

Inclusivity and Leadership Styles in Basic Education among Teachers in the Schools Division of Surigao City

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Page | 111

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Abstract

This study examined the extent of inclusivity implemented in basic education and the leadership styles of teachers that support inclusive practice in the Schools Division of Surigao City. Anchored on Leadership Styles Theory and inclusive education frameworks, the study used a descriptive-correlational design involving 283 elementary and secondary school teachers selected through stratified random sampling from schools implementing Special Needs Education, Indigenous Peoples Education, Madrasah Education, and Alternative Learning programs. Data were gathered through a validated researcher-made questionnaire with strong reliability coefficients for leadership styles (Cronbach's alpha = 0.91) and inclusivity factors (Cronbach's alpha = 0.89). Results showed that inclusivity was highly implemented overall ($M = 3.54$), with institutional policies rated highest ($M = 3.66$) and resource availability lowest but still highly implemented ($M = 3.33$). Teachers' leadership styles were generally highly supportive ($M = 3.64$), with transformational leadership obtaining the highest mean ($M = 3.73$), followed by servant, participative, distributed, transactional, and autocratic leadership. Leadership styles generally did not significantly differ across most profile variables, except distributed leadership by socioeconomic status and autocratic leadership by years of experience. All leadership styles showed significant positive relationships with the inclusivity dimensions, indicating that teacher leadership is a practical mechanism for strengthening inclusive education. The study concludes that inclusivity in Surigao City basic education is supported by both institutional systems and teacher-led classroom practices, but improvement is still needed in resources, culturally responsive support, and professional leadership development.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Leadership Styles, Teacher Leadership, Basic Education, Surigao City, Philippines

1. Introduction

Inclusive education has become a central obligation of contemporary basic education systems because it requires schools to provide equitable access, meaningful participation, and quality learning for all learners, including those who differ in ability, language, culture, socioeconomic condition, gender, and life circumstance. The global commitment to inclusive and equitable quality education is articulated in Sustainable Development Goal 4, while the broader inclusive education literature emphasizes that inclusion requires both access and participation within ordinary school communities (United Nations, 2015; UNESCO, 2020; Ainscow, 2020). In this sense, inclusion is not limited to placing learners in classrooms; it requires the school system to remove barriers, adjust instruction, and create a culture in which diversity is recognized as part of normal schooling.

In the Philippine basic education context, inclusive education is reinforced by national policy directions that require schools to identify and support learners who are at risk of exclusion. DepEd Order No. 23, s. 2022 institutionalizes the Child Find Policy for Learners with Disabilities and emphasizes systematic identification, assessment, and access to appropriate learning support (Department of Education, 2022). This policy direction is relevant to Surigao City because schools serve learners from diverse cultural and social groups, including Surigaonon learners, Muslim learners, Indigenous Peoples, learners with disabilities, and learners from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The local diversity of schools requires leadership practices that are both administratively responsive and pedagogically inclusive.

The rationale for this study is grounded in the role of teachers as classroom leaders. While many studies on inclusive education emphasize the role of school administrators, the daily implementation of inclusion occurs primarily through teachers' decisions, interactions, instructional adaptations, classroom rules, and assessment practices. Teachers exercise leadership when they motivate learners, serve learner needs, distribute responsibility, invite participation, maintain order, and provide feedback. These leadership behaviors may support or constrain inclusive practice. Thus, understanding teachers' leadership styles offers a practical way to examine how inclusion is enacted in basic education classrooms.

The research gap addressed in this study concerns the limited local evidence on how teacher leadership styles are associated with the implementation of inclusivity in basic education. Existing literature recognizes the importance of transformational, servant, distributed, participative, autocratic, and transactional leadership, but fewer studies examine these styles from the standpoint of teachers rather than principals, particularly in Philippine division-level contexts. In Surigao City, where schools implement multiple inclusion-related programs, localized evidence is needed to identify which leadership behaviors are most supportive of institutional policies, resource availability, staff training, community involvement, and student participation.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Leadership Styles Theory, which explains how recurring leadership behaviors shape relationships, decision-making, participation, performance, and organizational outcomes. The classic work of Lewin et al. (1939) identified autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leadership, while later theories expanded the discussion to transformational, transactional, servant, distributed, and participative leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Greenleaf, 1977; Northouse, 2022; Spillane, 2006; Somech, 2010). Within inclusive education, leadership styles matter because they affect how teachers build classroom belonging, involve learners, respond to diversity, support participation, and maintain productive learning environments.

The framework also draws from inclusive education scholarship which views inclusion as a systemic and participatory process. Ainscow (2020) argues that inclusive education requires the identification and removal of barriers to presence, participation, and achievement, while Messiou (2017) emphasizes the importance of learners' voices in inclusion. These perspectives support the study's focus on institutional policies, resource availability, staff training, community involvement, and student participation as operational indicators of inclusivity in basic education.

Conceptual Framework

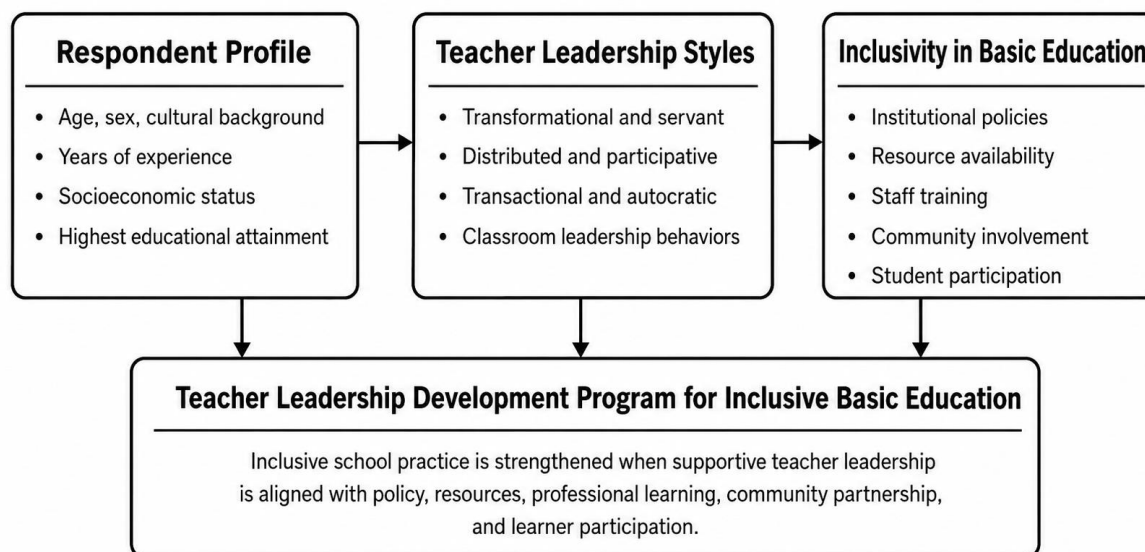


Figure note. Leadership Styles Theory frames teacher leadership as a practical mechanism for advancing inclusive education.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the study, showing how respondent profile, teacher leadership styles, and inclusivity in basic education collectively inform the proposed teacher leadership development program for inclusive basic education. The framework begins with the respondent profile, which includes age, sex, cultural background, years of experience, socioeconomic status, and highest educational attainment. These variables provide the background conditions that may influence how teachers understand, practice, and support inclusivity in the school setting.

The framework further identifies teacher leadership styles as the central mechanism through which inclusive education may be advanced. These styles include transformational and servant leadership, distributed and participative leadership, transactional and autocratic leadership, and classroom leadership behaviors. The arrow from respondent profile to teacher leadership styles indicates that teachers' demographic and professional backgrounds may shape their preferred leadership approaches and how these are enacted in classroom and school-based practices.

The third component of the framework is inclusivity in basic education, represented by institutional policies, resource availability, staff training, community involvement, and student participation. The arrow from teacher leadership styles to inclusivity suggests that teachers' leadership behaviors can support or strengthen inclusive practices. For example, collaborative and participative leadership may promote shared responsibility for inclusion, while transformational and servant leadership may foster empathy, learner support, and respect for diversity.

The lower box presents the expected output of the study: a **Teacher Leadership Development Program for Inclusive Basic Education**. The downward arrows from respondent profile, teacher leadership styles, and inclusivity indicate that all three components contribute to the proposed program. The program is grounded on the assumption that inclusive school practice becomes stronger when teacher leadership is aligned with policy implementation, adequate resources, professional learning, community partnership, and active learner participation.

Overall, Figure 1 illustrates that inclusivity in basic education is not achieved through policy alone. It is shaped by the interaction of teacher characteristics, leadership behaviors, institutional support, and learner-centered inclusive practices. The framework therefore positions teacher leadership as a practical mechanism for advancing inclusive education in the Schools Division of Surigao City.

Aim of the Study

The study aimed to determine the extent of inclusivity implemented in basic education and to examine the leadership styles of teachers that support inclusive practice in the Schools Division of Surigao City.

Statement of the Problem

1. What is the socio-demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, cultural background, level of experience, socioeconomic status, and highest educational attainment?
2. To what extent is inclusivity implemented in basic education in terms of institutional policies, resource availability, staff training, community involvement, and student participation?
3. What are the leadership styles of teachers that support the implementation of inclusivity in terms of transformational, servant, distributed, participative, autocratic, and transactional leadership?
4. Is there a significant difference in leadership styles when grouped according to profile variables?
5. Is there a significant correlation between the implementation of leadership styles and the extent of inclusivity implemented in basic education?

Hypotheses

- H01: There is no significant difference in leadership styles when grouped according to profile variables.
- H02: There is no significant correlation between the implementation of leadership styles and the extent of inclusivity implemented in basic education.

2. Literature Review

The literature on inclusive education consistently shows that inclusion is a systemic process that requires policy commitment, teacher capacity, learner participation, and school-community collaboration. UNESCO (2020) emphasized that inclusion must address all forms of exclusion and must consider the social, cultural, and institutional barriers that prevent learners from participating fully in school life. Ainscow (2020) similarly argued that inclusion requires schools to search for and remove barriers through continuous inquiry and collaborative improvement. These perspectives directly support the present study because the implementation of inclusivity in Surigao City was examined not through a single indicator but through institutional policies, resources, training, community involvement, and learner participation.

Institutional policy provides the formal basis for inclusion, but policy alone is insufficient without classroom-level enactment. Department of Education policy on child finding and learners with disabilities provides schools with a mechanism to identify and support learners who may otherwise be excluded (Department of Education, 2022). However, the effectiveness of such policy depends on how teachers interpret and apply inclusion in everyday instruction. This links the present study to teacher leadership because teachers are the closest implementers of inclusive policy. Their leadership styles can either make policy visible in the classroom or reduce it to documentary compliance.

Resource availability remains a recurring issue in inclusive education. Inclusive schools require accessible classrooms, adapted materials, assistive technologies, differentiated resources, and reference materials that help teachers respond to diverse needs. Ainscow (2020) and Van Miegheem et al. (2020) both point to contextual support and teacher preparation as conditions that influence the successful implementation of inclusion. This is important to the present study because resource availability obtained the lowest mean among inclusivity

dimensions, suggesting that Surigao City schools may have strong inclusive intentions and policies but still require additional material and infrastructural support.

Teacher professional development is also central to inclusion. Van Miegheem et al. (2020) concluded that teacher attitudes, preparation, and continuing professional development influence inclusive practice. Professional learning helps teachers move from general acceptance of diversity to concrete strategies such as differentiated instruction, classroom adaptation, collaboration with specialists, and learner-centered assessment. This supports the study's staff training dimension and explains why leadership cannot be separated from professional preparation. Teachers who are trained for inclusion are more capable of exercising leadership that is responsive rather than merely managerial.

Leadership theory further clarifies how teacher behavior affects inclusion. Transformational leadership promotes shared vision, encouragement, and intellectual stimulation, which can motivate learners and colleagues toward inclusive goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Servant leadership emphasizes care, listening, empathy, and learner growth, making it compatible with the ethical foundation of inclusion (Greenleaf, 1977). Distributed and participative leadership stress shared responsibility and collective decision-making, which are useful in schools where inclusion requires collaboration among teachers, parents, administrators, and communities (Spillane, 2006; Somech, 2010). Transactional leadership may support order, accountability, and feedback, while autocratic leadership may have limited situational value but must be balanced to avoid suppressing learner voice and participation (Northouse, 2022).

The synthesis of these sources suggests that inclusive education is most effective when leadership is supportive, collaborative, ethically grounded, and responsive to learner diversity. However, literature also shows that teacher leadership in inclusive education remains less studied than administrative leadership. The present study addresses this gap by examining teachers' leadership styles and their statistical relationship with inclusivity factors in the Schools Division of Surigao City. In doing so, it contributes localized empirical evidence on how teacher leadership may strengthen inclusive basic education.

3. Methodology

The study used a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design. This design was appropriate because the study described the socio-demographic profile of respondents, the extent of inclusivity implementation, and the leadership styles of teachers, while also examining relationships between leadership styles and inclusivity factors. The design was non-experimental; no variable was manipulated, and the study relied on observed perceptions gathered from teacher respondents.

The respondents were 283 elementary and secondary school teachers from the Schools Division of Surigao City. They were selected through stratified random sampling from schools implementing inclusion-related programs, including Special Needs Education, Indigenous Peoples Education, Madrasah Education, and Alternative Learning programs. The total population was 1,067 teachers, and the sample size of 283 was computed using the Raosoft sampling calculator at a 5% margin of error, 95% confidence level, and 50% response distribution.

The research locale consisted of 34 elementary and secondary schools in the Schools Division of Surigao City. These schools serve learners from diverse cultural, socioeconomic, linguistic, and learning backgrounds and were therefore appropriate for examining inclusivity in basic education. The study included schools with Special Needs Education, Indigenous Peoples Education, Madrasah Education, and related inclusive education programs.

Data were gathered using a researcher-developed survey questionnaire. Part 1 collected respondent profile data, while Part 2 measured inclusivity implementation in terms of institutional policies, resource availability, staff training, community involvement, and student participation. Another section measured leadership styles in terms of transformational, servant, distributed, participative, autocratic, and transactional leadership. Responses were

interpreted using a four-point Likert scale. The instrument was validated by experts and pilot-tested among 30 non-respondents. Reliability testing produced Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.91 for leadership styles and 0.89 for inclusivity factors, indicating excellent and good internal consistency, respectively.

The data were analyzed using frequency count and percentage for respondent profile, weighted mean and standard deviation for inclusivity and leadership indicators, t-test and one-way ANOVA for differences across profile variables, and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient for relationships between leadership styles and inclusivity factors. Ethical safeguards were observed, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, privacy, and secure handling of data.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Dominant Profile Characteristics of Respondents (n = 283)

Profile Category	f	%
Age: 40-49 years old	100	35.34%
Sex: Female	211	74.56%
Cultural background: Surigaonon	256	90.46%
Years of experience: 10-19 years	101	35.69%
Socioeconomic status: Middle	157	55.48%
Highest educational attainment: Undergraduate degree	145	51.24%

Table 1 shows that the respondents were predominantly female, Surigaonon, middle-class, and mid-career teachers, with the largest age group belonging to 40-49 years old. The profile indicates that inclusive education in Surigao City is implemented largely by experienced classroom practitioners. This matters because teacher leadership in inclusion is shaped by professional maturity, accumulated classroom knowledge, and exposure to changing DepEd policies. However, the limited representation of Muslim and Indigenous Peoples teachers also suggests a need for more culturally diverse teacher recruitment and support.

Table 2. Summary of Inclusivity Implemented in Basic Education

Inclusivity Dimension	M	SD	VI	QD
Institutional Policies	3.66	0.40	Strongly Agree	Highly Implemented
Resource Availability	3.33	0.59	Strongly Agree	Highly Implemented
Staff Training	3.53	0.47	Strongly Agree	Highly Implemented
Community Involvement	3.55	0.48	Strongly Agree	Highly Implemented
Student Participation	3.65	0.43	Strongly Agree	Highly Implemented
Overall	3.54	0.47	Strongly Agree	Highly Implemented

Table 2 indicates that inclusivity was highly implemented overall ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.47$). Institutional policies obtained the highest mean, suggesting that schools had visible policy commitments to equality, non-discrimination, respect for diversity, and learner-centered decision-making. Student participation also received a high rating, showing that learners were encouraged to express opinions, participate in activities, collaborate with peers, and advocate respect. Resource availability, while still highly implemented, received the lowest mean, indicating that materials, assistive technologies, classroom facilities, and individualized support remain priority areas for improvement.

Table 3. Summary of Teachers' Leadership Styles Supporting Inclusivity

Leadership Style	M	SD	VI	QD
Transformational Leadership	3.73	0.34	Strongly Agree	Very Influential
Servant Leadership	3.69	0.36	Strongly Agree	Very Influential
Distributed Leadership	3.59	0.42	Strongly Agree	Very Influential
Participative Leadership	3.61	0.42	Strongly Agree	Very Influential
Autocratic Leadership	2.63	0.81	Agree	Moderately Influential
Transactional Leadership	3.57	0.41	Strongly Agree	Very Influential
Overall	3.64	0.46	Strongly Agree	Very Influential

Page | 117

Table 3 shows that teacher leadership styles were generally very influential in supporting inclusive education. Transformational leadership obtained the highest mean ($M = 3.73$), indicating that teachers strongly perceived themselves as motivating learners, showing concern for personal growth, encouraging creativity, and modeling commitment. Servant leadership also obtained a high mean, showing that respect, listening, care, and community-building were central to classroom leadership. Autocratic leadership was lower and only moderately influential, suggesting that teacher leadership in Surigao City leans more toward supportive and participative approaches than command-oriented control.

Table 4. Significant Differences/Associations in Leadership Styles by Profile Variables

Tested Relationship	Statistic	p-value	Decision
Distributed leadership by socioeconomic status	$r = -0.15$	$p = 0.010$	Significant
Autocratic leadership by years of experience	$r = -0.14$	$p = 0.023$	Significant
All other leadership style-profile pairings	varied	$p > 0.05$	Not significant

Table 4 shows that most leadership styles did not significantly differ when grouped according to age, sex, cultural background, years of experience, socioeconomic status, and highest educational attainment. The exceptions were distributed leadership by socioeconomic status and autocratic leadership by years of experience. This means that teacher leadership practices are generally not determined by demographic identity alone; rather, they may be shaped by school culture, professional expectations, and institutional systems. The significant association involving autocratic leadership and experience suggests that classroom control practices may vary across career stages.

Table 5. Summary of Relationships between Leadership Styles and Inclusivity Factors

Leadership Style	Range of r-values	Significance	Notable Result
Transformational	0.14 to 0.50	All significant	Strongest with student participation ($r = 0.50$)
Servant	0.20 to 0.52	All significant	Strongest with institutional policies and student participation ($r = 0.52$)
Distributed	0.13 to 0.46	All significant	Strongest with student participation ($r = 0.46$)
Participative	0.21 to 0.50	All significant	Strongest with student participation ($r = 0.50$)
Autocratic	0.15 to 0.24	All significant	Weak positive relationships
Transactional	0.46 to 0.65	All significant	Strongest with student participation ($r = 0.65$)

Table 5 shows that all leadership styles were significantly related to inclusivity factors. Transactional leadership showed the strongest relationship with student participation ($r = 0.65$), suggesting that clear expectations, feedback, reinforcement, and classroom structure may help learners participate consistently. Servant and transformational leadership were also strongly linked to institutional policies and student participation, confirming that care, motivation, respect, and individualized support are important leadership behaviors for inclusion. Autocratic leadership showed weaker but still significant relationships, suggesting that structure and authority may



have a limited supportive role when used responsibly, but they are not the primary leadership pathway for inclusive practice.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Page | 118

The study concludes that inclusivity in basic education among teachers in the Schools Division of Surigao City is highly implemented and is strongly supported by teacher leadership styles. Institutional policies, student participation, community involvement, and staff training appear as strengths of the local inclusive education environment, while resource availability remains the most urgent area for strengthening. Teachers generally demonstrate leadership practices that are supportive of inclusion, particularly transformational and servant leadership, while autocratic leadership is less dominant. The significant relationships between leadership styles and inclusivity factors confirm that teacher leadership is not merely a classroom management concern but a key mechanism through which inclusive education becomes operational in everyday school practice.

It is recommended that the Schools Division of Surigao City strengthen teacher leadership development programs focused on transformational, servant, participative, and distributed leadership for inclusive classrooms. Professional development should include inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, learner voice, culturally responsive teaching, and support for learners with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples learners, Muslim learners, and other marginalized groups. The division and schools should also prioritize resource allocation for assistive technologies, inclusive learning materials, accessible facilities, and specialist support. Recruitment and professional development policies may further encourage cultural diversity among teachers. Future studies may include learners, parents, school heads, and community partners to provide a broader understanding of inclusive education implementation.

Declarations

Funding

The authors received no specific grant from any public, commercial, or not-for-profit funding agency for this study.

CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement

Nellie Poliquit Ruaya contributed to conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, and original draft preparation. Manuel B. Dayondon contributed to supervision, validation, review, editing, and scholarly guidance.

Ethical Statement The study followed ethical research procedures, including permission from relevant school authorities, informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and secure handling of data.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare no known competing financial or personal interests that could have influenced the conduct or reporting of the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings are available from the corresponding study records upon reasonable request and subject to applicable ethical and privacy restrictions.

AI Usage Disclosure

Generative AI assistance was used for language refinement, structure improvement, formatting, and manuscript preparation. The authors remain responsible for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.



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Page | 120

