

Leadership Practices for Teacher Retention Leading to Policy Development in Private Academic Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Teacher retention poses a significant operational challenge for private academic institutions, which often serve as temporary training grounds due to systemic macroeconomic disadvantages. The objective of this qualitative case study is to explore the specific leadership practices used by school leaders to promote teacher retention in selected private academic institutions in Mati City. Drawing on Adaptive Leadership Theory and Situational Leadership Theory, the study utilized a qualitative case study design to examine retention strategies in depth. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with 18 purposively selected key informants, comprising six school heads, five human resources personnel, and seven teachers across seven private basic education schools. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. The results indicate that administrators retain staff by integrating technical administrative support with adaptive relational strategies. These practices include fully subsidizing continuous professional development, cultivating approachable and family-oriented work environments, and embedding daily operations within a mission-driven framework. By fostering open communication and prioritizing the holistic enhancement of educator capabilities, school leaders successfully mitigate professional isolation. In conclusion, the study demonstrates that relying solely on standard administrative directives is insufficient to secure workforce loyalty. By combining situational guidance with adaptive relational care, educational leaders can successfully transform routine teaching jobs into deep vocational callings despite overwhelming macroeconomic pressures.

Keywords: Teacher retention, leadership practices, Situational Leadership Theory, Adaptive Leadership Theory, private academic institutions

INTRODUCTION

Leadership practices aimed at teacher retention form a necessary foundation for maintaining stability and educational quality within the private academic institution. Effective leadership is essential for fostering a positive school culture and enhancing student learning outcomes (Ackah Jnr et al., 2022; Holmes et al., 2019). As the private education sector increasingly confronts educator attrition, the strategic actions and retention initiatives implemented by school leaders become even more significant (Hong et al., 2024). Leaders' capacity to retain educators signals a stable environment for both students and the broader community (Reed, 2024). Consequently, establishing supportive leadership behaviors that address the factors influencing teacher retention is a crucial initial step in developing the support systems necessary for educators to thrive (David & Naparan, 2024; Reyes, Aquino, & Bueno, 2019).

Globally, leadership practices related to teacher retention have become increasingly critical. International studies show that when leadership does not actively foster a supportive workplace, teachers are significantly more likely to leave the profession (Scallan et al., 2023; Walton et al., 2023). For instance, the absence of positive, intentional leadership practices hinders teachers' ability to develop the resilience needed to endure demanding school environments (Seelig & McCabe, 2021). Retention issues intensify when school leaders neglect career-related concerns or fail to effectively reduce workplace stress (Mvana, 2024). Comparable administrative challenges

have been identified internationally where turnover remains a persistent concern if work environments deteriorate under unresponsive leadership (Mancuso et al., 2010; Meneghella, Walsh, & Sawagvudcharee, 2019).

In the Philippine context, teacher outmigration from private schools underscores significant challenges in how administrators manage their workforce amid economic constraints. Research indicates that educators remain in their positions despite demanding workloads only when school leadership provides effective support (Tabbal, Caigoy, Guevarra, & Ancho, 2020). In the Davao Region, significant teacher outmigration has led to a pronounced leadership crisis in private academic institutions. Recent reports note that public schools documented over 700 teacher vacancies, underscoring the considerable administrative pressure on private school leaders to retain their teachers as they migrate to the government sector (Francisquete, 2024). Even though local studies acknowledge persistent concerns about retention, they often focus on teacher-centered factors rather than on administrative practices. Local literature has explored specific teacher characteristics influencing retention (Salibat et al., 2024), the impact of reflective teaching practices on workplace tenure (Guerta & Baguio, 2025), and how job satisfaction affects teacher performance (Pacaña & Pedriña, 2024). As a result, the specific leadership dynamics of private basic education schools, particularly in Mati City, have received limited scholarly attention (Anog et al., 2024).

This study is grounded in a dual theoretical framework. The primary lens is Adaptive Leadership Theory (ALT), which conceptualizes leadership as the practice of mobilizing individuals to address complex, systemic challenges and promote organizational thriving (Heifetz, Linsky, & Laurie, 2009). Within private academic institutions, teacher retention is identified as a deeply adaptive challenge, requiring leaders to mitigate external economic pressures by regulating workplace distress and reframing the teaching profession. Additionally, this study is informed by Situational Leadership Theory (SLT), which elucidates how leaders manage staff's technical readiness on a daily basis by tailoring their approach to the competence and needs of those they supervise (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969).

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the specific leadership practices used by school leaders to promote teacher retention in selected private academic institutions in Mati City. By analyzing these administrative actions, the study aims to provide concrete, evidence-based insights into the effective management strategies that strengthen and sustain the teaching workforce within the private academic sector, serving as a solid foundation for future institutional policy development.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative case study design grounded in a constructivist philosophical worldview. A qualitative approach provided the necessary flexibility to explore the lived realities and perspectives of school administrators and their staff regarding teacher retention (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this research, the case unit is the collective phenomenon of leadership practices within seven purposively selected private academic institutions. By treating the shared experiences within these institutions as a single holistic case unit, the study captured recurring ideas and distinct variations in how local leadership responds to workforce stability.

Participants

Eighteen key informants from seven private academic institutions in Mati City were included in this qualitative study. The participants included six school leaders, five human resources personnel, and seven teachers. Participants were selected using purposive sampling criteria that required them to have at least two years of tenure and direct involvement in workplace support and retention matters. This ensured that all informants had the requisite familiarity to provide reliable insights into workplace culture and leadership practices.

Data Sources

The primary data sources for this research were the direct responses and lived experiences of the 18 key informants. Data were drawn from transcribed interviews with school heads on their administrative strategies, corroborated by the daily operational observations of human resources personnel and the classroom realities faced

by the teaching staff. The inclusion of these three distinct participant groups served as a triangulation method to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the institutional dynamics.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth, semistructured interviews lasting 30 to 60 minutes each. The interviews used open-ended questions to explore leadership practices, workplace experiences, and support mechanisms for teacher retention. Each session was audio-recorded with participants' permission to ensure accuracy during transcription. Data saturation was strictly observed and achieved, as evidenced by responses regarding leadership practices becoming highly repetitive and by the absence of new codes emerging from subsequent interviews.

Data Analysis

The interview responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the reflexive approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), to identify and interpret patterns and recurring ideas within the dataset. The analytical process commenced with comprehensive familiarization, during which each transcribed interview was read multiple times to ensure a thorough understanding of the content. In this phase, keywords, repeated phrases, and significant statements related to leadership practices and teacher retention were identified and assigned descriptive initial codes. These codes were then grouped and organized into broader thematic categories. To refine these categories, potential themes were evaluated for internal consistency and distinctiveness in relation to the coded extracts.

Additional strategies were implemented throughout the thematic analysis to enhance trustworthiness. Data triangulation was achieved by synthesizing the perspectives of school heads, human resources personnel, and teachers to corroborate the identified leadership practices. Member checking was also conducted by sharing selected transcripts and thematic interpretations with participants, thereby ensuring that the finalized themes accurately reflected their lived experiences and perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was secured from the appropriate academic review board prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. All personal information was kept private, and participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. Audio recordings were deleted after transcription and verification, while all research data were retained for one year before being securely disposed of.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To enhance credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings, multiple validation strategies were systematically implemented. Credibility was reinforced through rigorous data triangulation, synthesizing the perspectives of school heads, human resources personnel, and teachers to corroborate identified leadership practices. Member checking was conducted by sharing key points and transcribed interviews with participants to ensure accurate representation of their views and experiences. Transferability was addressed by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and participant profiles. Dependability and confirmability were maintained by grounding all analytical interpretations in participants' responses and documenting a comprehensive audit trail of the research process.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The author declares a potential conflict of interest as a board member of Agape Partners Academy of Mati, Inc., which served as one of the study sites. To mitigate this, participation in the study remained completely voluntary, and the researcher maintained strict objectivity by avoiding direct invitations or interviews with personnel over whom she held direct authority. All interpretations were grounded strictly in the data.

RESULTS

The following sections present the findings based on the lived experiences of the school heads, human resource personnel, and teachers.

Table 1 Participant Profile detailing the roles, years of experience, and school types of the 18 key informants involved in the study.

Code	Role	Years of Experience	School Type
<i>School #1</i>			
• SH01	• Technical Director/Principal	• 26 years	Sectarian
• T01	• SHS Coordinator/Teacher	• 2 years	Sectarian
<i>School #2</i>			
• HR02	• HR Head	• 3 years	Non-sectarian
• T02	• Instructor	• 2 years	Non-sectarian
<i>School #3</i>			
• SH03	• School Principal	• 12 years	Non-sectarian
• HR03	• Corporate Secretary/HR Officer	• 3 years	Non-sectarian
• T03	• Teacher	• 3 years	Non-sectarian
<i>School #4</i>			
• SH04	• School Head	• 24 years	Non-sectarian
• HR04	• HR Manager	• 24 years	Non-sectarian
• T04	• Teacher	• 4 years	Non-sectarian
<i>School #5</i>			
• SH05	• School Principal	• 8 years	Sectarian
• T05	• Highschool Teacher	• 2 years	Sectarian
<i>School #6</i>			
• SH06	• School President	• 27 years	Non-sectarian
• HR06	• School Admin/HR Officer	• 27 years	Non-sectarian
• T06	• Elem Principal/Teacher	• 11 years	Non-sectarian
<i>School #7</i>			
• SH07	• School Administrator	• 17 years	Non-sectarian
• HR07	• Principal/HR	• 15 years	Non-sectarian
• T07	• Teacher	• 14 years	Non-sectarian

Leadership Practices Employed by School Leaders to Support Teacher Retention

School heads utilized a dynamic blend of technical support and adaptive relational care to retain their staff. Recognizing the vulnerability of private institutions to continuous teacher turnover, administrators did not rely solely on rigid management. Instead, they actively sought to address both the professional requirements and the emotional well-being of their educators. This dual approach allowed them to establish baseline operational readiness while simultaneously fostering a supportive environment that nourished the teachers.

Table 2 Leadership Practices Employed by School Leaders to Support Teacher Retention, highlighting the core ideas and emergent themes implemented by administrators.

Core Ideas	Emergent Themes
- Fully funded continuous professional development (CPD) and seminars - Teachers' career advancement through valuable teaching experience - Internal scholarships to take up education or higher education degrees	Supporting Teacher Professional Growth
- Faith-Based Grounding of Institutional Purpose and Profession - Integration of Spiritual Activities and Values Formation - Alignment of Teacher Commitment with School Vision	Fostering Mission-Driven Leadership Practices

• Cultivation of an Approachable and Family-Oriented Atmosphere • Holistic Enhancement of Teacher Capabilities and Personal Development • Promotion of Mental Health, Camaraderie, and Emotional Well-being	Sustaining a Supportive Work Environment
• Encouragement of Two-Way Communication and Feedback • Constructive and Private Resolution of Workplace Issues • Promotion of Institutional Transparency and Open-Door Policies	Practicing Open and Transparent Communication

The findings revealed four major themes in school administrators' leadership practices. First, in supporting teacher professional growth, administrators fully funded continuous professional development and seminars. They removed the financial burden of training from their staff, ensuring educators were not stagnant in their professional development. Furthermore, leaders provided internal scholarships for aspiring educators, treating professional advancement as a mutual benefit. By cultivating their own workforce from within, schools prepared highly competent teachers every year and secured their employment through return service agreements, a practice highly praised by the teaching staff.

Second, by fostering mission-driven leadership practices, leaders reframed the teaching profession by establishing a faith-based institutional purpose. They treated education as a vocational calling rather than a corporate enterprise. Administrators deliberately integrated spiritual activities and values formation to align teacher commitment with the school vision. Daily devotions, weekly masses, and regular Bible studies were highly active practices that holistically nurtured the teachers' emotional and spiritual well-being. The human resources personnel validated that when personal goals aligned with the institutional mission, teaching became a profound conviction.

Third, sustaining a supportive work environment emerged as a key administrative practice. Recognizing that teachers require whole-person nourishment, administrators cultivated an approachable, family-oriented atmosphere. Leaders deliberately positioned themselves as accessible figures without projecting an intimidating persona. They actively promoted mental health, camaraderie, and emotional well-being by organizing recreational opportunities and informal bonding activities. These initiatives created dedicated spaces for educators to decompress from their heavy workloads, making them feel deeply valued as part of a family rather than mere employees.

Lastly, in practicing open and transparent communication, school heads mitigated professional isolation by encouraging two-way communication and feedback. They actively sought input from their educators during daily briefings, fostering a highly collaborative environment. When addressing operational errors or interpersonal conflicts, administrators prioritized constructive, private resolution to protect their teachers' dignity. Furthermore, maintaining open-door policies and promoting institutional transparency anchored the teachers emotionally and fostered long-term trust.

DISCUSSION

Leadership Practices Employed by School Leaders to Support Teacher Retention

This section discusses findings on the specific leadership practices employed by school leaders to support teacher retention in private academic institutions. To provide a comprehensive analysis of these practices, this study examined administrators' actions through the dual theoretical frameworks of Adaptive Leadership Theory and Situational Leadership Theory. The findings revealed that private school heads dynamically blended technical support with adaptive relational care. Using Situational Leadership Theory, leaders managed their staff's daily technical readiness by providing structural guidance, such as funding professional development and establishing clear communication lines. Simultaneously, leaders applied Adaptive Leadership Theory to navigate deeper systemic retention issues by transforming their schools into mission-driven holding environments that holistically addressed educators' spiritual and emotional needs.

The administrative provision of fully funded continuing professional development and internal scholarships directly addressed educators' baseline readiness, enhancing both competence and confidence in the classroom. By removing financial barriers, the administrators effectively met the educators' fundamental need for growth.

Moreover, leaders adaptively regulated workplace distress by replacing the friction of forced loyalty with mutual professional benefit. Arthur and Bradley (2023) and Darling Hammond (2000) corroborated this dynamic, noting that structured external development opportunities heavily strengthen internal motivation and contribute to higher retention rates. Steiner et al. (2022) and Alamoudi (2024) found that providing access to skill-building is a highly effective motivator for securing short-term organizational attachment. The strategic provision of internal scholarships served as a profound adaptive leadership intervention, successfully transforming transactional employment into a deeply rooted vocational commitment.

Furthermore, fostering mission-driven leadership practices signified a transition from transactional roles to a vocational calling. School leaders reframed the teaching profession by establishing a strong faith-based institutional purpose, helping educators view their work as more than just a source of income. Ching et al. (2023) corroborated this phenomenon, noting that educators are highly drawn to institutions that nurture their spirituality and provide a wholesome environment aligned with their personal beliefs. Vahalik (2022) and Tabbal et al. (2020) emphasized that leaders who focus on their staff's self-actualization and personal needs build significantly stronger relationships and foster a deeper sense of workplace belonging. Guided by Adaptive Leadership Theory, this alignment demonstrates how adaptive leadership can foster greater commitment by helping teachers see their work as consistent with their personal beliefs.

The practice of sustaining a supportive work environment focused on the deliberate creation of a nurturing, family-oriented holding environment designed to safely regulate intense academic pressures. School leaders adopted a family-like dynamic by making themselves accessible to teachers and showing concern for their personal well-being. Juwarti and Octafian (2025) and Safrida et al. (2025) emphasized that a harmonious school culture built on mutual respect and familial approachability significantly reduces feelings of professional isolation and burnout. Carr (2023) and Aulia and Haerani (2023) highlighted that regular social engagement and physical wellness activities are critical mechanisms for reducing strain. Providing these deliberate spaces prevented the systemic friction of heavy workloads from fracturing the workforce.

Finally, practicing open and transparent communication was a highly effective leadership practice that successfully addressed emotional fatigue. Open and accessible communication channels anchored the teachers, making them feel profoundly heard, valued, and supported. David and Naparan (2024) and Al Suraihi et al. (2021) supported this inclusive strategy, noting that engaging teachers in participative dialogue improved professional growth and reduced the frustration that can lead to turnover. Doughty (2024) and Katzer (2023) affirmed that a strong institutional culture demands formalized communication channels to prevent misunderstandings. Strategically encouraging teacher participation empowered them as collaborative partners rather than passive subordinates, successfully securing a deeply rooted commitment that enabled them to navigate complex academic demands as a unified team.

These combined leadership practices support the mandates outlined in the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads. By fully funding training, establishing effective communication systems, and implementing policies that support holistic well-being, private school leaders demonstrate active compliance with Domain 4, Developing Self and Others, and Domain 5, Building Connections (Department of Education, 2020). In addition, these supportive practices allow educators to meet the expectations of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers, particularly in assuming responsibility for lifelong learning and professional advancement (Department of Education, 2017).

Implications for Educational Practice

The findings of this study offer significant insights into the daily operations of private academic institutions, where traditional, highly informal leadership routines are rarely sustainable. Relying heavily on shifting verbal instructions inevitably accelerates teacher burnout and causes severe operational friction. In line with this, private school administrators must deliberately cultivate family-oriented holding environments and establish clear, transparent communication boundaries to successfully insulate educators from the inherent stresses of the academic profession. Furthermore, private schools can effectively mitigate their vulnerability as temporary training grounds by proactively investing in internal scholarship programs and subsidizing continuous professional development to nurture their workforce from within.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study provides a foundational starting point for exploring leadership practices to enhance teacher retention in private academic institutions, particularly in developing urban centers like Mati City. Future researchers are encouraged to expand the scope of this inquiry to include a larger and more diverse sample of private schools across multiple cities or regions. Broadening the geographical context will significantly improve the transferability of the findings and allow for a deeper comparative understanding of administrative strategies across different educational environments. Furthermore, subsequent studies would greatly benefit from adopting a mixed methods approach. By combining the qualitative insights regarding leadership practices with quantitative measures of teacher retention rates and job satisfaction, future investigators can rigorously assess the long-term impact and statistical effectiveness of these administrative interventions.

CONCLUSION

Teacher retention remains a critical operational priority for private academic institutions. The findings demonstrate that school leaders actively combine technical administrative support with adaptive relational strategies to sustain their workforce. Relying solely on standard administrative directives is fundamentally insufficient to secure long-term loyalty. Educational leaders must view teacher retention not merely as a matter of contractual compliance but as a profound adaptive effort requiring genuine relational care. By cultivating family-oriented work environments, fully subsidizing continuous professional development, and embedding daily operations within a mission-driven framework, administrators successfully elevate teaching from a routine job to a supported vocational calling. This balanced application of situational guidance and adaptive foresight allows private school leaders to build a deeply rooted, highly committed professional community despite external macroeconomic pressures. To ensure organizational stability, private academic institutions should institutionalize effective leadership practices by developing formal policies, including standardized contracts, transparent financial management, mission-oriented capability development, and inclusive psychological safety. These measures establish relational care and structural support as enduring elements of the institutional framework.

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