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Balancing Chalk and Leadership: The Journeys of Teachers-in-Charge in Indigenous People Schools in Tboli

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Abstract

Background and Rationale:

In many rural and geographically isolated schools, teachers do not only perform classroom instructions but also assume leadership responsibilities in the absence of formally appointed school heads. This reality is evident in Indigenous People schools in Tboli, South Cotabato, where Teachers-in-Charge carry the dual responsibility of teaching and leading. Their experiences reveal the complex intersection of instructional leadership, administrative work, cultural responsiveness, and service in underserved communities.

Objectives of the Study:

This study explored the lived experiences of Teachers-in-Charge as instructional leaders in Indigenous People schools in Tboli. Specifically, it examined how they teach and lead, the personal, organizational, community, and policy-related factors that shape their instructional leadership roles, and how they perceive their personal and professional growth as evolving school leaders.

Methods:

The study employed a qualitative research design using transcendental phenomenology. Ten Teachers-in-Charge from Tboli West District, Schools Division of South Cotabato, participated in the study. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed through phenomenological procedures to identify significant statements, formulated meanings, clustered themes, and the essence of the participants' lived experiences. Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability procedures.

Findings:

Findings revealed three major areas of experience. First, the lived experiences of Teachers-in-Charge were marked by everyday challenges, shared leadership, multiple responsibilities, and sustained commitment to Indigenous Peoples education. Second, their leadership practices were shaped by their effort to put instruction first, coach teachers using available resources, lead with culture and community support, and make Department of Education policies workable within local school realities. Third, the participants viewed themselves as growing instructional leaders who became better through experience, discovered

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personal strengths, aspired for professional growth, and saw leadership as an opportunity to make a meaningful difference in their schools and communities. These findings are supported by participant accounts such as "I keep school decisions anchored on learning goals and curriculum targets," "Sometimes teachers need encouragement more than materials," and "Respecting culture builds confidence."

Conclusion:

The study concludes that Teachers-in-Charge in Indigenous People schools perform a vital form of instructional leadership shaped by resilience, cultural sensitivity, community partnership, and professional commitment. Although they face limited resources, heavy workloads, and contextual challenges, they continue to sustain teaching and learning through adaptive and values-driven leadership. The study highlights the need for stronger recognition, training, mentoring, and policy support for Teachers-in-Charge serving in geographically isolated and culturally diverse schools.

Keywords: *Teachers-in-Charge, instructional leadership, Indigenous Peoples education, rural schools, transcendental phenomenology, Tboli*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Instructional leadership remains a vital element in improving school effectiveness, teacher performance, and learner achievement. It involves setting instructional direction, supporting teachers, monitoring teaching and learning, and creating a school environment where learning becomes the central concern of leadership practice (Hallinger, 2019; Leithwood et al., 2020). Studies have emphasized that effective school leaders influence student outcomes not only through administrative supervision but also through instructional guidance, teacher development, and sustained professional collaboration (Day et al., 2020; Grissom et al., 2021). In rural and remote schools, however, instructional leadership becomes more complex because leadership work is often performed under conditions of limited resources, staffing constraints, and geographic isolation.

In many small and geographically isolated schools, the presence of a permanent principal is not always possible. As a result, leadership responsibilities are often assumed by Teachers-in-Charge who perform both instructional and administrative functions while continuing their teaching duties. Preston and Wiebe (2020) noted that leadership in isolated and rural schools is often shaped by workload, limited support, and the need to respond to local school realities. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2020) emphasized that instructional leadership in remote and disadvantaged schools is affected by contextual challenges that require school leaders to adapt their practices to the needs of teachers, learners, and communities. These conditions show that the role of the Teacher-in-Charge is not merely temporary or administrative, but deeply connected to the daily work of sustaining instruction in schools where formal leadership structures are limited.

In the Philippine context, the Department of Education recognizes the importance of school leadership in strengthening teaching and learning. DepEd Order No. 001, s. 2020 identified school leaders as key actors in shaping instructional quality and school improvement (DepEd, 2020). More recently, DepEd Order No. 005, s. 2024 formally recognized Teachers-in-Charge as school heads when supported by a duly signed designation from the Schools Division Superintendent (DepEd, 2024). This policy recognition affirms the important role of TICs in extending school leadership to small, remote, and underserved schools. It also aligns with the broader goal of inclusive and equitable quality education under Sustainable Development Goal 4, particularly in reaching learners in disadvantaged and geographically isolated communities (Philippine Institute for Development Studies [PIDS], 2023).

In Tboli, South Cotabato, the role of Teachers-in-Charge is especially significant because many schools are located in upland, rural, and Indigenous Peoples communities. These schools often serve learners from culturally diverse backgrounds and operate within conditions marked by limited access, resource shortages, difficult terrain, and the absence of regularly appointed school heads. In such contexts, TICs are expected to teach, supervise instruction, mentor teachers, coordinate school programs, implement DepEd policies, and maintain relationships with the community. Previous studies have shown that Teachers-in-Charge in rural schools experience heavy workload, professional isolation, limited leadership training, and emotional pressure, yet

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they continue to demonstrate resilience and adaptability in performing their roles (Cabaraban & Capulso, 2021; Reyes & Punzalan, 2022). These realities are consistent with the local context described in the manuscript, where TICs in Tboli manage both teaching and leadership responsibilities in Indigenous Peoples and geographically isolated schools.

Although instructional leadership has been widely studied, much of the existing literature focuses on permanent principals and formal school heads. Less attention has been given to Teachers-in-Charge who exercise instructional leadership while also carrying classroom responsibilities. Ortiz (2025) found that Teachers-in-Charge demonstrate leadership competence, but contextual factors such as isolation, workload, and support systems may influence how their leadership affects school outcomes. Ciocon (2022) likewise emphasized the importance of professional characteristics in instructional leadership, suggesting that leadership effectiveness cannot be separated from the conditions in which school leaders work. This gap is important because TICs in Indigenous Peoples and rural schools occupy a unique position: they lead without the full authority, preparation, or resources often available to permanent principals.

The Indigenous Peoples school context further deepens the need to understand TIC leadership. In culturally diverse communities, school leadership requires sensitivity to learners' identities, local traditions, community values, and culturally responsive practices. Khalifa (2018) emphasized that culturally responsive school leadership requires leaders to recognize the cultural realities of learners and communities. Pangandoyon (2022) also highlighted that leadership in Indigenous Peoples schools in Mindanao involves practices shaped by cultural context, community relationships, and educational equity. For TICs in Tboli, instructional leadership is therefore not limited to curriculum implementation or teacher supervision; it also involves building trust, respecting culture, and sustaining education in communities where school and community life are closely connected.

Given these conditions, this study explored the lived experiences of Teachers-in-Charge as instructional leaders in Indigenous Peoples schools in Tboli, South Cotabato. Specifically, it examined how they teach and lead, the personal, organizational, community, and policy-related factors that shape their leadership roles, and how they perceive their personal and professional growth as instructional leaders. By giving voice to their experiences, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of instructional leadership in rural, geographically isolated, and culturally diverse school contexts.

II. MATERIALS and METHODS

Research Design

A qualitative research design using transcendental phenomenology was employed in this study. This design was appropriate because the study sought to understand the lived experiences of Teachers-in-Charge as they balanced their dual responsibilities as classroom teachers and instructional leaders in Indigenous People schools in Tboli. Phenomenology was used because the concern of the study was not to measure variables, but to listen closely to the stories of the participants and uncover the meanings they attached to their experiences.

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Moustakas (1994) explained that transcendental phenomenology focuses on the essence of human experience. It allows the researcher to understand a phenomenon by returning to the voices and descriptions of those who have directly lived through it. In this study, that phenomenon was the experience of teaching and leading at the same time in geographically isolated and culturally diverse school communities. Creswell (2014) also emphasized that qualitative research is suitable when the researcher seeks to explore how individuals make meaning of a particular experience. Thus, this design allowed the researcher to capture the inner realities, reflections, challenges, and aspirations of Teachers-in-Charge in their own words.

The use of transcendental phenomenology was also fitting because the researcher needed to practice epoché or bracketing. This means that personal assumptions were consciously set aside so that the voices of the participants could emerge more clearly. The manuscript itself explains that transcendental phenomenology allowed the researcher "to listen, rather than to impose," and to approach the experiences of Teachers-in-Charge with openness and humility

Participants and Sampling

Participants of the study were ten Teachers-in-Charge assigned in public elementary and integrated schools in Tboli, South Cotabato. These participants were directly involved in the phenomenon being studied because they were actively performing both teaching and leadership functions. They guided fellow teachers, supervised instructional programs, handled administrative responsibilities, and continued to teach their own learners. The manuscript specifically states that the study involved ten TICs who led public elementary and integrated schools in Tboli while carrying both classroom and school leadership responsibilities

The study used **census sampling** because all qualified Teachers-in-Charge who met the inclusion criteria were considered as participants. This was appropriate because the group of TICs in the identified setting was limited and clearly defined. Rather than selecting only a portion of the qualified participants, the researcher included the entire accessible group who had direct and sustained experience of the phenomenon. Patton (2020) supports the use of information-rich participants in qualitative inquiry, especially when the goal is to obtain meaningful and experience-based data from those who can best illuminate the research problem.

The inclusion criteria required that each participant had served as a Teacher-in-Charge for at least one school year, was actively performing both instructional and administrative roles, was assigned within Tboli, and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Those who previously held permanent school head or principal positions, those with less than one year of TIC experience, and those who declined to participate were excluded. This ensured that the participants had authentic, direct, and sustained experience in balancing teaching and instructional leadership in Indigenous People school contexts

Research Locale

The research locale was conducted in the Municipality of Tboli, South Cotabato. It was appropriate because it is geographically and culturally diverse, with several schools located in upland and distant communities classified as Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas.

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These conditions created challenges in educational service delivery, including limited accessibility, resource shortages, and staffing constraints. The manuscript states that many schools in Tboli operated without regularly appointed school heads, which led to the designation of Teachers-in-Charge who performed both instructional and administrative leadership roles .

This setting gave the study its proper context. The experiences of the participants could not be separated from the realities of the place where they worked. Their leadership was shaped by difficult terrain, limited resources, cultural expectations, and the need to serve Indigenous learners. For this reason, Tboli was not merely the location of the study but an important part of the phenomenon being explored.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through **semi-structured interviews**. This method was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to ask prepared questions while also giving participants the freedom to explain their experiences in their own words. Semi-structured interviews are useful in qualitative research because they allow depth, flexibility, and follow-up questions when participants raise important insights. Vasileiou et al. (2018) supported the use of in-depth interviews in qualitative inquiry because they help participants articulate experiences while allowing the researcher to probe emerging meanings.

Before the interviews were conducted, the researcher secured the necessary permissions from the Graduate School, the Department of Education, the Schools Division Superintendent, and the concerned district authorities. Participants were then informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, their rights as participants, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Informed consent was obtained before data collection. The manuscript also states that the participants were given clear information about the study's objectives, procedures, and possible risks before they were asked to provide voluntary consent .

Interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and later transcribed verbatim. This process preserved the actual expressions, meanings, and emotional tone of the participants' narratives. Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasized the importance of careful transcription in qualitative research because it helps retain the authenticity of participants' voices. Member checking was also conducted to allow the participants to review and validate the researcher's interpretations of their narratives. This strengthened the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings, consistent with Birt et al. (2016), who emphasized member checking as a way of improving the credibility of qualitative interpretations.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using **Colaizzi's phenomenological method**. This method was appropriate because the study aimed to describe the essence of the lived experiences of Teachers-in-Charge. Colaizzi's method provides a systematic process for analyzing phenomenological data while remaining faithful to the words and meanings of the participants. The manuscript explains that Colaizzi's method helped the researcher move beyond surface descriptions and understand the meanings of the participants' experiences from their own perspectives.

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The analysis began with repeated reading of the interview transcripts to gain a deep understanding of the participants' narratives. Significant statements were then extracted from the transcripts. These were statements that directly described the experience of being a Teacher-in-Charge in Indigenous People and geographically isolated schools. From these significant statements, meanings were formulated and grouped into clusters of themes. The themes were then organized according to the research questions of the study.

The process led to the development of an exhaustive description of the participants' lived experiences. From this description, the essential structure of the phenomenon was drawn. Finally, member checking was conducted to ensure that the findings truly reflected the realities shared by the participants. This step was important because the study aimed to honor the participants' voices and avoid imposing meanings that did not come from their actual experiences.

Ethical Considerations

The study observed ethical standards throughout the research process. Permission was secured from the appropriate offices before the conduct of the study. The participants were informed of the purpose of the research, the nature of their participation, and their right to refuse or withdraw at any point without penalty. Informed consent was obtained before the interviews were conducted.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained. Participant names were not used in the presentation of findings. Instead, codes such as **P1, P2, P3**, and so on may be used in the journal article to protect their identities. This is especially important because the participants came from a limited and identifiable professional group within a specific locality. The manuscript also states that aliases were used to protect the privacy of participants and that both verbal and written consent were secured before data gathering.

Lastly, the study also respected the dignity and comfort of the participants. They were allowed to skip questions that made them uncomfortable and were assured that their responses would be used only for research purposes. Ethical practice was necessary because the study involved personal narratives, professional experiences, and reflections on leadership challenges in small school communities. Following Nowell et al. (2017), ethical integrity in qualitative research requires voluntary participation, transparency, and respect for the participants' rights and lived realities.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure rigor, the researcher observed the principles of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through member checking, where participants were given the opportunity to validate the interpretations of their narratives. Dependability was ensured by keeping a clear record of the research process, including the data gathering steps, interview procedures, transcription process, and analysis decisions.

Transferability was addressed by providing a rich description of the research locale, participants, and context. This allows readers to understand the conditions under which the

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findings emerged and determine whether the results may be relevant to similar settings. Confirmability was maintained by grounding the findings in the actual narratives of the participants and by practicing bracketing throughout the research process. Korstjens and Moser (2018) emphasized that these four criteria are important in establishing the trustworthiness of qualitative research.

Through these procedures, the study ensured that the findings were not merely the researcher's interpretation, but a careful and faithful representation of the Teachers-in-Charge's lived experiences.

III. RESULTS and DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings of the study based on the research questions. The results are organized according to the major themes that emerged from the narratives of the Teachers-in-Charge. Each theme is supported by participant statements and discussed in relation to existing literature on instructional leadership, rural school leadership, Indigenous Peoples education, and teacher-leader identity.

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of Teachers-in-Charge as they teach and lead in Indigenous People schools of Tboli?

The first research question explored the lived experiences of Teachers-in-Charge as they performed their dual roles as classroom teachers and instructional leaders. Four themes emerged: living through everyday challenges, being with others in leadership, carrying multiple responsibilities, and sustaining commitment to Indigenous Peoples education.

Theme 1: Living Through Everyday Challenges

Participants described their leadership experience as a daily encounter with geographic, material, and instructional limitations. Teaching and leading in Indigenous People schools required them to constantly adjust to distance, lack of facilities, limited learning resources, and learner-related difficulties. These were not occasional problems but regular conditions that shaped how they performed their work.

One participant shared, "*The school is in a far-flung area with difficult transportation*" (P1). Another participant expressed, "*Travel consumes time needed for teaching*" (P9). The challenge of limited infrastructure was also evident when one participant stated, "*There is no electricity or internet*" (P4). In relation to instructional resources, another participant noted, "*We adjust lessons because of shortages*" (P2), while another said, "*Supplies are delayed*" (P6).

These narratives show that instructional leadership in Tboli's Indigenous People schools is deeply shaped by the realities of place. The Teachers-in-Charge were not simply supervising instruction in ideal conditions; they were leading in contexts where access, resources, and time were already limited. Their experiences affirm the observation of Preston and Wiebe (2020) that rural school leaders often face leadership challenges connected to geographic isolation and

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limited institutional support. Similarly, Mulkeen et al. (2020) emphasized that school leadership in low-resource settings is often affected by scarcity of materials, staffing constraints, and limited access to professional support.

Despite these barriers, the participants continued to find ways to sustain teaching and learning. Their responses suggest that the leadership of Teachers-in-Charge is adaptive and resilient. This supports the findings of Reyes and Punzalan (2022), who noted that Teachers-in-Charge in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas often experience hardship but continue to demonstrate persistence in fulfilling their roles.

Theme 2: Being With Others in Leadership

Another important experience of the participants was the relational nature of leadership. Teachers-in-Charge did not view leadership as something they performed alone. Instead, they relied on collaboration, teacher support, community engagement, and emotional understanding.

One participant shared, "*Collaboration helped improve learning*" (P10). Another stated, "*We cooperate to manage workload*" (P9). The role of mentoring was also reflected when a participant said, "*I support professional growth*" (P7). Community involvement was emphasized in the statement, *"Community partnership is important*" (P9), while the emotional side of leadership appeared in the statement, "*Understanding teachers is important*" (P2).

These narratives indicate that leadership in Indigenous People schools is built through relationships. The participants exercised leadership by working with teachers, listening to their concerns, supporting their growth, and engaging the community. This finding is consistent with Harris and DeFlaminis (2018), who emphasized that distributed leadership involves shared influence and collaborative practices rather than leadership centered only on formal authority. Bandura's (2000) concept of collective efficacy also supports this finding because the participants' narratives show that school improvement becomes more possible when teachers and communities believe in their shared capacity to act.

In rural and Indigenous contexts, leadership is not only technical but also relational and cultural. Pangandoyon (2022) explained that leadership in Indigenous Peoples schools in Mindanao is shaped by local relationships and cultural realities. Thus, the Teachers-in-Charge in this study became instructional leaders not only by giving directions, but by being present with teachers, learners, parents, and community members.

Theme 3: Carrying Multiple Responsibilities

Participants also described the heavy responsibility of being both teachers and school leaders. They handled classroom instruction while also managing administrative tasks, attending meetings, supervising programs, and responding to school concerns. This created a constant demand to balance different roles.

One participant stated, "*Balancing teaching and leadership is not easy*" (P2). Another shared, "*Meetings and teaching happen together*" (P10). To manage these demands, one

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participant explained, "Scheduling helps manage tasks" (P5), while another said, "*I set priorities*" (P1). The importance of support from colleagues was also evident when one participant stated, "*Colleagues help manage duties*" (P9). Still, the burden remained clear in the statement, "*Administrative work is heavy*" (P4).

These statements show that Teachers-in-Charge experience role overload. Their work involves instructional, administrative, relational, and managerial responsibilities. This finding supports Preston et al. (2020), who found that teacher-leaders and acting school heads in small rural schools often experience workload pressure because they perform teaching and leadership roles at the same time. Similarly, Grissom et al. (2021) emphasized that school leaders influence instruction, but their ability to do so may be constrained when leadership time is consumed by administrative demands.

The participants' narratives also reflect role identity negotiation. As explained by Stryker and McCall (1990), individuals occupy multiple roles, and these roles shape their behavior and self-understanding. In this study, the Teachers-in-Charge had to negotiate their identity as classroom teachers, instructional leaders, and acting school heads. Their leadership identity developed not in comfort but through the constant balancing of overlapping expectations.

Theme 4: Sustaining Commitment to Indigenous Peoples Education

Participants also expressed a strong commitment to Indigenous Peoples education. Their leadership was not only about managing school operations but also about respecting culture, supporting learners' confidence, and making instruction meaningful within the local context.

One participant firmly stated, "*No discrimination should happen*" (P1). Another shared, "*Students gaining confidence is fulfilling*" (P6). Cultural respect was further emphasized in the statements, "*Respecting culture builds confidence*" (P7), "*Indigenous knowledge guides lessons*" (P7), and "*Respect shapes teaching*" (P10).

These narratives show that Teachers-in-Charge understood the importance of culturally responsive education. They recognized that learners' identities, language, traditions, and community background must be respected in teaching and leadership. This finding aligns with Khalifa (2018), who emphasized that culturally responsive school leadership requires leaders to recognize and affirm the cultural realities of learners and communities. It also supports Pangandoyon (2022), who found that leadership practices in Indigenous Peoples schools are shaped by cultural sensitivity, community relationships, and the need for inclusive education.

The participants' commitment to Indigenous Peoples education reveals that instructional leadership in Tboli is not limited to curriculum implementation. It also involves protecting learners from discrimination, building confidence, and allowing Indigenous identity to become part of meaningful learning.

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Research Question 2: How do Teachers-in-Charge describe the personal, organizational, community, and policy-related factors that shape the way they understand and perform their instructional leadership roles?

The second research question examined the factors that influenced how Teachers-in-Charge performed instructional leadership. Four themes emerged: **putting instruction first, coaching teachers with what we have, leading with culture and community support, and making DepEd policies work in real life**.

Theme 1: Putting Instruction First

The participants described instructional leadership as the effort to keep teaching and learning at the center of school decisions. Even with administrative tasks, limited resources, and competing demands, they tried to ensure that learner needs and curriculum goals remained the priority.

One participant shared, *"I keep school decisions anchored on learning goals and curriculum targets"* (P1). Another participant said, *"I avoid rushed decisions, so teacher support remains consistent"* (P1). The same concern for learning was reflected in the statement, *"I sustain leadership by focusing on what matters most—teaching and learning"* (P3). Another participant added, *"Trust helps us carry out learning initiatives consistently"* (P9).

These responses show that the Teachers-in-Charge viewed instruction as the heart of their leadership. This finding is consistent with Hallinger (2019), who described instructional leadership as leadership focused on teaching, learning, teacher support, and instructional direction. Leithwood et al. (2020) likewise emphasized that successful school leadership is strongly connected to improving the conditions for teaching and learning.

In the context of Tboli, putting instruction first required deliberate effort because the participants had to manage administrative work while protecting time and attention for learning. Their narratives show that even without the full authority or resources of permanent school heads, they still attempted to lead with an instructional purpose.

Theme 2: Coaching Teachers With What We Have

The participants also described leadership as coaching and supporting teachers despite limited resources. Their work involved giving advice, encouraging teachers, sharing strategies, and helping colleagues improve instruction using whatever materials and opportunities were available.

One participant stated, *"I suggest strategies that work even with limited resources"* (P3). Another said, *"Sometimes teachers need encouragement more than materials"* (P6). The reality of limited technology was reflected in the statement, *"Teaching stays meaningful even without digital tools"* (P2). Another participant added, *"I guide teachers toward stronger strategies"* (P6).

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These statements show that coaching does not always require abundant resources. For the participants, coaching was often done through encouragement, practical advice, peer support, and shared problem-solving. This finding supports Day et al. (2020), who emphasized that effective school leaders improve teaching by supporting teachers and strengthening professional practice. It also relates to Harris and DeFlaminis (2018), who discussed distributed leadership as a way of using shared expertise and collaboration to improve school practice.

The participants' narratives also reflect the reality that leadership in rural schools often requires creativity. OECD (2019) noted that rural and remote schools commonly face limitations in resources and access to professional development. In this study, Teachers-in-Charge responded to such limitations by using practical, context-based coaching instead of waiting for ideal conditions.

Theme 3: Leading With Culture and Community Support

Participants described culture and community as major factors in their leadership. They recognized that leadership in Indigenous People schools requires respect for traditions, consultation with local leaders, community cooperation, and sensitivity to learners' language backgrounds.

One participant shared, *"I respect traditions and values in leadership decisions"* (P1). Another stated, *"Tribal leaders are consulted for alignment"* (P10). Community participation was reflected in the statement, *"Community cooperation sustains school activities"* (P6). Another participant said, *"Unique language backgrounds require adaptation"* (P3).

These narratives show that instructional leadership in Indigenous People schools is shaped by cultural and community realities. The Teachers-in-Charge did not lead only through formal school structures; they also worked through respect, consultation, and partnership. This aligns with Khalifa's (2018) view that culturally responsive school leadership requires leaders to engage the community and honor cultural identity. Pangandoyon (2022) similarly emphasized that leadership in Indigenous Peoples schools in Mindanao requires sensitivity to community values and local practices.

This theme suggests that in Indigenous People school settings, community support is not optional. It is a necessary part of sustaining school programs, improving learner participation, and making instruction more relevant to learners' lives.

Theme 4: Making DepEd Policies Work in Real Life

Participants also described their role as policy implementers who needed to translate DepEd directives into practices that fit local school conditions. Rather than applying policies mechanically, they adjusted them based on learner needs, school resources, and community realities.

One participant stated, *"Policies guide how I support teachers"* (P1). Another shared, *"I adapt policy to fit learner needs"* (P6). The role of external support was reflected in the

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statement, *"Supervisors support instructional improvement"* (P10). Another participant added, *"Leadership supports learner needs through standards"* (P7).

These statements show that Teachers-in-Charge served as bridges between national policy and local practice. This finding is consistent with DepEd Order No. 001, s. 2020, which recognizes the importance of school leadership in improving teaching and learning. It also aligns with DepEd Order No. 005, s. 2024, which formally recognizes Teachers-in-Charge as school heads when duly designated by the Schools Division Superintendent.

However, the participants' narratives also show that policy implementation in Indigenous People and geographically isolated schools requires adaptation. Karanikola et al. (2024) observed that policy demands can create emotional and administrative pressure for school leaders, especially when resources are limited. In this study, the Teachers-in-Charge managed this pressure by interpreting policies in ways that remained faithful to standards while still responding to the actual needs of learners and teachers.

Research Question 3: How do Teachers-in-Charge perceive their personal and professional growth as instructional leaders, and how do they envision their evolving roles in the future?

The third research question explored how Teachers-in-Charge saw themselves as growing and evolving instructional leaders. Four themes emerged: **becoming better leaders through experience, discovering strengths and learning about oneself, dreaming of growth and future opportunities, and seeing the future as a chance to make a difference**.

Theme 1: Becoming Better Leaders Through Experience

The participants viewed their leadership growth as something developed through daily practice. Their experiences in solving problems, making decisions, supporting teachers, and working with the community helped them become more confident and capable leaders.

One participant shared, *"My leadership and decision-making abilities strengthened"* (P2). Another stated, *"I reflect on how to improve teaching"* (P7). Cultural learning also became part of their growth, as reflected in the statement, *"I learned cultural sensitivity"* (P1). Another participant expressed, *"Leadership is about empowering others"* (P10).

These narratives show that leadership development among Teachers-in-Charge is experiential. They learned not only from formal training but from the actual demands of teaching and leading in difficult contexts. This finding supports Day and Gu (2019), who emphasized that professional identity and resilient leadership are shaped by lived practice, reflection, and experience. It also connects with Kelchtermans (2020), who explained that teachers' professional self-understanding develops through the meanings they attach to their work.

For the Teachers-in-Charge, experience became a teacher. Their leadership was shaped by the realities of their schools, the needs of their teachers, and the cultural context of their learners.

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Theme 2: Discovering Strengths and Learning About Oneself

Participants also described leadership as a process of self-discovery. Through their role as Teachers-in-Charge, they became more aware of their strengths, limitations, and capacity to influence others.

One participant shared, *"I realized I am stronger than I thought"* (P6). Another stated, *"Each situation taught me something"* (P4). The leadership role was further described in the statement, *"Leadership is empowering teachers"* (P9). Another participant added, *"Working with community creates impact"* (P9).

These narratives show that leadership allowed the participants to better understand themselves. They discovered patience, resilience, courage, and the ability to work with others. This finding is consistent with Beijaard et al. (2004), who emphasized that teacher professional identity is shaped by how teachers understand themselves in relation to their work and professional roles. OECD (2022) also emphasized that teacher professional identity develops through experience, reflection, and engagement with the school environment.

In this study, self-awareness was not only personal. It was also professional. The Teachers-in-Charge came to understand that their leadership mattered because it affected teachers, learners, and the wider community.

Theme 3: Dreaming of Growth and Future Opportunities

Participants also expressed their aspirations for continued professional growth. Their leadership experience encouraged them to pursue further studies, continue serving as leaders, improve education, and strengthen community partnerships.

One participant shared, *"I plan to continue my studies"* (P5). Another stated, *"I see myself continuing leadership"* (P1). The desire to improve learner outcomes was reflected in the statement, *"I want quality education for learners"* (P8). Another participant added, *"I want stronger community partnerships"* (P3).

Responses show that the participants did not see their current role as the end of their professional journey. Instead, they viewed it as preparation for further growth. This finding is supported by Markus and Nurius (1986), who introduced the concept of possible selves, referring to how individuals imagine their future identities and use these images to guide their present actions. Hamman et al. (2013) also emphasized that teachers' future selves influence their motivation, professional identity, and development.

For the Teachers-in-Charge, the future was not only about promotion or position. It was about becoming more prepared, more capable, and more useful to the learners and communities they served.

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Theme 4: Seeing the Future as a Chance to Make a Difference

The final theme shows that the participants viewed their future leadership as an opportunity to create positive change. They wanted to become compassionate, learner-centered, culturally aware, and transformational leaders.

One participant shared, *"I want to be compassionate"* (P2). Another stated, *"Supporting students is priority"* (P1). The importance of context was reflected in the statement, *"I understand community context"* (P3). Another participant expressed, *"I want transformational leadership"* (P9).

These narratives reveal a hopeful and purpose-driven view of leadership. The participants did not define future leadership merely as authority or career advancement. Rather, they viewed it as a responsibility to serve learners, support teachers, and strengthen the community. This finding aligns with Leithwood et al. (2020), who emphasized that successful leadership involves setting direction, developing people, and improving organizational conditions. It also supports Santos (2024), who discussed the significance of micro-leadership in rural Philippine schools, particularly in contexts where teacher-leaders sustain education despite limited formal authority.

The participants' future self-perceptions suggest that Teachers-in-Charge are not only temporary leaders filling administrative gaps. They are developing professionals whose experiences can shape long-term leadership capacity in Indigenous People and rural schools.

Synthesis of the Results and Discussion

Overall, the findings reveal that Teachers-in-Charge in Indigenous People schools of Tboli experience leadership as a demanding but meaningful journey. Their lived experiences are shaped by geographic isolation, resource limitations, workload pressure, community expectations, and cultural responsibilities. Despite these conditions, they continue to lead through collaboration, adaptation, cultural respect, and commitment to learners.

Findings also show that the instructional leadership of Teachers-in-Charge is grounded in practical wisdom. They prioritize instruction, coach teachers using available resources, build community partnerships, and adapt DepEd policies to local realities. Their leadership is not only administrative but also relational, cultural, and deeply contextual.

Finally, the study reveals that Teachers-in-Charge see themselves as growing leaders. Their experiences help them develop confidence, discover personal strengths, pursue professional growth, and imagine a future where they can make a greater difference. Their stories show that leadership in rural and Indigenous People schools is not defined only by position. It is also defined by service, resilience, cultural understanding, and the courage to continue leading even in difficult conditions.

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Conclusions

Consequently, the study concludes that Teachers-in-Charge in Indigenous People schools in Tboli perform instructional leadership as a lived practice of resilience, service, and cultural responsiveness. Despite limited resources, difficult terrain, heavy workloads, and overlapping teaching and administrative duties, they continue to sustain learning through collaboration, practical coaching, community partnership, and respect for Indigenous culture. Their experiences show that leadership in rural and IP schools is not defined only by formal position but by commitment, adaptability, and the ability to guide teachers and learners in challenging contexts.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Department of Education strengthen support for Teachers-in-Charge through regular leadership training, mentoring, workload assistance, and clearer policy guidance suited to geographically isolated and Indigenous People schools. Capacity-building programs should focus on instructional supervision, culturally responsive leadership, teacher coaching, community engagement, and stress management. Future researchers may also conduct similar studies in other districts or divisions to further understand the needs, practices, and professional growth of Teachers-in-Charge in rural and culturally diverse educational settings.

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