

Culturally Responsive Practices and School Leadership Strategies in Public Secondary Schools: Basis for a Strategic Action Plan

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ABSTRACT

This study examined culturally responsive practices and school leadership strategies among public secondary schools in Ubay Districts I, II, and III, with the purpose of developing a strategic action plan that could be proposed based on the results of the study for improving inclusive and effective school management. Specifically, assessed the extent to which culturally responsive practices and school leadership strategies were manifested in the school setting. It further investigated the significant relationship between the two variables to determine how leadership strategies influence culturally responsive teaching practices.

Findings revealed that both culturally responsive practices and school leadership strategies were highly evident among the respondents. Teachers strongly agreed that they consistently acknowledge learners' diverse cultural backgrounds, integrate familiar cultural examples in lessons, and promote respect for cultural differences in the classroom. Likewise, respondents strongly agreed that school heads foster respectful and professional school environments, recognize teachers' accomplishments, and motivate teachers to improve instructional performance. Statistical analysis further revealed a significant relationship between culturally responsive practices and school leadership strategies, confirming that effective leadership contributes to the successful implementation of culturally responsive teaching practice.

The study concluded that school leadership serves as a critical foundation for strengthening culturally responsive practices in public secondary schools. Leadership behaviors that promote collaboration, inclusivity, and professional support significantly influence teachers' ability to deliver culturally meaningful instruction. Based on the findings, the study recommends the implementation of a strategic action plan focused on leadership development, teacher capacity-building, and sustained monitoring of culturally responsive practices. Strengthening these areas can improve instructional quality and promote a more inclusive and community-connected learning environment.

Keywords: culturally responsive practices, school leadership strategies, public secondary schools, educational leadership, strategic action plan

INTRODUCTION

Education serves as the foundation of national development and social transformation. In the Philippine educational system, schools are expected not only to deliver academic instruction but also to promote inclusivity, equity, and cultural sensitivity. In diverse communities such as Ubay Districts I, II, and III, public secondary schools function as centers of learning where students from various cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds interact. This diversity requires schools to adopt culturally responsive practices and effective leadership strategies that address the unique needs of learners.

Culturally responsive practices refer to teaching approaches that recognize and respect students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and identities as integral parts of the learning process. Culturally responsive teaching serves as a bridge between policy intentions and classroom realities by allowing teachers to adapt instructional

strategies based on the cultural experiences of learners. Teachers who practice cultural responsiveness create classrooms where students feel respected, valued, and included.

At the same time, school leadership strategies significantly influence how educational goals are implemented. School heads shape the professional climate of the institution by promoting collaboration, providing instructional support, and ensuring that school policies align with learner-centered goals. Culturally competent school leaders are those who recognize the importance of culture in education and actively promote practices that reflect the diversity of their learners.

The Department of Education supports these principles through Republic Act No. 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, which emphasizes contextualized and learner-centered instruction. DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021 further promotes culturally responsive education through the Indigenous Peoples Education Framework and localized learning initiatives.

Despite these policies, schools continue to face challenges in fully implementing culturally responsive instruction and sustaining collaborative leadership. Some teachers struggle with contextualizing lessons, while some school leaders face difficulties in fostering inclusive decision making and professional collaboration. These concerns make it necessary to examine how leadership strategies and culturally responsive practices interact within the school environment.

This study aimed to assess culturally responsive practices and school leadership strategies in public secondary schools in Ubay Districts I, II, and III. It also sought to determine the significant relationship between these variables and to develop a strategic action plan that strengthens both instructional inclusivity and leadership effectiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The diversity of learners in Philippine public schools continues to shape the direction of educational reforms, particularly in the areas of culturally responsive teaching and school leadership. In rural and semi-urban communities such as Ubay Districts I, II, and III, education is closely connected to local identity, language, values, and traditions. Schools do not only function as academic institutions but also as cultural spaces where learners' experiences and community realities influence how teaching and learning take place. Because of this, culturally responsive practices and effective school leadership strategies have become essential in promoting inclusive and meaningful education.

Culturally responsive practice refers to instructional approaches that recognize and integrate learners' cultural backgrounds into the teaching and learning process. In the Philippines, this is closely associated with contextualization and the use of indigenous and local knowledge systems. Rex B. Inocian, Revalo, and Pono (2019) emphasized that contextualizing indigenous knowledge in classroom instruction improves learners' comprehension and participation. Their findings indicate that students respond more positively when lessons are connected to familiar cultural contexts. Similarly, Mark E. Caingcoy (2023) found that culturally responsive teaching practices among Filipino teachers enhance learner engagement and motivation by aligning instructional strategies with student's lived experiences.

These findings are supported by recent international research. Zaretta Hammond (2021) explained that culturally responsive teaching strengthens students' cognitive engagement by linking culture with how the brain processes information. This perspective highlights that cultural relevance is not only a matter of inclusion but also a factor in improving academic performance. Likewise, the OECD (2021) reported that inclusive and culturally responsive classroom practices contribute to improved student achievement and equity in diverse educational systems. These studies affirm that culturally responsive practices are critical in addressing learner diversity and enhancing instructional effectiveness.

In the Philippine educational system, culturally responsive practices are further reinforced through national policies. The Department of Education promotes contextualized and inclusive education through initiatives such as the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program and the Basic Education Development Plan 2030. These

policies emphasize the importance of adapting instruction to local contexts, thereby ensuring that learning remains relevant and accessible to all students.

While culturally responsive practices focus on classroom instruction, school leadership strategies play a significant role in enabling and sustaining these practices. Leadership in education involves guiding teachers, shaping school culture, and ensuring that instructional goals are effectively implemented. Zara (2026) found that leadership practices in Philippine educational institutions significantly influence teacher performance, professional development, and instructional effectiveness. School leaders who provide support, clear direction, and opportunities for collaboration create environments where teachers are better able to implement inclusive and responsive teaching strategies.

In addition, Niez (2024) highlighted that leadership and institutional support are essential in addressing the challenges faced by Filipino educators, particularly in professional development and instructional innovation. When school leaders invest in teacher capacity-building and encourage reflective practice, teachers become more capable of adapting their instruction to meet diverse learner needs. This suggests that leadership strategies directly impact the quality of teaching practices in schools.

Recent international studies further support the influence of leadership on teaching and learning. Viviane Robinson (2020) emphasized that leadership practices focused on teaching and learning have a significant effect on student outcomes. Similarly, Helen Timperley et al. (2020) noted that leadership that prioritizes teacher professional learning leads to improved instructional practices. These findings indicate that effective leadership is a key factor in promoting teaching approaches that respond to learner diversity.

The relationship between culturally responsive practices and school leadership strategies is evident in how leadership shapes the conditions for teaching and learning. School leaders influence teachers' beliefs, practices, and professional growth through policies, support systems, and school culture. In the Philippine context, where schools operate within diverse cultural environments, leadership strategies that promote inclusivity, collaboration, and continuous learning are essential in strengthening culturally responsive teaching.

Moreover, educational outcomes in the Philippines are influenced by broader systemic and contextual factors. Maligalig, Caoli-Rodriguez, Martinez, and Cuevas (2010) noted that socio-economic conditions, institutional capacity, and access to resources affect teaching effectiveness and student achievement. These realities highlight the need for leadership strategies that are responsive to both instructional and contextual challenges.

Overall, the literature suggests that culturally responsive practices and school leadership strategies are closely interconnected. Culturally responsive teaching becomes more effective when supported by leadership that fosters inclusivity, professional development, and instructional improvement. At the same time, leadership strategies gain relevance when they directly influence classroom practices and address the diverse needs of learners. In the context of Ubay Districts I, II, and III, examining the relationship between these two variables is essential in developing strategies that enhance both teaching effectiveness and school leadership.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Sociocultural Theory by Lev Vygotsky (1978) and Transformational Leadership Theory by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985). Sociocultural Theory explains that learning is a social process shaped by culture, language, and interaction. Learners understand knowledge through experiences connected to their environment. This theory supports culturally responsive practices because it emphasizes the importance of integrating students' cultural backgrounds into teaching and learning.

Transformational Leadership Theory explains how leaders inspire, motivate, and empower others toward shared goals. In education, transformational leadership is reflected when school heads support teachers, encourage collaboration, and create positive school climates. This theory supports the leadership strategies variable by explaining how leadership directly influences teaching effectiveness and school improvement.

Together, these theories explain that culturally responsive teaching becomes stronger when school leadership creates an environment where inclusivity, respect, and collaboration are consistently practiced.

Objective of the Study

This study aimed to examine culturally responsive practices and school leadership strategies among public secondary schools in Ubay Districts I, II, and III.

Specifically, it sought to:

1. assess the respondents' perception of culturally responsive practices in public secondary schools;
2. assess the respondents' perception of school leadership strategies of school heads in public secondary schools;
3. determine the significant relationship between culturally responsive practices and school leadership strategies; and
4. propose a strategic action plan based on the findings of the study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design

This study utilized the descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive method was used to assess the extent of culturally responsive practices and school leadership strategies, while the correlational method was employed to determine the significant relationship between the two variables and design a proposed partnership model that can be used to strengthen collaboration among schools, teachers.

The study was conducted among teachers from public secondary schools in Ubay Districts I, II, and III. A total of 141 respondents participated in the study.

Instrument

To gather pertinent data for the study, the researcher employed the descriptive-correlational survey approach. The primary data-gathering tool was a modified survey questionnaire, divided into four parts:

Part I: Culturally Responsive Practices were items adapted from David, 2021 – Teacher Practices on Cultural Inclusivity and modified for local context (e.g., inclusion of local language, cultural representation in teaching). Part II: School Leadership were patterned after Arriola & Balmes, 2020 – Leadership Styles and School Culture, focusing on cultural competence, inclusivity, and collaboration; and part III: Community Relationship / School–Community Partnership – adapted from Reyes (2023), assessing partnership strength, trust, and mutual support.

The culturally responsive practices section measured how teachers integrate learners' culture, local context, and inclusive strategies into classroom instruction. The school leadership strategies section measured how school heads motivate teachers, promote collaboration, foster professionalism, and support instructional improvement. The community relationship

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the level of culturally responsive practices as perceived by the respondents in terms of how teachers integrate culture into instruction and classroom interaction. The indicators were measured using weighted mean (WM) and rank, and collectively describe the extent to which teaching practices reflect learners' cultural backgrounds. The results were organized from highest to lowest mean to determine which practices are most and least evident in the classroom setting.

Table 1. Culturally Responsive Practices

Indicators	WM	DV	Rank
<i>The teacher...</i>			
1. integrate cultural examples familiar to learners during lessons.	3.61	SA	4
2. acknowledge and respect learners' diverse cultural backgrounds in class interactions.	3.84	SA	1
3. adapt instructional materials to reflect local traditions and community values.	3.51	SA	8.5
4. encourage students to share cultural experiences related to the lessons.	3.64	SA	3
5. design activities that allow learners to connect lessons with their cultural identity.	3.51	SA	8.5
6. avoid practices that marginalize students based on ethnicity or culture.	3.45	SA	10
7. incorporate local languages or expressions when appropriate to enhance understanding.	3.56	SA	6.5
8. use classroom strategies that promote respect for cultural differences.	3.70	SA	2
9. ensure that classroom discussions do not stereotype or misrepresent cultural groups.	3.60	SA	5
10. collaborate with colleagues to enhance cultural inclusivity in teaching practices.	3.56	SA	6.5
Composite Mean	3.60	Highly Practiced	

Legend:

Range Scale	Descriptive Value (DV)	Interpretation
3.25-4.00	Strongly Agree (SA)	Highly Practiced
2.50-3.24	Agree (A)	Moderately Practiced
1.75-2.49	Disagree (D)	Less Practiced
1.00-1.74	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Not Practiced

Among the ten indicators, the highest weighted mean was obtained by item 2, “acknowledge and respect learners’ diverse cultural backgrounds in class interactions,” with a WM of 3.84, interpreted as “Strongly Agree.” This indicates that teachers consistently demonstrate respect for diversity and inclusivity in their interactions with learners. The high rating suggests that teachers are highly aware of cultural differences and are able to create a classroom environment that values diversity, which is a core component of culturally responsive teaching.

On the other hand, the lowest weighted mean was recorded in item 6, “avoid practices that marginalize students based on ethnicity or culture,” with a WM of 3.45, also interpreted as “Strongly Agree.” Although still within the high range, this comparatively lower score suggests that there may be occasional gaps in fully eliminating marginalizing practices. It may imply that while inclusivity is generally practiced, there are still subtle challenges in consistently ensuring that all learners feel equally valued and free from bias in all classroom situations.

The composite mean for culturally responsive practices is 3.60, interpreted as “Strongly Agree” with a descriptive meaning of “Highly Practiced.” This indicates that, overall, teachers demonstrate a strong implementation of culturally responsive practices in their instruction. The result reflects that cultural integration, inclusivity, and respect for diversity are evident in classroom practices, contributing positively to culturally responsive practices.

Table 2 presents the level of school leadership as perceived by the respondents, focusing on how school heads demonstrate leadership practices that influence teachers and the overall school environment. The indicators were assessed providing insight into the effectiveness of leadership strategies.

Table 2. School Leadership Strategies

Indicators	WM	DV	Rank
<i>The school head...</i>			
1. motivates teachers to improve instructional performance.	3.66	SA	3
2. provides clear directions toward achieving school goals.	3.56	SA	6
3. encourages open communication among teachers.	3.61	SA	5
4. recognizes and appreciates teachers’ accomplishments.	3.67	SA	2
5. promotes teamwork and collaboration in the school.	3.46	SA	9
6. resolves conflicts fairly and professionally.	3.65	SA	4
7. supports professional development for teachers.	3.55	SA	7.5
8. practices transparency in decision-making.	3.55	SA	7.5
9. set high expectations and models positive behavior.	3.50	SA	8
10. fosters a school environment that values respect and professionalism.	3.69	SA	1
Composite Mean	3.60	Very Effective	

Legend:

Range Scale	Descriptive Value (DV)	Interpretation
3.25-4.00	Strongly Agree (SA)	Highly Effective
2.50-3.24	Agree (A)	Moderately Effective
1.75-2.49	Disagree (D)	Less Effective
1.00-1.74	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Not Effective

The highest weighted mean was obtained by item 10, “fosters a school environment that values respect and professionalism,” with a WM of 3.69, interpreted as “Strongly Agree.” This indicates that school heads are highly effective in establishing a professional and respectful environment within the school. The result suggests that leadership strongly emphasizes values-based management, which contributes to positive interpersonal relationships and a supportive working atmosphere among teachers.

Conversely, the lowest weighted mean was observed in item 5, “promotes teamwork and collaboration in the school,” with a WM of 3.46, still interpreted as “Strongly Agree.” While the rating remains high, it indicates that collaboration and teamwork, although present, may not be as strongly emphasized as other leadership practices. This may suggest the need for more structured or consistent efforts to strengthen collaborative practices among teachers and staff.

The composite mean for school leadership is 3.60, interpreted as “Strongly Agree” with a descriptive meaning of “Highly Effective.” This indicates that school heads generally demonstrate effective leadership practices that positively influence teachers and the school environment. The findings suggest that leadership in these schools is characterized by professionalism, motivation, and support, contributing to overall school effectiveness.

Table 3. Test of Relationship Between School Leadership Strategies and Culturally Responsive Practices

Variables		χ^2	Df	p-value	Interpretation	Decision
School Leadership Strategies	Culturally Responsive Practices	55.778	1	<.001	Significant	Reject H ₀

*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 presents a chi-square test of independence conducted to determine whether there is a significant association between school leadership strategies and culturally responsive practices of public secondary schools. The results revealed a statistically significant association, $\chi^2(1, N = 141) = 55.78, p < .001$. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

This indicates that school leadership strategies and culturally responsive practices are significantly associated, suggesting that variations in leadership approaches are linked to differences in the implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices. This finding implies that effective leadership plays a crucial role in fostering culturally responsive environments in schools. School heads who demonstrate strong leadership behaviors are more likely to influence teachers to adopt inclusive and culturally sensitive instructional practices. When school heads provide strong instructional leadership, inclusive decision-making, and professional support, teachers are more capable of delivering culturally meaningful and responsive instruction.

The findings reveal that teachers demonstrate a high level of culturally responsive practices, indicating that they consistently integrate cultural awareness into their instructional approaches. This suggests that teachers are becoming more sensitive to the diverse backgrounds of learners, which is essential in the Philippine educational context.

Table 4. Based on the findings, a strategic action plan is proposed to strengthen inclusive leadership and improve culturally responsive teaching practices. The proposed interventions focus on leadership development, teacher capacity-building, and continuous monitoring.

Table 4. Table 5. Proposed Strategic Action Plan for Strengthening Culturally Responsive Practices and School Leadership Strategies

Areas of Concern	Goals/Objectives	Activities/Strategies	Persons Involved	Time Frame	Source of Budget	Success Indicators
Culturally Responsive Practices: The teacher avoids practices that marginalize	Foster a learning environment where every student’s cultural and ethnic identity is respected, valued, and integrated into	Organize workshops for teachers and staff on culturally responsive teaching and anti-bias practices. Conduct training on culturally responsive	Teachers, master teachers, curriculum experts	6 months	MOOE, Instructional support funds (₱5,000)	Reduction in reported cases of cultural or ethnic bias over the school year and higher

students based on ethnicity or culture.	the educational experience, removing barriers that lead to marginalization.	pedagogy; contextualized lesson planning workshops.				students in class engagements.
School Leadership Strategies: The school head promotes teamwork and collaboration in the school.	Enhance leadership capacity in encouraging community volunteers to contribute to the school initiative.	Conduct training on culturally responsive leadership, stakeholder engagement, and inclusive decision-making.	School heads, leadership trainers.	3 months	MOOE, School Funds (₱5,000)	Improved leadership practices and increased teamwork and collaboration in the school.
Total Proposed Budget					₱15,000	

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that culturally responsive practices and school leadership strategies were both highly evident in public secondary schools in Ubay Districts I, II, and III. Teachers consistently demonstrated efforts to create inclusive classrooms, while school heads maintained supportive and professional school environments.

More importantly, the significant relationship between the two variables confirms that school leadership serves as a major influence on culturally responsive teaching practices. Leadership strategies that promote collaboration, inclusivity, and professional development strengthen teachers' ability to implement meaningful and culturally grounded instruction.

It was therefore concluded that improving leadership effectiveness is essential in sustaining culturally responsive education and strengthening overall school performance.

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