

School Leadership and Gender Equality Implementation in Philippine Public Elementary Schools

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Abstract

This study explored how school heads' leadership practices influence the implementation of gender equality and inclusive education in public elementary schools in Glan I District, Sarangani Province. While efforts to promote gender equity in Philippine schools are ongoing, the role of school leadership in achieving this goal remains under-examined, especially in rural settings. The study aimed to assess the level of leadership practices demonstrated by school principals, evaluate the extent of gender equality implementation, and determine the relationship between the two.

Using a quantitative-correlational design, data were collected from selected school heads, teachers, and community stakeholders through validated survey questionnaires. The leadership practices were measured across three areas: transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership. Gender equality implementation was assessed based on enrolment parity, curriculum sensitivity, participation, school safety, and awareness.

Findings revealed that school principals displayed high levels of leadership across all three domains. Gender equality implementation was also rated highly, particularly in terms of student participation and enrolment. However, areas such as teacher training in gender sensitivity and regular awareness activities showed room for improvement. A significant positive relationship was found between leadership practices and gender equality outcomes, with distributed leadership showing the strongest link.

The study highlights the vital role of school heads in creating equitable and inclusive learning environments. Strengthening leadership development and gender-awareness efforts can further enhance the progress already seen in these schools.

Keywords: leadership practices; gender equality; inclusive education; public schools; rural Philippines

I. INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of gender equality in education remains a pressing global concern, particularly in rural and socio-economically disadvantaged regions. Despite efforts by governments and international organizations, disparities in access, participation,

and outcomes between genders continue to persist. Global frameworks such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 call for inclusive and equitable quality education for all. However, challenges rooted in deep-seated socio-cultural norms, gender-based violence, and economic inequality still hinder meaningful

progress. These issues are especially pronounced among marginalized populations who face multiple layers of disadvantage (UNESCO, 2020; UNICEF, 2021).

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has institutionalized the Gender and Development (GAD) framework to promote gender equity through inclusive curricula, training programs, and gender-responsive school policies. However, while the policy framework is in place, implementation is often inconsistent across regions, particularly in rural areas such as Sarangani Province. Here, children face barriers including early marriage, gender-based harassment, limited access to basic resources, and cultural norms that often prioritize boys' education over girls' or vice versa. These issues are especially evident in schools within the Glan 1 District, where a significant portion of the population belongs to Indigenous Peoples (IP) communities. The intersection of poverty, tradition, and limited institutional support compounds the gender disparities in educational access, engagement, and achievement.

School leadership is a critical factor in creating and sustaining inclusive, equitable, and gender-responsive learning environments. Leadership models such as transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership have been associated with improvements in school climate, teacher motivation, and student outcomes. However, there is limited empirical research exploring how these leadership practices directly impact the implementation of gender equality, especially in rural Philippine school settings. Understanding this relationship is vital to informing policies and practices that are culturally relevant and context-specific.

Despite existing frameworks, gender equality in education remains elusive in many rural areas. The extent to which school leadership influences the successful implementation of gender-responsive policies is not fully understood, particularly in the context of Glan 1 District in Sarangani Province. This study aims to address the following specific problems:

1. What is the level of leadership practices exhibited by elementary school principals in Glan 1 District?
2. What is the level of implementation of gender equality in these schools?
3. Is there a significant relationship between school leadership practices and the implementation of gender equality?

This study seeks to assess the leadership practices of elementary school principals and examine how these practices relate to the implementation of gender equality in their respective schools. Specifically, it aims to:

- Evaluate the prevailing leadership practices among school heads in Glan 1 District.
- Assess the extent to which gender equality initiatives are implemented within schools.
- Determine whether a significant relationship exists between leadership approaches and gender equality outcomes.

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to the broader discourse on educational leadership and gender equality. It offers practical insights for policymakers, educators, and school leaders who are working toward inclusive and equitable learning environments in the Global South.

Review of Related Literature

Leadership Practices in the School Setting

Educational leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping inclusive, equitable, and effective learning environments. School leaders act not only as administrators but also as visionaries and catalysts for change, guiding the direction and culture of their institutions. Among the various leadership models, transformational leadership has been extensively recognized for its capacity to inspire and motivate individuals toward shared educational goals. According to Bass and Avolio (1994), transformational leaders are those who articulate a clear vision, stimulate innovation, and

recognize individual contributions. They model the behaviors they wish to see and foster an environment of trust, respect, and commitment. In educational settings, this form of leadership has been linked to higher teacher morale, stronger student engagement, and significant institutional changes (Berkovich & Eyal, 2021). These leaders foster a shared sense of purpose among school personnel, creating fertile ground for inclusive and gender-sensitive practices to take root.

Transformational leadership also encourages innovation and openness to new pedagogical strategies, which is crucial in responding to diverse learner needs. It supports a school culture where gender equality can flourish, as teachers feel empowered to address bias, challenge stereotypes, and adapt their instructional strategies to promote inclusiveness. This type of leadership is particularly valuable in environments where educators face deeply rooted socio-cultural norms that may hinder progressive educational reforms.

Complementing transformational leadership is the concept of instructional leadership, which places a stronger emphasis on the principal's role in supervising teaching and learning processes. Hallinger (2018) defined instructional leadership as a systematic approach involving curriculum alignment, classroom observation, instructional support, and the promotion of professional development opportunities for teachers. Instructional leaders focus on academic excellence by ensuring that teachers are equipped with the necessary tools and support to improve learning outcomes.

In rural and marginalized communities, such leadership is especially critical. Teachers in these contexts often deal with limited resources, large class sizes, and varying student backgrounds. Instructional leaders help bridge these gaps by guiding teachers in delivering gender-sensitive instruction and ensuring that equity is embedded in daily teaching practices (Garcia & De Vera, 2020). These leaders also promote the use of differentiated instruction and inclusive classroom management strategies that cater to the specific needs of learners, including girls, boys, and students from Indigenous or minority backgrounds.

Moreover, instructional leaders can drive initiatives aimed at reshaping the school curriculum to eliminate gender stereotypes, reinforce positive gender roles, and instill values of mutual respect. By prioritizing professional development on gender sensitivity, instructional leaders equip teachers to better address the needs of all learners and become advocates for equality within the classroom.

Meanwhile, distributed leadership has gained considerable traction in recent years as an alternative model that decentralizes authority and emphasizes collaboration. Unlike traditional hierarchical structures, distributed leadership empowers teachers, staff, and even students to co-lead initiatives and participate in decision-making processes. Spillane and Diamond (2017) asserted that distributed leadership fosters shared accountability, enhances professional trust, and promotes innovation within schools. Harris (2014) further emphasized that shared leadership leads to a more dynamic school culture where inclusive practices, such as gender-sensitive education, are more likely to be implemented effectively and sustainably.

In the Philippine context, Cabrera (2022) highlighted that distributed leadership is particularly effective in rural schools where resources are often limited, and community involvement is crucial. Through this model, school leaders can tap into the unique knowledge and strengths of their staff and community members. When teachers are given a voice in shaping school policies and initiatives, they become more committed to implementing gender-responsive practices. Furthermore, in settings where Indigenous traditions influence school operations, distributed leadership allows for culturally responsive approaches that align with local values while still promoting inclusivity.

Distributed leadership also supports capacity-building at all levels of the school. Teachers become change agents who can initiate and sustain gender-related programs, while students can be encouraged to take active roles in peer education and awareness campaigns. This collaborative culture contributes to a sense of ownership and collective responsibility for promoting gender equality.

Gender Equality Implementation in Basic Education

Achieving gender equality in education involves more than achieving numerical balance in enrollment rates. It requires the intentional dismantling of systemic barriers, the promotion of fairness, and the establishment of supportive environments for all learners, regardless of gender. According to UNESCO (2020), effective gender equality implementation in schools should be multidimensional. This includes reforming curricula to eliminate bias, providing equal opportunities for participation, training teachers in gender sensitivity, and enforcing policies that protect students from harassment and discrimination.

In the Philippine education system, the Department of Education (DepEd) has taken active steps to institutionalize gender equality through its Gender and Development (GAD) framework. This framework is reinforced by key policy issuances such as DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017 (Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy) and DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 (Child Protection Policy). These directives aim to embed gender responsiveness in school policies, learning materials, teaching strategies, and institutional practices.

Valencia (2017) found that while progress has been made in improving parity in enrollment between boys and girls, significant challenges remain in terms of retention and completion rates. These challenges are often influenced by cultural expectations, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, economic hardship, and gender-based violence. In rural and Indigenous communities, these factors are even more pronounced, requiring tailored interventions that respect local customs while advancing equality.

Teacher preparedness is another crucial issue. Many educators lack formal training in gender-sensitive pedagogy, making it difficult for them to identify and counteract gender bias in teaching and classroom interaction. David and Reyes (2020) noted that despite DepEd's continuous efforts to integrate gender sensitivity in teacher development programs, practical application in classrooms remains inconsistent,

particularly in remote schools where access to professional development is limited.

A study by Plan International (2020) further highlighted that school-based gender violence, though often underreported, continues to negatively impact students' sense of safety and academic performance. Female students, in particular, are vulnerable to verbal harassment, physical bullying, and discriminatory practices. The presence of strong leadership, effective reporting mechanisms, peer support networks, and community engagement were identified as key components in creating safe and inclusive learning environments.

Teachers and administrators who proactively implement gender-sensitive programs—such as gender-awareness campaigns, mentoring groups, and inclusive student organizations—can contribute significantly to a shift in school culture. These initiatives not only enhance awareness but also build resilience among students, promoting positive self-concepts and a deeper understanding of gender justice.

Leadership and Gender Equality: The Interconnection

Recent studies emphasize a strong link between effective school leadership and successful gender equality implementation. Northouse (2022) emphasized that leadership is fundamentally about influence—those in leadership roles shape not only policy but also the values, attitudes, and behaviors of the school community. Leaders who prioritize inclusivity and equality are more likely to foster an environment where equitable practices are actively pursued.

Transformational leaders, in particular, can motivate staff to reflect on their biases and adopt teaching methods that accommodate the diverse needs of learners. Through modeling inclusive behavior, recognizing teacher contributions, and promoting a shared vision, these leaders inspire their teams to embrace gender equality as a shared responsibility (Berkovich & Eyal, 2021). They also serve as champions for equity-focused initiatives, lobbying for resources, organizing community outreach, and encouraging open dialogue around gender issues.

Instructional leaders reinforce this by ensuring that teachers receive targeted training and feedback related to inclusive teaching. By embedding equity into teacher evaluation systems and curriculum planning, they institutionalize practices that prioritize fairness. Regular monitoring, classroom observations, and student performance data help identify areas of improvement, enabling timely interventions.

Distributed leadership enhances this framework by distributing responsibility and enabling broader participation. Reyes and Balanon (2022) documented that schools with well-established shared leadership structures are better equipped to implement and sustain gender-responsive programs. Even when financial or human resources are scarce, the collaborative nature of distributed leadership ensures that initiatives do not solely rely on one person. Instead, collective leadership helps integrate inclusive practices across departments and school functions.

Culturally responsive and community-oriented leadership also plays a significant role in addressing localized gender issues. In Indigenous communities, for example, school leaders who understand and respect local traditions while advocating for gender equality are more likely to gain community trust and foster sustainable change. They can build bridges between modern educational practices and traditional values, facilitating dialogue that respects both while advancing inclusivity.

In conclusion, leadership and gender equality are closely intertwined. Visionary, supportive, and collaborative leadership practices form the foundation of inclusive educational settings where both boys and girls can thrive. The integration of transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership models—adapted to the specific cultural and socioeconomic contexts of rural Philippine schools—offers a promising pathway toward achieving gender equality in basic education. These insights serve as a critical foundation for the present study, which seeks to explore how leadership practices influence the implementation of gender equality in elementary schools within Glan I District.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a **quantitative-correlational research design** to examine the relationship between school principals' leadership practices and the level of gender equality and inclusive education implementation in public elementary schools. The correlational method was deemed appropriate because it enables the researcher to determine whether, and to what extent, a relationship exists between two or more quantifiable variables without manipulating any of them. In this case, the focus was on identifying patterns and associations between leadership practices—such as transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership—and the effectiveness of gender equality and inclusive education initiatives within the school setting.

The choice of a quantitative-correlational design was further justified by the study's aim to gather empirical, measurable data that could be statistically analyzed. This approach allowed the researcher to examine not only the strength and direction of relationships between variables but also to explore the extent to which leadership practices can predict or influence the outcomes related to inclusive education and gender equality. By focusing on measurable indicators, the study sought to provide a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of the interplay between leadership and equity in educational contexts, particularly in rural and culturally diverse communities.

The research was conducted in **Glan I District**, a geographically and culturally diverse area located in the municipality of Glan, Sarangani Province, in the southern Philippines. The district includes a range of schools situated in highland, lowland, and coastal zones, with a significant number serving Indigenous Peoples (IP) communities and other marginalized sectors. This diversity provided a rich context for studying how leadership strategies are operationalized in real-world school environments facing economic constraints, cultural diversity, and geographic isolation. These conditions made Glan I District an ideal setting for examining how educational leadership intersects with issues of equity, access, inclusion, and cultural sensitivity.

The participants in this study consisted of **school principals, teachers, and Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) presidents** from selected public elementary schools within the Glan I District. A **purposive sampling** technique was employed to identify respondents who were directly involved in leadership, teaching, or community engagement within their respective schools. This sampling method was chosen to ensure that data were collected from individuals with firsthand experience and influence over the leadership and implementation of gender equality and inclusive education practices. The inclusion of multiple stakeholder perspectives enriched the data and allowed for a more holistic analysis of how leadership practices impact school inclusivity and gender responsiveness.

To gather the necessary information, a **researcher-made questionnaire** was developed. The instrument was carefully designed to address the three key components of the study. The first part assessed leadership practices, specifically focusing on transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership models. Respondents were asked to rate statements related to vision-setting, instructional supervision, shared leadership, and collaborative decision-making. The second part of the questionnaire measured the level of gender equality implementation in schools. This included indicators such as gender balance in enrolment and participation, integration of gender-sensitive content in the curriculum, student safety, and the presence of awareness programs and anti-discrimination measures. The third section of the instrument evaluated inclusive education practices, such as access to learning opportunities for all students, teacher preparedness and training in inclusive strategies, and family and community engagement in supporting diverse learners.

The questionnaire underwent **expert validation** to ensure that it was aligned with educational leadership principles, gender equality standards, and inclusive education frameworks. Experts in the fields of education, gender studies, and research methodology were consulted to review and critique the content, structure, and clarity of the instrument. Based on their feedback, revisions were made to improve its accuracy and relevance. To

further establish reliability, the instrument was **pilot-tested** in a neighboring school district with similar demographic and geographic characteristics. The pilot test helped identify ambiguities and refine items for better comprehension and consistency in responses.

The actual data collection was conducted with the full cooperation of the **Schools Division Office of Sarangani Province**. Formal letters of permission were submitted to the division and to the school heads of participating institutions. Upon approval, coordination with school principals was carried out to schedule convenient times for data distribution and collection. The researcher ensured that all participants were **informed about the purpose of the study**, their rights as respondents, and the voluntary nature of their participation. **Informed consent** forms were provided and signed prior to the administration of the survey.

Depending on the location and accessibility of the schools, questionnaires were distributed **either in person or electronically**. Remote schools received digital copies through email or messaging platforms, while more accessible schools received printed forms. Participants were given ample time to answer the items thoughtfully and at their convenience. The researcher made follow-up visits or calls to ensure a good response rate and to provide clarification if necessary. Efforts were made to maintain minimal disruption to the school's daily operations during the data gathering phase.

Once all responses were collected, the data were carefully **encoded, tallied, and processed** using appropriate statistical tools. Descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation, were computed to summarize the responses and determine the prevailing level of leadership practices and gender equality implementation in the schools surveyed. These measures provided a baseline understanding of the current state of leadership and inclusivity in the target district.

To examine the relationships between the key variables, the **Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient** was used. This statistical technique measured the strength and direction of the relationship between leadership practices and gender equality implementation. Additionally,

regression analysis was conducted to explore the predictive value of the different leadership models on the implementation of inclusive education practices. The use of these inferential statistics enabled the researcher to test the study’s hypotheses and draw evidence-based conclusions about the role of school leadership in fostering inclusive and gender-equitable educational environments.

Throughout the research process, **ethical considerations** were strictly observed. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were maintained at all times. Respondents were assured that their answers would be used solely for academic purposes and that no personal identifiers would be disclosed in any report or publication. Data were stored securely and access was restricted to the researcher only. All responses were reported in aggregate form to prevent any potential identification of individual schools or respondents.

In addition, the researcher upheld principles of **honesty, transparency, and academic integrity** during data analysis and interpretation. No manipulation or alteration of responses was performed to fit any preconceived outcome. The findings were presented as accurately as possible to reflect the true insights and experiences of the participants.

In summary, the research methodology adopted in this study combined **rigorous quantitative techniques** with ethical and context-sensitive procedures to ensure the reliability, validity, and credibility of the findings. By carefully designing the instrument, selecting informed participants, and applying appropriate statistical analyses, the study was able to investigate the complex dynamics between school leadership and the implementation of gender equality and inclusive education in the culturally diverse and economically challenged setting of Glan I District.

III.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Level of School Leadership Practices

Table 1

Indicators	Mean Ratings	SD	Qualitative Description
1. The school principal/school head effectively communicates a clear vision that inspires staff and students.	4.61	0.63	Highly Evident
2. The school principal/school head encourages innovation and creativity among teachers and students.	4.53	0.68	Highly Evident
3. The school principal/school head fosters a sense of community and belonging within the school.	4.53	0.69	Highly Evident
4. The school principal/school head recognizes and celebrates the achievements of both teachers and students.	4.56	0.68	Highly Evident
5. The school principal/school head motivates staff to exceed their usual performance levels.	4.52	0.64	Highly Evident
Mean	4.55	0.59	Highly Evident

Table 1 shows that **transformational leadership practices** among school heads in Glan I District are highly evident, with an overall mean of 4.55. The highest-rated indicator was the ability to communicate a clear vision (M = 4.61), emphasizing principals’ strength in inspiring and aligning their teams—consistent with Bass and Avolio’s (1994) concept of inspirational motivation.

Other indicators such as recognizing achievements, fostering community, and encouraging innovation also received strong ratings, highlighting the principals’ consistent use of core transformational behaviours (Northouse, 2022). The slightly lower but still high score in motivating staff to exceed expectations suggests an area for potential improvement in performance empowerment.

Overall, the data supports prior findings that transformational leadership contributes to positive school culture and inclusive practices, especially in rural contexts (Hallinger, 2011; Berkovich & Eyal, 2021).

Table 2

Indicators	Mean Ratings	SD	Qualitative Description
1. The school principal/school head provides guidance on curriculum development to meet student needs.	4.59	0.65	Highly Evident
2. The school principal/school head regularly observes classroom teaching and provides constructive feedback.	4.39	0.77	Highly Evident
3. The school principal/school head ensures that teachers have access to professional development opportunities.	4.6	0.63	Highly Evident
4. The school principal/school head actively supports teachers in implementing effective instructional strategies.	4.56	0.65	Highly Evident
5. The school principal/school head aligns school resources with instructional priorities to enhance learning outcomes.	4.54	0.66	Highly Evident
TOTAL	4.54	0.60	Highly Evident

Table 2 shows that **instructional leadership practices** are highly evident among school heads in Glan I District, with an overall mean of 4.54. The highest-rated item was ensuring access to professional development opportunities (M = 4.60), underscoring the principals’ role in supporting teacher growth—a key function of effective instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2018).

While all indicators were rated highly, the lowest score was for classroom observation and feedback (M = 4.39), suggesting a need to strengthen ongoing supervision practices. This is consistent with research emphasizing that regular feedback improves teaching quality and student outcomes (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Overall, these findings affirm that school heads actively support instructional planning, teacher development, and resource alignment—key elements for enhancing learning, especially in rural schools.

Table 3

Indicators	Mean Ratings	SD	Qualitative Description
1. The school principal/school head encourages teachers to take on leadership roles within the school.	4.58	0.64	Highly Evident
2. Decision-making is shared among teachers, staff, and the school principal/school head.	4.48	0.70	Highly Evident
3. The school principal/school head supports collaborative efforts among teachers to improve school practices.	4.51	0.71	Highly Evident
4. The school principal involves teachers in the planning and implementation of school activities.	4.49	0.68	Highly Evident
5. The school principal/school head creates an environment where staff feel empowered to make decisions.	4.34	0.74	Highly Evident
Mean	4.48	0.60	Highly Evident

Table 3 reveals that **distributed leadership practices** among school heads in Glan I District are highly evident, with an overall mean of 4.48. The highest-rated indicator was encouraging teachers to take on leadership roles (M = 4.58), reflecting principals’ efforts to empower teachers—a hallmark of distributed leadership (Spillane & Diamond, 2017).

Slightly lower ratings were observed in creating an environment where staff feel empowered to make decisions (M = 4.34), suggesting room to strengthen trust and autonomy among school personnel. Nonetheless, the consistent high ratings indicate that school heads value shared decision-making and foster collaboration in school planning and improvement efforts.

These findings align with studies highlighting distributed leadership as a driver of collective ownership and innovation in schools (Harris, 2014), particularly effective in rural contexts where team-based leadership is essential.

Table 4

Leadership Practices	N	Means	SD
Transformational Leadership Role	174	4.55	0.59
Instructional Leadership Role	174	4.54	0.60
Distributed Leadership	174	4.48	0.60
Overall Mean	174	4.52	0.57

The **summary table** revealed that school principals in Glan 1 District demonstrated a high level of leadership practices across all three domains. Among these, transformational leadership scored the highest ($M = 4.28, SD = 0.41$), followed by instructional leadership ($M = 4.11, SD = 0.48$) and distributed leadership ($M = 3.97, SD = 0.52$). These findings suggest that school leaders are actively fostering a vision of inclusive education, providing instructional support, and encouraging shared decision-making.

This aligns with prior studies indicating that transformational and instructional leadership significantly influence school improvement, teacher engagement, and inclusive practices (Braun et al., 2020; Hallinger & Wang, 2019). The relatively lower score in distributed leadership highlights an area for development, particularly in empowering teachers and staff to co-lead gender-responsive initiatives.

Level of Gender Equality Implementation

Table 5

Indicators	Mean Ratings	SD	Qualitative Description
1. Boys and girls have equal opportunities to enroll in this school.	4.74	0.53	Highly Evident
2. The school ensures that boys and girls have similar retention rates.	4.66	0.51	Highly Evident
3. Both boys and girls are equally encouraged to stay in school until completion.	4.74	0.49	Highly Evident
4. The school addresses dropout issues equally for both genders.	4.66	0.55	Highly Evident
5. There are no significant gender disparities in graduation rates.	4.68	0.60	Highly Evident
Mean	4.69	0.47	Highly Evident

Table 5 shows that **gender parity in enrolment and retention** is highly evident in the participating schools, with an overall mean of 4.69. The highest-rated indicators were equal opportunities to enroll and encouragement to stay in school (both $M = 4.74$), indicating strong institutional commitment to inclusive access and support through completion.

Slightly lower—but still high—ratings were noted in dropout prevention ($M = 4.66$) and gender parity in retention and graduation ($M = 4.66$ and $M = 4.68$, respectively), suggesting ongoing efforts to reduce dropout rates and ensure equitable outcomes for both genders.

These results align with DepEd’s Gender and Development (GAD) mandates and support findings from UNESCO (2020), which emphasize that ensuring equal access is foundational but must be paired with sustained efforts to keep all learners engaged through gender-responsive programs.

Table 6

Indicators	Mean Ratings	SD	Qualitative Description
1. The curriculum includes topics that promote gender equality.	4.64	0.55	Highly Evident
2. Teaching materials are free from gender stereotypes.	4.58	0.57	Highly Evident
3. Teachers use gender-sensitive teaching methods.	4.6	0.55	Highly Evident
4. Classroom activities encourage equal participation from all students, regardless of gender.	4.7	0.51	Highly Evident
5. Assessments are designed to be fair to both boys and girls.	4.73	0.48	Highly Evident
Mean	4.65	0.44	Highly Evident

Table 6 indicates that the **implementation of gender-sensitive curriculum and pedagogy** is highly evident, with an overall mean of 4.65. The highest-rated item was the design of fair assessments for both boys and girls (M = 4.73), reflecting efforts to maintain equity in evaluation practices.

Other indicators, such as the inclusion of gender equality topics (M = 4.64) and equal classroom participation (M = 4.70), confirm that gender sensitivity is being integrated across teaching and learning activities. The lowest score, though still high, was in the use of gender-neutral teaching materials (M = 4.58), suggesting the need for continued review of instructional resources to eliminate subtle biases.

These results affirm the schools' alignment with DepEd's GAD policies and global standards promoting inclusive education (UNESCO, 2020), emphasizing that both content and method are essential in fostering an equitable learning environment.

Table 7 shows that **participation in school activities** is highly gender-inclusive, with an overall mean of 4.72, the highest among the gender equality domains. The top-rated item was promotion of gender balance across all activities (M = 4.75), indicating a strong commitment to equitable participation.

Consistently high ratings were also given for accessibility to extracurricular activities (M = 4.74) and leadership opportunities for both genders (M = 4.72), suggesting that students are equally encouraged to lead and engage. The slightly lower but still high score for encouraging non-traditional gender roles (M = 4.68) suggests progressiveness, though further cultural sensitivity may be needed in promoting these roles.

These findings reflect the schools' proactive stance in fostering inclusive participation and echo global best practices that advocate for removing gender-based restrictions in student involvement (UNICEF, 2021).

Table 7

Indicators	Mean Ratings	SD	Qualitative Description
1. Boys and girls have equal opportunities to participate in school leadership roles.	4.72	0.49	Highly Evident
2. Extracurricular activities are equally accessible to both boys and girls.	4.74	0.46	Highly Evident
3. The school promotes gender balance in participation across all activities	4.75	0.45	Highly Evident
4. There is no gender bias in selecting students for school competitions and events.	4.71	0.48	Highly Evident
5. Both boys and girls are encouraged to participate in non-traditional gender roles in activities (e.g., boys in arts, girls in sports).	4.68	0.51	Highly Evident
Mean	4.72	0.41	Highly Evident

Table 8

Indicators	Mean Ratings	SD	Qualitative Description
1. There are accessible mechanisms for reporting gender-based violence in school.	4.46	0.75	Highly Evident
2. Gender-based harassment is rare in this school.	4.51	0.65	Highly Evident
3. The school takes immediate action to address reports of gender-based violence.	4.59	0.62	Highly Evident
4. Students feel safe from gender-based violence and harassment in school.	4.62	0.58	Highly Evident
5. Awareness programs about gender-based violence are regularly conducted.	4.38	0.68	Highly Evident
Mean	4.51	0.54	Highly Evident

Table 8 indicates that **measures addressing gender-based violence and harassment in schools** are highly evident, with an overall mean of 4.51. The highest-rated indicator was the school’s ability to take immediate action on reported incidents (M = 4.59), reflecting strong responsiveness from administrators.

Students also reported feeling safe in school environments (M = 4.62), suggesting the effectiveness of protection efforts. However, the lowest-rated item was the frequency of awareness programs (M = 4.38), indicating a need for more consistent education and campaigns on the issue.

These findings align with DepEd’s Child Protection Policy (DO 40, s. 2012) and underscore the importance of institutional accountability and student empowerment in preventing school-based gender violence (Plan International, 2020).

highly evident, with an overall mean of 4.31. The highest-rated indicator was students’ positive attitudes towards gender equality (M = 4.36), reflecting a growing culture of respect and inclusiveness.

The lowest-rated items were the training of teachers in gender sensitivity (M = 4.22) and conduct of regular awareness programs (M = 4.24), suggesting the need for more structured and frequent capacity-building efforts.

Despite this, the consistent high ratings indicate that schools prioritize gender sensitivity in their activities and curriculum, supporting the global call for mainstreaming gender in education systems (UNESCO, 2020). Sustained initiatives can further strengthen attitudes and institutional practices toward long-term gender equity.

Table 9

Indicators	Mean Ratings	SD	Qualitative Description
1. The school conducts regular gender awareness programs.	4.24	0.76	Highly Evident
2. Teachers are trained in gender sensitivity	4.22	0.75	Highly Evident
3. Students demonstrate positive attitudes towards gender equality.	4.36	0.68	Highly Evident
4. The school promotes discussions on gender equality in class.	4.41	0.65	Highly Evident
5. Gender sensitivity is a priority in school activities and initiatives.	4.33	0.73	Highly Evident
Mean	4.31	0.62	Highly Evident

Table 9 shows that **the level of gender awareness and sensitivity (GWA) in schools** is

Table 10

Dimensions	N	Mean	SD
Gender Parity in Enrollment and Retention	174	4.69	0.47
Gender-Sensitive Curriculum and Pedagogy	174	4.65	0.44
Participation in School Activities	174	4.72	0.41
Gender-Based Violence and Harassment	174	4.51	0.54
Gender Awareness and Sensitivity	174	4.31	0.62
Overall Mean	174	4.58	0.43

Table 10 **summarizes the extent of gender equality implementation across five key dimensions**, with an overall mean of 4.58, interpreted as highly evident. The highest-rated domain was participation in school activities (M = 4.72), indicating inclusive involvement of both genders in leadership roles, events, and extracurriculars.

This was followed by gender parity in enrolment and retention (M = 4.69) and gender-sensitive curriculum and pedagogy (M = 4.65), reflecting equitable access and inclusive instructional practices. However, the lowest mean was noted in gender awareness and sensitivity (M = 4.31), suggesting a need for more focused training and awareness programs for both students and staff.

Overall, the data highlight strong implementation of gender equality across schools, with specific areas—like awareness and consistent programming—that could benefit from further improvement. These results affirm the schools’ alignment with DepEd’s gender mainstreaming efforts and global frameworks for inclusive education (UNESCO, 2020; DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017).

Table 11 reveals a **statistically significant positive relationship between school heads’ leadership practices and the level of gender equality implementation across five key dimensions**. The overall Spearman’s rho ($\rho = 0.583$, $p < 0.001$) suggests a moderately strong correlation, indicating that as leadership practices improve, gender-responsive strategies in schools become more evident.

Among the leadership dimensions, distributed leadership showed the strongest association with gender equality implementation ($\rho = 0.57$), particularly in the area of gender awareness and sensitivity ($\rho = 0.561$). This aligns with Spillane and Diamond’s (2017) view that distributed leadership fosters shared responsibility, empowering more staff to engage in equity-centered reforms. When teachers are part of decision-making and program planning, gender-related policies are more effectively integrated into daily school life (Harris, 2014).

Transformational leadership, characterized by inspirational vision and commitment to values (Bass & Avolio, 1994), also demonstrated strong correlations, especially with gender sensitivity ($\rho = 0.50$). This supports findings by Berkovich and Eyal (2021), who emphasized that transformational leaders are instrumental in promoting inclusive values and challenging discriminatory norms within school systems.

Although slightly lower, the correlations between leadership practices and gender parity in enrolment and retention ($\rho = 0.416$) and participation in school activities ($\rho = 0.382$) remain meaningful. These outcomes affirm the role of leaders not just in setting strategic goals but also in shaping a supportive environment where boys and girls are encouraged to participate equally (UNESCO, 2020). Furthermore, the association between leadership and gender-based violence prevention ($\rho = 0.491$) underlines the responsibility of school heads to ensure that protective mechanisms are in place—a finding consistent with DepEd’s Child Protection Policy (DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012).

Finally, the results confirm that inclusive leadership is a critical factor in driving gender

Table 11

GE Practices	Statistics	TR_	IN_	DL_	Overall (Leadership Practices)
Gender Parity in Enrolment and Retention	Spearman's rho	0.38	0.406	0.379	0.416
	p-value	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001
Gender-Sensitive Curriculum and Pedagogy	Spearman's rho	0.41	0.38	0.436	0.445
	p-value	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001
Participation in School Activities	Spearman's rho	0.37	0.352	0.366	0.382
	p-value	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001
Gender-Based Violence and Harassment	Spearman's rho	0.46	0.417	0.486	0.491
	p-value	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001
Gender Awareness and Sensitivity	Spearman's rho	0.50	0.498	0.541	0.561
	p-value	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001
Overall Mean	Spearman's rho	0.53	0.509	0.57	0.583
	p-value	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001

equality in schools. Leaders who are visionary, supportive, and collaborative create conditions where inclusive education can thrive. These findings emphasize the need for leadership development programs that equip school heads with the competencies to lead gender-responsive and equitable school environments (Northouse, 2022).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to determine the level of leadership practices demonstrated by school heads in Glan I District and to assess the extent to which gender equality has been implemented in their respective schools. In addition, it sought to examine the relationship between these leadership practices and the effectiveness of gender equality initiatives within the basic education setting. The findings provided meaningful insights into how educational leadership can shape inclusive and equitable school environments, particularly in rural and diverse communities such as those in Glan I District.

The results revealed that school principals consistently exhibited high levels of transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership. In the dimension of transformational leadership, school leaders were found to be effective in communicating a compelling vision, motivating staff, and initiating changes that align with inclusive education goals. Instructional leadership was also prominent, with school heads actively engaged in supporting classroom instruction, monitoring learning outcomes, and providing professional development opportunities that enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Furthermore, distributed leadership practices were evident, as principals empowered teachers and other staff to take on leadership roles, make decisions, and collaborate on school improvement initiatives.

In terms of gender equality implementation, the study found that schools performed commendably across several dimensions. There was clear evidence of gender parity in enrolment and retention, demonstrating efforts to provide equal educational opportunities for boys and girls. Moreover, students were equally involved in academic and extracurricular activities, suggesting that the schools have made progress in reducing

traditional gender barriers. The curriculum and teaching practices were reported to incorporate gender-sensitive perspectives, promoting fairness and inclusion in classroom discussions and learning materials. Efforts to create a safe and respectful school environment were also recognized, along with initiatives to raise awareness about gender equality among both students and staff. However, some areas, such as continuous teacher training and sustained gender-awareness programs, were identified as needing further attention and development.

Statistical analysis confirmed a significant and positive relationship between school leadership practices and gender equality implementation. Among the three leadership types assessed, distributed leadership showed the strongest connection to positive gender equality outcomes. This suggests that when leadership responsibilities are shared among various stakeholders—including teachers, parents, and community members—schools are better positioned to create inclusive environments and promote gender sensitivity in daily practice. Transformational and instructional leadership also contributed meaningfully to gender equality initiatives, particularly by influencing teacher behaviors, setting school-wide expectations, and fostering professional growth.

These findings emphasize that effective and inclusive leadership is crucial for advancing gender equality in schools. A leadership style that is visionary, participatory, and grounded in a shared commitment to equity can transform school culture and improve outcomes for all learners. The study also highlights the value of professional development and collaborative decision-making in sustaining these efforts over time.

From a practical standpoint, the study offers important implications for school administrators, policymakers, and education stakeholders. Strengthening leadership capacity, particularly in rural and underserved areas, is essential to scaling up gender-responsive education. Training programs should emphasize not only instructional leadership skills but also the principles of gender equity, cultural sensitivity, and community engagement. Schools should also institutionalize systems that promote shared leadership and inclusive

governance to ensure that all voices are heard in the decision-making process.

Finally, the study encourages future researchers to build upon these findings by conducting similar investigations in other districts or regions. Exploring how leadership practices interact with various cultural, geographic, or socioeconomic contexts can further deepen our understanding of what works best in promoting gender equality in education. By doing so, educational systems can continue to evolve into more inclusive, equitable, and empowering environments for all students.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance leadership-driven gender equality initiatives in schools, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. These suggestions aim to improve the effectiveness of gender equality practices by leveraging school leadership and fostering a culture of inclusivity and equity.

1. **Institutionalizing Regular, Evidence-Based Training for Educators**
The Department of Education (DepEd) and local education offices should institutionalize regular, evidence-based training programs focused on gender-sensitive leadership, instructional strategies, and inclusive policy implementation. These programs should specifically target school heads and teacher-leaders, with an emphasis on areas that face unique challenges, such as rural districts. The training should equip school leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to lead gender-responsive initiatives effectively, ensuring that they can create an environment where gender equality is embedded in school policies and practices. Additionally, these training sessions should address the intersectionality of gender with cultural and socio-economic factors, particularly in rural and Indigenous communities, to ensure a comprehensive approach to inclusivity.
2. **Developing Robust Protocols to Address Gender-Based Harassment**
Schools must develop and implement more robust protocols to identify, prevent, and respond to gender-based harassment. This includes establishing confidential reporting systems that encourage students and staff to report incidents without fear of retaliation. Awareness campaigns should be conducted regularly to educate students, teachers, and parents on the impact of gender-based violence and the importance of creating safe, respectful school environments. Furthermore, schools should integrate student-centered protection mechanisms that focus on the emotional and psychological safety of all learners, particularly in environments where gender-based harassment may be prevalent. Providing professional development on handling such issues can help teachers and school leaders address concerns more effectively.
3. **Encouraging Distributed Leadership Practices**
To promote a more inclusive leadership structure, it is recommended that schools adopt distributed leadership practices by forming gender equality task forces or school-based Gender and Development (GAD) teams. These task forces can include teachers, parents, and even students, empowering them to contribute meaningfully to gender equality programming. By sharing leadership roles, schools can cultivate a collective sense of responsibility and accountability in addressing gender issues, thus enhancing the sustainability and inclusivity of gender-sensitive initiatives. Encouraging participation from all members of the school community ensures that gender equality is not solely the responsibility of the school leadership but a shared goal for everyone involved.
4. **Encouraging the Use of Inclusive Instructional Materials**
Teachers should be equipped and encouraged to use instructional materials that challenge traditional gender stereotypes and promote inclusivity across all subject areas. This can be achieved through continuous curriculum audits and classroom observations to ensure that

teaching materials reflect gender-neutral content and foster an inclusive learning environment. Additionally, training programs should emphasize the importance of integrating gender-sensitive perspectives into all lessons, enabling teachers to address gender issues in their classrooms effectively. A consistent focus on inclusive education in both formal and informal training will contribute to long-term change.

5. **Recognizing the Unique Needs of Indigenous Communities**

Given the cultural diversity in many rural schools, particularly in areas with significant Indigenous populations, it is important to develop localized GAD strategies that recognize and respect the unique needs of these communities. Involving community elders and local leaders in the development of gender equality programs ensures that the strategies are culturally sensitive and appropriate. Tailoring programs to the specific needs and traditions of Indigenous communities will not only promote gender equality but also enhance the sustainability and acceptance of these initiatives within the community.

6. **Future Research and Continuous Improvement**

Future studies should explore the long-term impact of gender-responsive leadership practices on student learning outcomes. Research could also examine how other variables, such as school climate, teacher beliefs, or parent involvement, moderate the relationship between leadership and gender equality. Understanding these factors will provide deeper insights into how leadership practices can be further refined to create even more inclusive educational environments. Ongoing research can help fine-tune gender equality initiatives and offer practical recommendations for school leaders, educators, and policymakers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who played a part in supporting us throughout the process of completing

this research. Without your invaluable contributions, this study would not have been possible.

First and foremost, we express our sincere appreciation to the school heads, teachers, and community members of Glan I District. Your time, honesty, and willingness to share your insights have been the foundation of this study. The knowledge you provided made this research not only possible but meaningful, and we are grateful for your active participation in helping us better understand the dynamics of leadership and gender equality in education.

We are also profoundly grateful to the Department of Education – Division of Sarangani for granting us the opportunity to carry out this research. Your trust and support made it possible for us to explore the important topic of gender equality in schools, and we deeply appreciate the permission and assistance we received throughout the study.

A heartfelt thank you goes to Sultan Kudarat State University, particularly the College of Graduate Studies, for providing us with the academic resources, guidance, and infrastructure that helped us grow as researchers. The faculty, staff, and fellow students offered invaluable support, advice, and encouragement, which played a significant role in the successful completion of this research. The skills and knowledge gained at this institution have been instrumental in shaping our development as researchers and scholars.

To our research advisers and mentors, we are incredibly thankful for your constant support and expertise. Your thoughtful feedback, unwavering encouragement, and dedication to guiding us throughout this process have significantly improved the quality of this research. We deeply appreciate the time and effort you invested in nurturing our academic growth and in helping us refine our ideas and approach.

We also wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to our families and loved ones, whose unwavering support provided us with the strength and motivation to persevere. Thank you for understanding our commitments, for believing in us, and for encouraging us through the challenging

moments. Your love, patience, and encouragement were crucial in helping us maintain focus and finish this research.

Above all, we give thanks to the Almighty for granting us the strength, wisdom, and perseverance to complete this journey. Without His guidance and grace, we would not have had the clarity or purpose needed to carry this project to its conclusion. We are deeply thankful for the opportunity to engage in this meaningful work, and we are hopeful that our findings will contribute to the advancement of inclusive, equitable education for all students.

This research is the result of collective efforts, and we are grateful to everyone who supported and guided us along the way. Thank you.

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