervision of Department of Education. School leaders are expected to demonstrate instructional leadership, organizational competence, and stakeholder collaboration to ensure effective school governance and learner development.

Bisag Elementary School, as a rural public elementary institution, operates within unique educational and socio-cultural contexts that influence leadership practices and school management systems. School leaders encounter challenges associated with resource limitations, teacher workload, community needs, and educational program implementation. Despite these realities, educational leaders continuously strive to maintain instructional quality, organizational effectiveness, and positive school-community relationships.

Several studies emphasized that leadership styles significantly influence school effectiveness and teacher motivation. Transformational leadership, for instance, enhances teacher commitment and organizational collaboration by encouraging shared vision, professional growth, and participatory governance (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2020). Similarly, distributed leadership strengthens organizational effectiveness through shared responsibilities and collaborative decision-making processes (Spillane, 2019).

Although educational leadership has been widely studied, there remains limited qualitative research focusing on the lived experiences and contextual leadership practices of elementary school leaders in rural Philippine settings. Thus, this study aimed to explore the leadership styles and school management practices employed at Bisag Elementary School and examine how educational leadership shapes organizational processes, instructional support, and stakeholder engagement within the school community.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Transformational Leadership Theory developed by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985), as well as Distributed Leadership Theory by Spillane (2006).

Transformational Leadership Theory posits that effective leaders inspire and motivate individuals toward shared organizational goals by fostering trust, collaboration, innovation, and professional growth. Transformational leaders encourage participatory decision-making, empower teachers, and cultivate positive organizational cultures that support educational improvement.

Distributed Leadership Theory emphasizes shared leadership responsibilities within organizations. Leadership is viewed not solely as the function of one individual but as a collaborative process involving teachers, school personnel, and stakeholders. This theory highlights the importance of collective participation in organizational decision-making and school management practices.

These theories provided a framework for understanding how leadership styles and management practices influence school operations, instructional support, teacher engagement, and community participation within Bisag Elementary School.

Statement of the Problem

This study explored the leadership styles and school management practices employed at Bisag Elementary School.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do school leaders, teachers, and stakeholders describe the leadership styles practiced at Bisag Elementary School?
2. What school management practices are implemented in terms of:
 - 2.1 instructional leadership;
 - 2.2 organizational management;
 - 2.3 teacher support;
 - 2.4 stakeholder engagement; and
 - 2.5 school governance?
3. How do leadership styles influence teacher collaboration, school climate, and instructional practices?
4. What challenges do school leaders encounter in managing school operations and implementing educational programs?
5. What insights may be derived from the participants' experiences to strengthen educational leadership and school management practices?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the leadership styles and school management practices implemented at Bisag Elementary School. The qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because the study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences, perceptions, and practices of school leaders, teachers, parents, and community stakeholders regarding educational leadership within the school context. Through qualitative inquiry, the researcher was able to capture the participants' personal insights, experiences, and interpretations concerning leadership behaviors, decision-making processes, organizational management, instructional supervision, and stakeholder collaboration. The descriptive qualitative design further enabled the study to examine educational leadership within its natural setting, allowing the researcher to understand how leadership practices influence school culture, teacher engagement, organizational dynamics, and school-community relationships in a rural elementary school environment.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Bisag Elementary School located in Bisag, Palanan, Isabela, Philippines. The school is situated in a rural community and operates under the governance of the Department of Education. Bisag Elementary School caters to elementary learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and continuously implements school programs and educational initiatives aimed at improving instructional delivery and organizational effectiveness. The locale of the study provided a relevant context for examining educational leadership practices due to its unique geographical location, organizational structure, community involvement, and educational realities commonly experienced by rural public elementary schools in the Philippines.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study included the school head, elementary teachers, parents, and selected community stakeholders of Bisag Elementary School. These participants were purposively selected based on their direct experiences, involvement, and participation in school leadership, governance, and management processes. The school head provided insights regarding leadership approaches, administrative responsibilities, and organizational management practices. Teachers shared their experiences related to instructional supervision, teacher support, collaboration, and school climate. Parents and community stakeholders contributed perspectives regarding stakeholder engagement, school-community relationships, and participation in school programs and activities. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to select information-rich participants who could provide meaningful and relevant narratives aligned with the objectives of the study.

Research Instruments

The study utilized multiple qualitative research instruments to gather comprehensive and contextualized data. Semi-structured interview guides were employed to facilitate in-depth discussions with the participants regarding their experiences and perceptions of educational leadership and school management practices. Focus group discussion guides were likewise utilized to encourage collaborative sharing of insights among teachers, parents, and stakeholders. Observation notes were used to document actual school practices, organizational interactions, leadership behaviors, and school activities observed during the conduct of the study. In addition, document analysis checklists were utilized to examine relevant school documents such as school improvement plans, meeting records, accomplishment reports, and organizational memoranda. The interview and discussion questions focused on leadership experiences, management practices, instructional supervision, teacher collaboration, stakeholder participation, and challenges encountered in school governance and administration. To ensure the credibility and appropriateness of the instruments, the interview guides underwent validation by experts in educational leadership and qualitative research.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to the conduct of the study, the researcher secured formal permission from the school administration of Bisag Elementary School. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process, including voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and respect for participants' rights and welfare. After obtaining approval, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with the selected participants. Classroom observations and school environment observations were also carried out to gather contextual information regarding leadership practices, organizational interactions, and school management processes. Relevant school documents such as organizational reports, school improvement plans, and meeting records were analyzed to supplement and validate the data gathered from interviews and observations. All interviews and discussions were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and completeness of the collected data. Field notes and reflective observations were likewise documented to enrich the interpretation of findings.

Data Analysis

The gathered data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach. This method was utilized to systematically identify, organize, analyze, and interpret recurring patterns and themes emerging from the participants' narratives and experiences. The analysis began with familiarization with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary records. Significant statements and meaningful responses were then coded to identify important concepts and recurring ideas related to educational leadership and school management practices. After coding, related categories were clustered and organized into broader themes representing the shared experiences and perspectives of the participants. The themes were subsequently reviewed, refined, defined, and interpreted to ensure coherence and alignment with the objectives of the study. Trustworthiness and rigor of the qualitative findings were established through member checking, triangulation of data sources, thick description, peer debriefing, and maintenance of audit trails. These procedures ensured the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the findings presented in the study.

Results and Discussion

Theme 1: Collaborative and Participatory Leadership Practices

The findings revealed that educational leadership at Bisag Elementary School is strongly characterized by collaborative and participatory governance practices. Participants consistently emphasized that the school head promotes shared decision-making, open communication, and collective involvement in planning and implementing school programs and activities. Teachers explained that they are regularly consulted regarding instructional concerns, school improvement initiatives, and organizational decisions, which fostered a positive and supportive school environment.

One teacher participant stated:

“Hindi lang po siya nagdedesisyon mag-isa. Kinukuha niya muna ang opinion naming mga guro bago gumawa ng final decision.”

Another participant shared:

“Nagkakaroon kami ng open communication kaya mas nagiging maayos ang samahan sa paaralan.”

Similarly, another teacher explained:

“Kapag may problema o bagong programa, lahat kami ay kasali sa pag-uusap kaya nararamdaman naming mahalaga rin ang aming kontribusyon.”

The participants' responses indicate that collaborative leadership practices cultivate trust, mutual respect, and stronger professional relationships within the school organization. Teachers become more engaged and motivated when they feel that their perspectives and experiences are valued by school leaders. The findings further suggest that participatory governance encourages organizational transparency and collective accountability, which contribute positively to school effectiveness and teacher commitment.

The school head also emphasized the importance of collaborative leadership in managing school operations and sustaining positive organizational culture.

The school head stated:

“Mas maganda ang resulta kapag sama-sama ang pagdedesisyon dahil mas naiintindihan ng bawat isa ang layunin ng paaralan.”

These findings imply that leadership practices rooted in collaboration and participation strengthen organizational cohesion and teacher empowerment. Shared governance allows teachers to become active contributors to school improvement rather than passive implementers of policies and programs.

The findings support the study of Leithwood and Jantzi (2020), who argued that transformational leadership enhances collaboration, shared vision, and organizational commitment within educational institutions. Similarly, Spillane (2019) emphasized that distributed leadership strengthens school effectiveness by encouraging collective participation and shared responsibilities among organizational members. In the Philippine educational context, participatory leadership has likewise been recognized as an essential component of School-Based Management programs, where teachers and stakeholders are encouraged to actively engage in school governance and decision-making processes.

Moreover, the findings align with the work of Ainscow (2020), who stressed that collaborative educational leadership fosters inclusive school cultures and strengthens professional learning communities. Open communication and participatory governance contribute to stronger organizational trust, improved morale, and increased teacher satisfaction.

The findings further reveal that collaborative leadership practices positively influence organizational harmony and professional relationships within the school community. Teachers noted that supportive communication and shared leadership create a more encouraging and less hierarchical work environment.

One participant shared:

“Kapag may magandang relasyon ang school head at teachers, mas magaan ang trabaho at mas nagiging motivated kami.”

This suggests that participatory leadership contributes not only to organizational management but also to the emotional and professional well-being of teachers. Educational leaders who foster collaboration create environments where teachers feel respected, empowered, and professionally valued.

Theme 2: Instructional Leadership and Teacher Support

The study revealed that instructional leadership and teacher support are central components of school management practices at Bisag Elementary School. Participants described the school head as actively involved in monitoring instructional processes, mentoring teachers, and encouraging professional growth and development. Teachers explained that leadership support significantly improved their teaching confidence, instructional strategies, and classroom management practices.

One teacher participant stated:

“Malaki ang tulong ng monitoring at coaching sa amin para mapabuti ang pagtuturo.”

Another teacher explained:

“Ina-encourage kami na mag-attend ng seminars at trainings para madagdagan ang aming kaalaman.”

Similarly, another participant shared:

“Kapag may classroom observation, hindi lang basta evaluation kundi may guidance talaga kung paano pa mapapabuti ang teaching.”

These responses indicate that instructional leadership practices contribute to continuous teacher improvement and professional learning. Teachers perceived monitoring and mentoring not as punitive mechanisms but as supportive processes that strengthen instructional effectiveness and pedagogical competence.

The findings suggest that school leaders who actively provide instructional guidance create professional environments that promote reflective teaching practices and continuous learning. Leadership support through coaching, classroom observations, and professional development opportunities enhances teachers' confidence and motivation to improve classroom instruction.

One teacher participant expressed:

“Mas nagiging confident kami magturo kapag alam naming may support at guidance mula sa school head.”

The findings support Hallinger (2021), who emphasized that instructional leadership significantly influences teaching quality, teacher performance, and learner achievement. Effective school leaders guide instructional improvement by monitoring classroom practices, supporting teacher development, and establishing clear academic goals. Similarly, Robinson et al. (2020) argued that instructional leadership positively affects educational outcomes through teacher mentoring, professional support, and collaborative instructional supervision.

Furthermore, the findings align with Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, which highlights the importance of guidance and scaffolding in professional learning and development. Educational leaders who mentor and support teachers contribute to stronger instructional practices and improved learning environments.

The study also revealed that instructional support fosters stronger teacher commitment and organizational engagement. Teachers noted that leadership encouragement motivates them to pursue professional growth and improve classroom instruction despite existing challenges.

One participant explained:

“Kahit maraming trabaho, ginaganahan kaming mag-improve dahil supportive ang administration.”

This implies that leadership support strengthens not only instructional competence but also teachers' morale and professional resilience. Educational leaders who invest in teacher development contribute to sustainable school improvement and instructional excellence.

Theme 3: Community-Centered School Management

The findings revealed that community-centered school management is an important aspect of educational leadership at Bisag Elementary School. Participants emphasized that school leaders actively involve parents, barangay officials, and community stakeholders in implementing school programs, literacy activities, Brigada Eskwela, and other educational initiatives. Stakeholder participation was perceived as essential in strengthening school operations and supporting learner development.

One stakeholder participant shared:

“Nakikipagtulungan kami sa paaralan kasi gusto naming makatulong sa pag-aaral ng mga bata.”

A parent participant stated:

“Kapag may school activities, nagtutulong talaga ang mga magulang at guro.”

Another parent explained:

“Mas maganda kapag may communication ang paaralan at komunidad kasi mas naiintindihan namin kung paano makakatulong sa mga bata.”

These responses indicate that strong school-community relationships create supportive educational environments that promote learner development and organizational effectiveness. School leaders who encourage stakeholder participation strengthen collaboration and shared responsibility among educational partners.

The findings further suggest that community-centered leadership enhances trust, transparency, and collective participation in school governance. Through active communication and collaboration, stakeholders become more involved in addressing school concerns, supporting school programs, and contributing to learner success.

The school head shared:

“Hindi magiging successful ang school programs kung walang tulong mula sa mga magulang at komunidad.”

The findings support Epstein’s (2018) School–Family–Community Partnership Framework, which emphasized that collaborative stakeholder engagement positively influences educational outcomes and school improvement initiatives. Similarly, Goodall and Montgomery (2019) argued that meaningful parent and community engagement strengthens learners’ academic development and school participation.

Moreover, the findings align with Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory, which posits that children’s development is shaped by interconnected social systems including family, school, and community environments. Collaborative school-community relationships create supportive conditions that enhance learner well-being and educational experiences.

Participants also highlighted that community participation strengthens resource mobilization and school sustainability. Through collaborative efforts, stakeholders assist schools in implementing programs despite limited institutional resources.

One participant stated:

“Kahit kulang minsan ang resources, nagtutulungan ang komunidad para masuportahan ang paaralan.”

This finding implies that stakeholder collaboration serves as an important support mechanism in sustaining school programs and addressing organizational challenges in rural educational contexts.

Theme 4: Challenges in Educational Leadership and School Management

Despite the positive leadership practices observed at Bisag Elementary School, the participants identified several challenges affecting educational leadership and school management. Among the most common concerns raised were insufficient instructional resources, increasing administrative workload, teacher responsibilities, financial limitations, and geographical barriers associated with the rural location of the school.

One teacher participant stated:

“Minsan mahirap pagsabayin ang paperwork at teaching responsibilities.”

Another participant explained:

“Kulang din minsan ang resources kaya nagiging challenge ang implementation ng programs.”

Similarly, another teacher shared:

“Marami kaming ginagawa kaya minsan nakakaapekto na rin sa preparation sa teaching.”

These responses indicate that administrative demands and workload pressures significantly affect teachers' efficiency and instructional preparation. Teachers and school leaders are often required to balance classroom responsibilities with extensive documentation, reporting requirements, and program implementation tasks.

The findings suggest that leadership effectiveness in rural schools is influenced not only by leadership competence but also by structural and organizational constraints. Limited resources and workload demands may hinder the efficient implementation of school programs and instructional initiatives.

The findings support OECD (2019), which highlighted that resource limitations, administrative workload, and organizational pressures remain persistent challenges in educational leadership across different educational systems. Similarly, Fullan (2020) emphasized that school leaders often encounter institutional and systemic barriers that affect organizational sustainability and instructional improvement.

Participants also identified geographical isolation as a challenge affecting school management and stakeholder participation.

One participant shared:

“Dahil malayo ang lugar, minsan mahirap din ang coordination at pag-attend ng trainings at activities.”

Another teacher stated:

“May mga pagkakataon na nahihirapan kaming kumuha ng resources dahil sa location ng school.”

These findings imply that rural school leaders must demonstrate adaptive and resilient leadership practices to effectively manage contextual and environmental limitations. The realities of geographically isolated schools require school leaders to maximize available resources, strengthen stakeholder partnerships, and implement flexible management strategies.

Despite these challenges, participants emphasized that teamwork, collaboration, and supportive leadership practices help sustain school operations and organizational stability.

One teacher participant explained:

“Kahit maraming challenges, nagiging manageable dahil nagtutulungan ang school head, teachers, at stakeholders.”

This finding highlights the importance of collaborative leadership and collective resilience in addressing organizational difficulties within rural educational settings. Effective educational leadership is not solely dependent on administrative authority but also on the ability to foster cooperation, adaptability, and shared commitment among school stakeholders.

Conclusion

The study revealed that educational leadership at Bisag Elementary School is characterized by collaborative governance, instructional support, participatory leadership, and community-centered management practices. Effective leadership positively influences teacher motivation, school climate, and stakeholder engagement.

However, leadership practices are also challenged by resource limitations, administrative workload, and contextual realities within rural educational settings. Despite these challenges, adaptive and participatory leadership approaches contribute significantly to organizational effectiveness and school improvement.

The study underscores the importance of strengthening leadership development programs and institutional support mechanisms to sustain effective educational leadership practices in elementary schools.

Recommendations

1. School leaders should continue strengthening participatory leadership and collaborative decision-making practices.
2. Professional development programs focusing on instructional leadership and school governance should be enhanced.
3. Schools should strengthen stakeholder partnerships and community engagement initiatives.
4. Institutional support and resource allocation for rural schools should be improved.
5. Future researchers may explore educational leadership practices using comparative or longitudinal qualitative approaches.

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