

# The Implication of Diversity Leadership Skills of School Principals to Learning & Development (L&D)

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## Abstract

As the teaching force of the elementary and secondary schools become more diverse, there is a need for the administration and the school principals to acknowledge the changing demographics and take advantage of the benefits of embracing diversity to improve the quality of teaching and learning in Philippine schools. Being aware of the principals' diversity leadership skills is the first step before any actions can be taken. This study sought to find out the level of diversity leadership skills of school principals as perceived by their teachers and explored the possible implications of the findings to learning and development (L&D). The results showed that the principals have high diversity leadership skills but noticeably low in items pertaining to initiating activities and programs that promote awareness of diversity, showing respect for teachers' religion, using gender neutral language, conflict resolution, and giving appreciations, rewards and punishments that do not result to showing favoritism. It is recommended that the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) conduct a nationwide needs assessment on the diversity leadership skills of their principals, and develop and implement a training program to address the identified needs. Further study is also encouraged to test the validity and reliability of the revised Diversity Leadership Scale (DLS) designed to measure the DLS of the Filipino principals.

**Keywords:** diversity, diversity leader skills, school principals

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## 1. Introduction

The function of school principals center not only on the supervision of instruction, but also on school management which includes the procurement of schools materials as well as hiring and promoting school teachers, school communication which includes the preparation of school reports, and school-community relations which involves working with the stakeholders, (Chapman, 2000 as quoted by Sindhvad, 2009). In order to be successful in all these, and thereby make the school they manage effective, the school principals must have the kind of leadership that will bring their schools to where they intended them to be. In a study done by Magulod (2017), about the components of school effectiveness of private and public elementary schools in Cagayan City, Philippines, school leadership competency and professional collaboration were found to be predictors of school effectiveness. The findings of the study that school leadership correlates with school effectiveness is also affirmed in several other researches (Herrera, 2010; Deeboonmee and Ariratana, 2013; and D'Sa and Sheela, 2015). But with the continuing changes and evolution in education, and with the coming of more diverse teaching force, and equally more diverse students and stakeholders, the job of school principals become more challenging. School principals must learn how to manage the diverse teaching force entering their schools. Researches say that there are many benefits of fostering diversity in the workplace, and in schools when diversity is prioritized and strives to create authentic cultural change, the quality of both teaching and learning improves, benefitting everyone, (Stevens and Motamedi, 2019).

Diversity leadership is the "process of acting respectfully, sensitively, and tolerably against the diversity of individuals with many differences such as gender, language, religion, race, ethnic origin, personality and political view by accepting them as they are, making use of such diversity of individuals in line with the objectives of the organization and directing such people in line with common objectives by holding them together in harmony, thanks to an impartial and fair management mentality" (Polat & Olcum, 2016, p. 72). Diversity leadership goes beyond being aware of the differences of the everyone in the organization but also directing them to the achievement of the objectives of the organization without creating divisions and conflicts. The successful management of diversity implies the development of a strong culture that values cultural differences, Niemann (2006).

Changes in the school demographics should prompt school administrators to act and prepare everybody to function effectively. School principals in diversity-enhanced schools move toward the goal of having an effective diversity leadership through five phases: (1) building trust by modeling for their colleagues inclusive and nonjudgmental discussion, reflection, and engagement strategies that teachers can use to establish positive learning communities in their classrooms; (2) engaging personal culture by developing the cultural competence of teachers—their ability to form authentic and effective relationships across differences; (3) confronting issues of social dominance and social justice by constructing a compelling narrative of social justice that will inform,

inspire, and sustain educators in their work, without falling into the rhetoric of shame and blame; (4) transforming instructional practices by carrying out instruction that are more responsive to diversity; and (5) engaging the entire school community by creating a welcoming and equitable learning environments for diverse students and their families, school leaders must engage the entire school community, (Howard, 2007). In the given six phases, we see that diversity-enhanced schools go beyond the acknowledgement of the differences of some into including the differences and similarities of all members of the school organization. Central to the achievement of diversity leadership goals is the leadership preparations of school principals and administrators, (Sanches, Thronton and Usinger, n.d.).

In the Philippines, school administrators are guided by the constitution of the Philippines acknowledging human differences and therefore proclaiming that everyone should have the right to be free from discrimination based on the actual or perceived ethnicity, race, religion or belief, political inclination, social class, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, civil status, disability, HIV status, health, medical, language, physical features or other status (**Section 4**). **In the context of work**, inflicting stigma (Section 5a), and using those above mentioned as basis for selection, promotion, and termination of workers, and in the determination of compensation, training, incentives, privileges, benefits or allowances, as well as other terms and conditions of employment (Section 5.d.1), are prohibited. In Philippine schools, the Department of Education (DepEd) issued a gender-responsive basic education policy that calls for an end to discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation and gender identity in schools which primarily aimed at protecting students (Thoreson, 2017). This is further expanded to the protection as well of teachers who may come from this diversity group, as the Gender and Development (GAD) Focal Point Systems (GFPS) was established through DO 27, s 2013. The department also collaborated with different government agencies to bring about the synergy towards an inclusive workplace and cohesive skills training – employment partnership, that aimed at promoting inclusion in the workplace of persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups in 2018. DepEd teachers are expected to embrace diversity and to be inclusive both in philosophy and practice in the schools. DepEd secretary Briones continues to rally the department to ensure inclusiveness, cultural diversity in its policies, (Malipot, 2018).

With all these directives from the Department of Education is the question on how the school principals are performing as leaders in a more diversified environment as perceived by their teachers. As there is a dearth on studies done on this topic in the country, this study sought to conduct a research for the purpose of contributing to the knowledge on diversity leadership which can in turn be a basis for the learning and development of school leaders. This study specifically sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of school administrators' diversity leadership skills based on teachers' perceptions?
2. What is the implication of the school administrators' level of diversity leadership skills to organization's learning and development (L&D)?

This study is guided by the theory on inclusive leadership theory by Edwin Hollander (2008). In a school with diverse teaching force, it is not enough to merely know the demographics of the school but there must be a conscious and intentional effort to foster an environment that welcomes, respects and gives each teacher a chance to contribute to the organization. Organizations must go beyond acknowledging diversity to including diversity in all aspects of school activities thus paving the way to inclusive leadership. Inclusive leadership is about fostering relationships that can accomplish things for mutual benefit, and is oriented significantly more towards the involvement rather than the manipulation of followers by those in power, in the context of this study, by the school principals, (Hollander, 2009). There are six traits that were found to distinguish inclusive leaders from others and these are visible commitment as seen in the articulation of authentic commitment to diversity, in challenging the status quo, holding others accountable and making diversity and inclusion a personal priority; humility as seen in being modest about capabilities, admitting mistakes, and creating the space for others to contribute; awareness of bias as seen in being aware of personal blind spots as well as flaws in the system and working hard to ensure meritocracy; curiosity about others as seen in the demonstration of an open mindset and deep curiosity about others, listening without judgment, and seeking with empathy to understand those around them; cultural intelligence as seen in being attentive to others' cultures and adapting as required; and effective collaboration as seen in empowering others, paying attention to diversity of thinking and psychological safety, and focusing on team cohesion, (Bourke, 2019).

Figure 1. Research paradigm

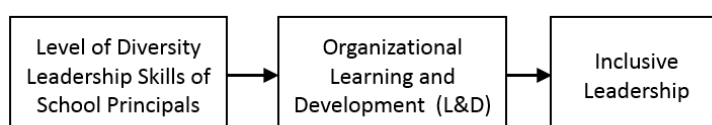


Figure 1 below shows the research paradigm of the study. This study intended to measure the level of diversity of leadership skills of school principals, and looked at the implications of the findings to the school

organization' learning and development (L&D). By taking actions to the findings and creating programs for L&D, schools can enjoy the benefits of an inclusive leadership.

## 2. Methodology

This research which intended to find the implication of diversity leadership skills of school principals to learning & development (L&D) used a cross-sectional survey research design to achieve its objective. Respondents were 24 teachers from the elementary and secondary schools, in the Philippines who were selected using a non-probability sampling technique based on convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher.

To get the level of diversity leadership skills of the school principals, Diversity Leadership Scale (DLS) developed by Polat, Arslan and Ölçüm in 2017 was used. Permission to use and adapt the scale to Filipino respondents were sought through email to the authors. Professors Polat and Ölçüm responded and gave the permission for the researcher to use their scale. The DLS had 37 items with three sub-domains namely diversity integration, equity and respect, and was translated to English from the Turkish language. The researcher revised the DLS and adapted the scale for better understanding and made it more suitable to the context of the Filipino teachers. Three more items were added as the researcher found them to be necessary to capture the perceptions of teachers on their principals' diversity leadership skills. To analyze the data gathered, descriptive statistics was used to measure for central tendency.

## 3. Results

Out of the 24 respondents, 20 were females and 4 were males. Nineteen were ages 20-29, two were between 30-39 and three were between 40-49. Majority of the respondents (n=15) were bachelor's degree holder, seven (7) had masterate degree and two (2) had doctorate degree. Fourteen (14) of the respondents were teaching at the high school level and ten were teaching at the elementary level. Most of the respondents were Roman Catholics (n=20), three were protestants and there was one respondent who did not indicate his/her religion. Twenty (20) of the respondents were single and only four (4) were married.

The overall result of the DLS showed that teachers perceived their principals to have high diversity leadership skills (DLS score = 4.08). Under different dimensions, the teachers perceived their principals to have high DLS in diversity inclusion and integration (DLS = 4.10), high in equity (DLS = 4.15) and slightly lower but still high in interpretation in respect for diversity (DLS = 3.97).

Of the forty items in the DLS, four items were observed to have low scores namely items 19, 20, 24, and 40. The low scores pertained to initiating activities and programs that promote awareness of diversity, showing respect for teachers' religion, using gender neutral language, conflict resolution, and giving appreciations, rewards and punishments that do not result to showing favoritism

## 4. Analysis and Discussion

The results show that the principals are perceived to be high in their diversity leadership skills with low scores only in four items. Under the domain diversity inclusion and integration, the teachers reported that their principals try to integrate the teachers' differences in the organizational system and process. The principals were reported to acknowledge their different cultural backgrounds and the values that they hold, and the expertise they bring to the school. Principals tried to take advantage of these differences in order to create a unified teaching force. The Philippines has about 110 ethno-linguistic groups and in every school in the country, it is common to have teachers belonging to different groups and speak different languages with Filipino and English as the common languages, because in the first place these are the languages used for instruction. The results show that principals did not discriminate teachers speaking languages different from theirs. Welcoming and appreciating teachers with different cultural values can benefit the school as students also coming from different ethno-linguistic groups can very well relate with their teachers. In this domain, it is noticeable that principals were reported a little low on making activities that intentionally talk about the differences of teachers, and how to be more sensitive and accepting about the differences they have. Also, the principals scored low on conflict resolution and in integrating the different religions of the teachers.

In the equity domain, principals who are high in this domain are expected to encourage equity and equality in the school. The DLS results show that the principals of the teacher respondents based the evaluation of their teachers on performance and not on their differences. Teachers did not feel that the principals discriminated them because of their physical attributes nor did the principals based evaluation on social status. However, on giving rewards and punishments, the principals seemed to have shown favoritism to some of the respondents' fellow teachers. The scores on the three items discussing favoritism under equity were relatively low.

On respect for diversity, the teacher respondents reported that their principals generally showed respect for each teachers' diversity. Respect for diversity is respecting individuals based on the idea that we are all human beings and therefore equal in all respects, (Polat, 2017). It also includes respecting the individual teacher's autonomy, (p.513). In schools, teachers teach different subjects and each one of them is considered an expert in

their field. For school organizations to be effective, the teachers' expertise in their subject should be respected and they should be given the academic freedom to plan and execute instruction that teachers deem to be effective to their students. Although the overall score in equity was high, low scores were noted in areas such as the use of gender neutral language and also in respecting the teachers differing views. Teachers reported that their principals tended to put pressure on teachers in order for them to come up with a decision as a group. In the interest of time, organizations must make decisions as quickly as possible. Teachers must be led to make decisions in a way that they will not feel pressured to make one immediately which might lead to compromising their beliefs and values.

This study found out that principals have generally high diversity leadership skills in all three domains but noticeably scored low on the following specific items: activities and programs that promote awareness of diversity, showing respect for teachers' religion, using gender neutral language, conflict resolution, and giving appreciations, rewards and punishments that do not result to showing favoritism.

## 5. Implications to Learning and Development (L&D)

DepEd school principals are expected to exercise instructional leadership and sound administrative management of the school they are assigned on the basis of shared governance where everyone has a particular role, task and responsibility to perform, (RA 9155). This, in principle, is what diversity leadership is all about when each personnel's role and contributions to the organization are acknowledged regardless of their uniqueness. To be effective school principals they must embrace the differences of all their staff and utilize these differences for the advantage of the school so that they create an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning, and foster a professional collaborative spirit among school heads, teachers, and the community as a whole as is expected of them.

The results of this study showed that there is no program for the training of principals to develop their diversity leadership skills, and the principals are in need of the following: initiating training in activities and programs that promote awareness of diversity, showing respect for teachers' religion, using gender neutral language, conflict resolution, and giving appreciations, rewards and punishments that do not result to showing favoritism.

The agency responsible for the learning and development of the department is the National Educator's Academy of the Philippines (NEAP). This agency should spearhead the development of training programs for school principals to develop their diversity leadership skills, leading to becoming inclusive leaders. As this study is limited in scope, NEAP may conduct a needs analysis first that will represent the need of the entire DepEd school principal population, and verify whether those identified training needs in this study are the same needs by most principals. When needs are identified, then a training program should be developed and implemented. The program should then be monitored and evaluated as to the impact it made to the school organizations.

In the division level, superintendents may include the development of diversity leadership skills of their school principals and school heads by integrating diversity in school-based management. Division schools may conduct self-evaluation of the principals' understanding of others so they can be aware of their personal biases towards others and create action plans. Together, principals can have a shared vision of embracing diversity in their own respective schools.

## 6. Recommendations

This study recommends the following:

1. Immediate assessment of the diversity leadership skills of school principals within DepEd. As the DepEd is moving towards a more inclusive organization, it should have a profile on the leadership skills.
2. Training of the school principals in the areas identified by this research. The respondents can still develop their diversity leadership skills but addressing their needs based on the identified areas.
3. Test for psychometric properties of the modified diversity leadership scale (DLS). The DLS psychometric properties had already been tested and established by Polat (2015) but the revised DLS has not been established. To ensure reliability and validity of the scale, the new DLS for Filipinos must be tested as well.
4. Conduct of the same test to other respondents in other schools through a stratified random sampling to ensure wider representation of the intended population.

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