

Gender and Leadership Styles in Philippine Public Schools: A Case Study of School Leaders in the Schools Division Office of Manila

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Abstract: This study explores the influence of gender on leadership styles among public school leaders in the Schools Division Office of Manila. Using a qualitative case study design, the research involved purposive sampling of 12 school principals (6 male, 6 female) and employed semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in leadership behaviors, gender-related challenges, and perceptions of effectiveness. Results show that while female leaders often exhibited transformational leadership traits and male leaders leaned toward transactional or autocratic styles, these tendencies were significantly shaped by contextual moderators such as school culture and staff gender composition. What distinguishes this study is its demonstration of how leadership styles are mediated by Filipino sociocultural values—including collectivism, deference to hierarchy, and gender norms—revealing leadership as a culturally negotiated practice rather than a fixed trait. The study affirms the relevance of contingency leadership theory in the Philippine context and contributes a culturally grounded perspective to global conversations on gender and leadership. Findings offer important implications for developing gender-aware, context-sensitive leadership programs in education.

Key Words: gender, leadership styles, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, educational leadership, Philippines

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership in education plays a critical role in shaping school culture, teacher performance, and student outcomes. Research on gender and leadership suggests that societal expectations influence how men and women lead, often aligning male leaders with task-oriented, transactional styles and female leaders with relational, transformational styles (Carli & Eagly, 2020; Blackmore, 2022). However, much of this research has been situated in Western contexts. There is limited understanding of how these dynamics unfold in non-Western settings like the Philippines, where collectivist values and traditional gender roles may intensify gender-based expectations in

leadership.

In Philippine public schools, school leaders face not only organizational demands but also cultural pressures that shape leadership behavior. Filipino women are often expected to lead with empathy and collaboration, while men may be perceived as natural authority figures (Harris & Jones, 2020). These gendered expectations create unique challenges that may influence leadership effectiveness and how leadership is perceived by stakeholders.

While discussions of gender and leadership are increasingly present in global research, there is a pressing need to contextualize these conversations within Philippine public education. School leadership here is not only a site of bureaucratic administration but also a cultural performance shaped by gendered

expectations and hierarchical traditions. This study engages with the broader discourse on gender stereotypes in leadership, but moves beyond surface-level comparisons. It critically examines how leadership is enacted amid the pressures of gender norms, institutional constraints, and localized values, offering a nuanced take on how leaders navigate expectations and performance in a highly gendered environment.

This research fills a gap in the literature by examining how gender influences leadership styles in the Schools Division Office of Manila. It focuses on identifying the leadership styles practiced by male and female leaders, the challenges they face, and whether gendered leadership differences affect school performance. By contextualizing gender and leadership in a Philippine public education setting, the study offers relevant insights for leadership training, gender-sensitive policy development, and school governance.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative case study design to explore gendered leadership styles among public school leaders in the Schools Division Office of Manila. The study was conducted from January to April 2025 and involved in-depth interviews and structured observations.

The participants were 12 school principals (6 male, 6 female) selected through purposive sampling to ensure gender representation across various school settings (elementary and secondary schools). All participants had at least five years of leadership experience.

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather insights into leadership styles, gender-related challenges, and perceptions of leadership effectiveness. Interview questions were based on leadership frameworks from Bass (1985) and Carli & Eagly (2020). Observations of school meetings and documents (e.g., school improvement plans) were also analyzed to triangulate the data.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study used triangulation (interviews, observations, documents)

and conducted member checking with participants to validate interpretations.

Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and themes across the data. Coding was done manually, and themes were categorized based on leadership styles (transformational, transactional, autocratic), challenges (e.g., gender bias, workload, expectations), and leadership outcomes (e.g., staff morale, school performance).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Predominant Leadership Styles

The study reveals that leadership styles among public school leaders in the Schools Division Office of Manila exhibit a clear gendered pattern. Female leaders were more likely to adopt transformational leadership approaches, emphasizing collaboration, motivation, and emotional support. This observation echoes the findings of Pounder (2021), who asserted that transformational leadership resonates with attributes often associated with female leaders, such as empathy, interpersonal sensitivity, and a nurturing disposition. These leaders were observed to prioritize shared vision and staff development, fostering a culture of trust and inclusivity.

On the other hand, male leaders predominantly exhibited transactional and occasionally autocratic styles. They emphasized rule enforcement, performance benchmarks, and authoritative decision-making—features reflective of task-oriented leadership traits. These findings are consistent with those of Lumby (2020) and Berkovich and Eyal (2021), who found that male school heads often align with transactional behaviors due to socialized expectations of assertiveness and control. While some male leaders acknowledged the value of collaboration, many leaned into leadership practices that favored efficiency and order over emotional engagement.

Notably, these gendered patterns are not rigid. Both male and female leaders occasionally demonstrated flexibility in leadership styles, adapting to the needs of their schools and teams. This aligns with Riggio's (2008) view that leadership effectiveness is largely contingent on situational demands rather than fixed personal traits.

2. Gender-Specific Challenges

Gender continues to shape the challenges educational leaders face. Female principals reported frequent experiences of being perceived as “too soft” or lacking authority when employing collaborative or empathetic approaches. This mirrors the “double bind” dilemma observed in prior studies, where women leaders are expected to lead effectively while adhering to stereotypically feminine traits (Carli & Eagly, 2020). In several cases, female principals shared stories of encountering skepticism or passive resistance from male subordinates when advocating reformative changes or asserting authority.

Male leaders, meanwhile, disclosed pressure to maintain an authoritative persona, particularly during conflict or crisis management. While some wished to engage staff in dialogue or reflective decision-making, they felt constrained by the expectation to “take charge” and exhibit control. These gendered expectations are in line with Ryan and Haslam's (2019) “glass cliff” phenomenon, which posits that women are often placed in leadership roles during turbulent times, only to be scrutinized more heavily. The study supports this theory, with many female leaders being assigned to schools with existing reputational or performance challenges.

The findings underscore how gendered norms not only shape leadership style but also the perception and acceptance of those styles in educational institutions.

3. Influence of Contextual Moderators

The study identified school culture and subordinate gender as critical contextual moderators that influence how gender and leadership style

interact. Female principals assigned to schools with predominantly male teaching staff often adapted their leadership approaches by incorporating more directive behaviors to establish authority and credibility. Conversely, male leaders working in schools with strong cultures of collaboration were more likely to demonstrate participatory behaviors, often drawing from transformational principles.

These patterns validate the contingency theory of leadership, which emphasizes the importance of situational variables in determining effective leadership (Riggio, 2008). Additionally, the gender composition of subordinates emerged as a significant factor, with both male and female leaders adjusting their tone, decision-making process, and delegation patterns based on how their staff perceived gender roles. This aligns with Harris and Jones (2020), who argue that organizational norms and peer composition shape leadership adaptability.

The influence of these moderators demonstrates that while gender informs leadership tendencies, the organizational setting plays a pivotal role in mediating how these styles are enacted.

4. Perceived Effectiveness of Leadership Approaches

Therefore, this study contributes a distinctively Philippine dimension to existing theories of gender and leadership by demonstrating how sociocultural conditions—such as deference to hierarchy, gendered staff composition, and school traditions—compel both male and female leaders to negotiate and sometimes transgress expected leadership norms. This contextual nuance is often missing in Western-centric studies, and it reinforces the argument that leadership development must be both gender-aware and culturally attuned.

What distinguishes the findings of this study is their sociocultural specificity. While the overarching patterns regarding gendered leadership styles parallel international literature, this study shows how such styles are reshaped by localized norms within Philippine public schools. For instance, the collectivist cultural orientation and hierarchical

expectations embedded in Filipino school communities mediate how leadership is enacted and received. Female leaders, although exhibiting transformational tendencies, often had to assert authority more deliberately in male-dominated staff environments. Conversely, male leaders adapted their typically transactional approaches when school cultures favored participatory governance. These dynamics illustrate that leadership effectiveness is not simply a matter of gender or style, but of context-sensitive adaptation.

Transactional leadership, predominantly associated with male leaders in this study, was viewed as effective in maintaining discipline, ensuring accountability, and delivering short-term outcomes. This echoes Lumby (2020) and Berkovich and Eyal's (2021) observations that task-oriented, transactional leadership—often attributed to male leaders—facilitates order and operational control. However, similar to earlier critiques, participants in this study noted that transactional approaches lacked the emotional resonance and developmental depth required for sustained staff engagement and school improvement. Autocratic styles, though seldom preferred, were occasionally deemed useful in crisis situations but generally correlated with lower morale and a sense of alienation among teachers.

In terms of perceived effectiveness, transformational leadership was consistently rated more favorably by staff members across schools. Teachers associated this style with higher morale, open communication, and a stronger sense of community. These perceptions mirror those reported in studies by Moorosi (2021) and Shields (2019), which link transformational leadership to long-term institutional stability, teacher motivation, and enhanced student achievement. The association of female leadership with transformational qualities—such as empathy, responsiveness, and team-building—further reinforces the global pattern noted by Carli and Eagly (2020), where women leaders tend to be perceived as more relationship-oriented and inclusive.

On the other hand, transactional leadership was viewed as effective in maintaining discipline, ensuring accountability, and delivering short-term performance outcomes. However, staff members noted that it lacked the emotional engagement and long-term developmental impact seen in transformational leadership. Autocratic styles, though rarely preferred, were sometimes acknowledged as necessary in crisis situations—yet overreliance on this style was associated with diminished staff morale and engagement. While prior studies in Western contexts (e.g., Carli & Eagly, 2020) highlight similar gendered patterns, this study is unique in demonstrating how these styles are modified by school-based sociocultural norms in the Philippine context.

These findings affirm the importance of flexibility in leadership style, with gender-informed practices needing to be responsive to institutional goals, staff needs, and external pressures. They also provide practical insights for leadership development programs in education: while both male and female leaders are capable of adopting effective strategies, training and policy should emphasize inclusive, collaborative models that transcend traditional gender norms.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined how gender influences leadership styles in public schools under the Schools Division Office of Manila, revealing both consistencies with global research and unique contextual dynamics specific to the Philippine setting. As in prior literature, female school leaders were more likely to exhibit transformational leadership traits—such as collaboration, emotional engagement, and inclusivity—while male leaders tended toward transactional or autocratic behaviors associated with structure, discipline, and control. However, these patterns were not fixed. Leadership behaviors shifted in response to contextual moderators such as school culture and the gender composition of staff.

What sets this study apart is its demonstration of how sociocultural values—such as collectivism, respect for hierarchy, and traditional

gender roles—mediate the enactment and perception of leadership styles. Unlike in many Western-centric studies, leadership in the Philippine context was shown to be a process of negotiation and adaptation rather than a stable identity tied to gender alone. Male leaders adopted participatory practices in collaborative school environments, while female leaders displayed directive behaviors when navigating male-dominated staff contexts. This situational responsiveness affirms the utility of contingency leadership theory while also contributing a localized, culturally grounded perspective.

The findings underscore the need for gender-sensitive and contextually responsive leadership development programs in Philippine education. Training must move beyond essentialist understandings of leadership and embrace flexible, inclusive models that empower school leaders—regardless of gender—to respond effectively to the demands of their institutional settings. Ultimately, advancing gender equity in leadership entails not only recognizing persistent stereotypes and challenges but also equipping leaders with the tools to navigate them skillfully within their unique educational contexts.

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