



THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN SHAPING TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL EQUITY AND INCLUSIVENESS

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ABSTRACT

This present research aims to determine the attitude of the teachers on the influence of school leaders on equity and inclusion in a secondary school context in the Philippines. In the current study, the researchers used a purposive sampling type to sample 27 teachers from the intended population through an online structured questionnaire comprising of 20 items on a five-point Likert scale. School leadership is considered highly from the perspective of participants with a general weighted mean of 4.16 thus there is agreement with Leadership Practices that promote equity & Inclusion. They included clarity of vision for equity, (mean = 4.38) and leadership's support for equity, (mean = 4.15). However, there are opportunities for improvement highlighted by the results as well, such as professional development for equity (mean = 3.77) and making certain that all Teacher concerns are met (mean = 3.96). In addition, this research fills the gap in the literature by supporting school leadership as a central construct influencing teacher cognition of equity and inclusion. In this case, the analysis has shown that even though school leaders are actively working to improve the organizational culture, this process requires special support and the necessary tools to involve teachers actively in equity-enhancing activities. Hence, the research seeks to expose knowledge for enhancing the school leadership approaches, and also to support the processes that would foster the achievement of equality in an educational context and satisfy the needs of the learners.

Keywords: *Equity, Inclusiveness, School Leadership, Teacher Perceptions, Educational Environment*

INTRODUCTION

The issue of equity and integration within contexts of learning has recently been reciprocating in many schools currently in the process of adopting diversities of students' needs and origins (DeMatthew et., al. 2020). These principles can also be very effective when implemented in schools through appropriate leadership because leaders through their actions, decisions, and policies shape the organizational culture of the institution (Poekert et., al. 2022). Prior research has suggested that any manner in which school leaders fully support equity as well as inclusiveness usually results in the enhancement of teacher morale and or student results (Finefter, 2020). Nevertheless, teachers' perceptions of these leadership efforts have not yet been well clarified, especially in some particular local contexts (Mincu, 2022; Barak et., al. 2021). Even as scholarship on educational equity continues to expand, there is limited knowledge on how teachers perceive leadership related to equity, with few studies taking an exclusive view of teachers and their perceptions regarding leadership and equity (Gulsen & Celik, 2021). It is essential to conduct such research at present since education systems globally face the question of satisfying the function of reducing inequalities resulting from social and economic processes (Wilkins et., al. 2020). Education inequality has been another issue that has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, thereby calling for school leaders, to reflect on their philosophy of equity and inclusion (Nadelson et., al. 2020; Gocen et., al. 2020).

To achieve the goal of understanding the best practices from the teacher's perception coupled with the deficiencies present in the leadership practices for equity and inclusion, the researchers' study aims to achieve the following specific objectives. Knowledge of these perceptions is important due to the significance and the role that teachers have in the successful introduction of inclusive educational practices within the classroom (Alkaabi et., al. 2022). In addition to bringing insights that help fill experiment-based gaps in the literature, this study also aims to offer practical suggestions for better school leadership and the creation of a more equitable classroom. The researchers seek to advance that conversation through this study and assist in promoting leadership practices in educational equity.

Research Questions

This research has aimed to explore the perceptions of teachers regarding the impact of school leadership on equity and inclusiveness within the educational environment.

1. How does the clarity of the school leadership's vision for equity and inclusiveness influence teachers' perceptions of their roles in promoting these values?
2. What impact does the commitment of school leadership to addressing inequities have on teachers' willingness to engage in discussions about diversity and inclusion?
3. In what ways do teachers perceive the adequacy of resources provided by leadership to support inclusive teaching practices?
4. How do teachers' perceptions of their concerns being heard by school leadership correlate with their engagement in equity-focused initiatives?

5. What role does professional development play in shaping teachers' understanding and implementation of inclusive practices, according to their perceptions of school leadership support?
6. How do clear policies on discrimination communicated by leadership affect the overall culture of respect and inclusiveness within the school?
7. To what extent do teachers feel involved in decision-making processes related to equity, and how does this involvement impact their perceptions of school inclusiveness?

METHODOLOGY

The data for this particular study were collected from a group of secondary school teachers who were asked questions about leadership's influence on equity and inclusion. The purposive sampling method was used to sample 27 teachers because in this method, the researcher focuses on people with specific characteristics; resulting in selecting teachers from different ages experiences, etc. Questionnaire data were therefore administered on a structured research instrument which comprised of items that captured teachers' perception of leadership practices and the responses were made using a 5 Likert rating scale. Moreover, the instrument developed was a researcher-made questionnaire.

Descriptive analysis involved the use of weighted means to make the interpretations of the responses to capture the true opinions of the teachers. The present study has several limitations due to which its generalizability might be limited to the specific educational institution context. Further, the use of questionnaire data can bias the study in terms of teachers' perceptions. However, these limitations should not detract from the fact that the study has given a useful insight into the nature of school leadership and its impact on the promotion of the principles of inclusive education.

RESULTS

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	21	80.8%
Male	5	19.2%
Age		
18-25	0	0
26-33	14	53.8%
34-42	8	30.8%
43 and above	4	15.4%
Years in service		
1-2 years	3	11.5%
3-5 years	3	11.5%

6-10 years	12	46.2%
10 years and above	8	30.8%

Table 2. The Leadership within school that impacts teachers' perceptions of equity and inclusiveness

Statement	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
School leadership actively communicates a clear vision for equity and inclusiveness.	4.38	Agree
The principal demonstrates a commitment to addressing inequities within the school.	4.15	Agree
Leadership regularly engages teachers in discussions about diversity and inclusion.	4.35	Agree
I feel that my concerns about equity are heard and valued by school leaders.	3.96	Agree
School leaders provide adequate resources to support inclusive teaching practices.	4.08	Agree
Leadership models inclusive behavior and attitudes in their daily interactions.	4.23	Agree
There are clear policies in place, communicated by leadership, to address issues of discrimination.	4.15	Agree
School leaders actively seek input from diverse groups of teachers when making decisions.	4.00	Agree
I receive regular professional development focused on equity and inclusion from school leadership.	3.77	Agree
Leadership acknowledges and addresses the diverse needs of students in school planning.	3.96	Agree
There is a strong culture of mutual respect and understanding fostered by school leadership.	4.27	Agree
I feel supported by school leadership when implementing inclusive teaching strategies.	4.19	Agree
Leadership ensures that all staff members are aware of and adhere to the school's equity policies.	4.23	Agree
I feel that leadership provides a safe environment for discussing and addressing sensitive issues related to equity.	4.23	Agree

Leadership actively works to eliminate biases in school policies and practices.	4.15	Agree
There are opportunities for teachers to participate in decision-making processes related to equity.	4.19	Agree
Leadership frequently evaluates and adjusts school practices to promote equity and inclusion.	4.31	Agree
I believe that the actions of school leadership align with the stated goals of creating an inclusive school environment.	4.31	Agree
Leadership provides effective support and guidance for addressing inequities observed in the classroom.	4.19	Agree
General Weighted Mean	4.16	Agree

Scale	Mean Range	Verbal Interpretation
5	4.51 - 5.00	Strongly Agree
4	3.51 - 4.50	Agree
3	2.51 - 3.50	Moderately Agree
2	1.51 - 2.50	Slightly Agree
1	1.00 - 1.50	Disagree

DISCUSSION

The survey conducted by the selected participant group of 27 teachers from Bayugan II National High School helped get basic information about the demographic characteristics of teachers and teachers' perception of equity in the school environment for the learners. In terms of the gender distribution of the respondents, the study reveals that the majority of the teachers are females, in a ratio of 21: 5 which translates to 80.8% and 19.2% respectively. This imbalance might also skew the school's culture and perceptions regarding equity, along with the way the staff handles relationships, knowing that a female-focused school is likely to reopen the question for consideration of a different set of relations and values. Knowledge of this gender dynamic is crucial to enable leadership to facilitate gender equity in the school by modifying strategies.

Teaching human capital's age distribution also shows that the workforce is relatively young, 585 (53.8%) teachers being aged 26-33 years. It can be inferred that majority of the teachers may be in their early to middle age, this might explain the high level of innovative and flexible modal in arriving at solutions to teaching challenges and inclusiveness. On a positive note, there are many teachers in the age group of 34 to 42 years (30.8%) and above 43 years (15.4%). This is very important when beginning discussions around equity and embracing inclusiveness as the youth can challenge the ideas of more experienced members, on the other hand, the experienced members can teach and impart their experience to the young members. Leadership can use this mix by

promoting the assignment of young and experienced practitioners to work together on projects.

This is evident through the specific years of service whereby a considerable proportion of the teachers render considerable years of service. A little above half of the sampled teachers (46.2%) have served for 6-10 years, while 30.8% have served in education for over 10 years. This experience can be of great use in cultivating a common understanding of school equity and inclusion since these teachers may have observed and worked through different educational policies and changes over the years of their practice. On the other hand, the less numerous groups of teachers with 1-2 yrs of experience (11.5%) and 3-5 yrs of experience, (11.5%) may offer new analysis, but they may not have the rich experience that will help to develop fair practices.

The survey results embodied in Table 2 depict teachers' management of leadership for equity and inclusiveness at Bayugan II National High School. In short, the total general weighted mean of 4.16 means that all the teachers responded positively to the effects of school leadership on such vital areas. One of the most significant components of the data is that teachers receive feedback that school leaders promote equity and inclusive leadership with a weighted mean of 4.38. This high score indicates that the principal is effective in clarifying goals concerning equity and the staff recognizes and endorse them. Getting one's vision well defined can make it act like a framework upon which teachers and the school community at large work towards the achievement of its goals. Teachers also had a positive attitude toward the principal regarding efforts toward equity with a mean score of 4.15. This supports the view that leadership not only acknowledges such injustices but is also keen on identifying ways of reducing them. It takes such commitment to make teachers trust and confident in engaging actively in equity-focused initiatives.

Create conversation on diversity and inclusion is another sub-construct which has scored higher with a mean of 4.35 showing that leadership is perceived higher in this area where constant discussions are held. This raises the belief that school leaders promote free and open communication in order to create a voice where the teachers are able to disclose information as well as ideas and questions. That value and measures for their implementation reveal the necessity of the combined actions taken by experts to manage the deficit of the inclusive environment: teacher input as well as their proposals can become more successful and functional than the existing policies. The mean score obtained for the statement about the teachers' acknowledgment about the equity concerns was 3.96, and therefore, it can also be interpreted as a slightly lower level of endorsement of this statement. Although this score reflects the opinion that teachers' concern is acknowledged, the score indicates that NWA might still need some improvement to make all voices count. Further development of this aspect may improve teachers' perceptions of control and ownership over equity endeavors. Regarding the provision of appropriate resources to enhance the teaching in line with the inclusive education mean, the results yielded 4.08 which shows that the teachers feel prepared to enhance the provision of the teaching in line with the needs of inclusive education. Together with the mean of 4.19 for the improvement of these strategies, a feeling of support when implementing the mentioned strategies means that leadership greatly

assists in providing such tools and support which is essential for effective teaching in multicultural environments.

Policies against employment discrimination had a mean reaction of 4.15; this shows that teachers understand the directions given by leadership on the issues of discrimination. It would be useful to shed light on it to promote safety and fairness in the environment. Nonetheless, there is a slightly lower mean of 3.77 for the professional development related to equity and inclusion, which indicates that such training is still limited. Possible expansion of frequency and relevance of such professional development sessions can enhance the teachers' practice to an even greater extent. Understanding leadership culture: As for understanding leadership culture, the results of the mean score of 4.27 suggest that the interpersonal climate is quite mature in terms of mutual respect. Such a culture provides a basis for practicing inclusiveness because individuals are willing to work with one another and address issues. Leadership's efforts in eradicating biases and implementing equity policies/discriminations got high scores of 4.15 and 4.15 respectively by the teachers. The scores on decision-making opportunities (4.19) and the assessment of school practices (4.31) indicate that leadership values teacher input and is dedicated to continuous operation assessment of the effects of their policies. It also exemplifies responsiveness that not only reinforces teachers' commitment to the school's equity goals but also guarantees that the utilized strategies fit and produce the desired results.

Conclusions

The following findings of this study respond to the research questions posed in this study concerning equity and inclusiveness in leadership. The level of specification of equity in visions outlined by the school leadership has a considerable impact on the role teachers perceive themselves as having in cultivating equity. Thus, the principal making formal and positional commitment to equal opportunity and equity in the school creates a social climate that encourages teachers to participate in diversity and inclusion discussions. Moreover, the teachers' attitude in terms of resources signaled by the respondents is generally positive when it comes to the matter of integration of the strategies and tools for inclusive teaching practices. This study also reveals how teachers feel that their concerns about equity are out heard but there is still some scope in leadership's action. Additionally, the issue of discrimination policies and, in particular, aversive tolerance, when leadership sets the example, is strong for mutual respect within the school. Teachers also feel they have a say especially concerning equity showing that the leadership allows them to be part of the decision-making process. In general, the study establishes the necessity of school leaders in the development of an effective and welcoming learning environment and highlights improvement recommendations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the current study, the following suggestions may be useful to improve leadership effectiveness for equity and inclusiveness in schools. First, there is a need for school leaders to work on the enhancement and deployment of school-specific professional learning opportunities related to equity and access so that the teachers can

be well-prepared. Furthermore, establishing the habits of engager feedback can ensure that equity concerns raised by the teachers can be cascaded and dealt with, improving the teachers' perceived sense of power. Further research is also needed to confirm these assumptions in other learning environments, using larger and more diverse samples to study the flexibility of the teachers' perceptions depending on context. Another relevant method of research that seems to be promising is longitudinal research since it is timely to understand how perceptions change as leadership practices and policies are adopted. However, quantitative tools like self-completed surveys or questionnaires might provide further details about the problems and accomplishments teachers encounter in equity-related concerns. Moreover, comparing students' and parents' experiences with teachers' views on school leadership may give a broader view of the school climate for equity and inclusion. Addressing these areas will help educational institutions to go further with their efforts in promoting equitable learning environments.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The researcher of this study confirms their adherence to the principles of ethical practices in the course of conducting the research. All respondents agreed to participate in the study and consent was sought before engaging them with a complete understanding of the research objective and method. The respondents were also told that they could decide to pull out of the study at any point but without any repercussions. These measures ensured that all the participants remained anonymous, thus ensuring confidentiality was observed. In addition, the respondents' health was considered by following strict standard operating procedures that enhanced their comfort during data collection. The researchers would like to state that there is no conflict of interest in the performance of this research as well as in arriving at this conclusion; every result was analyzed without prejudice. The policy concerning plagiarism was adhered to, and proper citation was done to all the resources that were used in the research. In conclusion, the outcome of this study was

used for research as well as informative purposes concerning equity and inclusiveness in the learning institute.

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