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HARMONIZING LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE: THE ROLE OF MAGUINDANAON CULTURAL NORMS IN SHAPING SCHOOL GOVERNANCE AND INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION

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ABSTRACT

The growing recognition of culturally responsive leadership highlights the need to understand how indigenous cultural norms shape educational governance and instructional practices. In culturally grounded communities, school leadership extends beyond administrative functions to include the preservation of identity, values, and communal harmony. This study explored the role of Maguindanaon cultural norms in shaping school governance and instructional supervision within formal educational settings. The primary objective of the study was to examine the lived experiences of Maguindanaon school heads and teachers as they integrate cultural values, Islamic principles, and community traditions into leadership and supervisory practices. Anchored in a qualitative research design, the study employed a phenomenological approach to capture participants' meanings, perceptions, and interpretations of culturally grounded leadership. Findings revealed that Maguindanaon school leaders consistently practiced culturally responsive, inclusive, and community-oriented leadership. Governance and supervisory practices were strongly influenced by Islamic moral values, emphasizing integrity, respect, consultation, and service. School leaders demonstrated sensitivity to religious observances and cultural traditions by aligning school policies, schedules, and decision-making processes with community realities. Instructional supervision was conducted through respectful and non-confrontational approaches, encouraging the

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integration of local language, traditions, and lived experiences into teaching and learning. Leaders also displayed adaptive leadership by thoughtfully balancing institutional policies with cultural identity, ensuring compliance while preserving cultural integrity. These practices strengthened school–community relationships, fostered trust, and reinforced a shared sense of belonging. The study concludes that effective leadership in the Maguindanaon context is deeply relational, values-based, and culturally anchored. Honoring culture and faith enhances governance, instructional supervision, and stakeholder trust, demonstrating that culturally responsive leadership is essential for sustaining harmony, inclusivity, and meaningful education in indigenous and Muslim school communities.

Keywords: culturally responsive leadership; indigenous education; Islamic values in education; school governance

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Today, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of culturally responsive leadership in education, particularly in regions where indigenous identities, such as the Maguindanaon culture, intersect with the structures and expectations of formal schooling. As the Philippine education system pushes for inclusivity and equity under frameworks such as the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), school leaders are increasingly expected to move beyond standardized, one-size-fits-all approaches to governance and instructional supervision.

International literature highlights the need to incorporate indigenous knowledge systems, cultural values, and community traditions into school governance and instructional supervision to create inclusive, equitable, and contextually relevant educational environments (UNESCO, 2020; Khalifa et al., 2018). Culturally grounded leadership practices foster stronger school-community relations and enhance teacher and learner engagement, especially in indigenous and minority settings (Walker & Shuangye, 2019). However, much of the global discourse still centers on Western leadership models, creating a knowledge gap regarding indigenous-led educational frameworks in Southeast Asia.

In the Philippine setting, Republic Act No. 10533 or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 mandates the use of a culture-sensitive curriculum and learning environment, particularly for Indigenous Peoples (IPs). The Department of Education’s Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program emphasizes the importance of local cultures in shaping educational practices (DepEd, 2022). Despite these policies, research still leans heavily on administrative efficiency and student outcomes without deeply examining how indigenous cultural norms influence leadership practices (Tayag & Bacus, 2020). This signals a national literature gap in exploring school governance through the lens of indigenous traditions and local leadership customs.

Zooming into South Central Mindanao, where large Maguindanaon communities reside, schools are often situated in socio-culturally complex and historically marginalized regions. While there are commendable grassroots efforts to integrate Maguindanaon language and culture in the classroom (Sanguila et al., 2021), limited attention is given to how school leaders and instructional supervisors consciously incorporate Maguindanaon norms—such as *kanduli* (communal sharing), *maratabat* (honor), and *kasabihan* (proverbs)—into administrative decision-making and supervisory roles. In Sultan Kudarat, a province rich in Maguindanaon heritage, school leaders face the challenge of balancing national education

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mandates with community cultural expectations. Yet, no existing study fully documents how Maguindanaon cultural principles influence day-to-day governance and supervision in schools.

This study addresses the literature gap by investigating the role of Maguindanaon cultural norms in shaping school leadership and instructional supervision in selected public schools of Sultan Kudarat. It is anchored on SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), which call for inclusive, culturally relevant education and equitable leadership practices. The goal of this study is to explore and describe how Maguindanaon school heads and instructional leaders integrate their cultural values and leadership traditions into governance practices—ultimately contributing to more culturally responsive and sustainable school systems in indigenous communities.

Research Questions

This study sought to explore and describe how Maguindanaon school heads and instructional leaders integrate their cultural values and leadership traditions into governance practices—ultimately contributing to more culturally responsive and sustainable school systems in indigenous communities in Lutayan District, Division of Sultan Kudarat. It answered the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Maguindanaon school leaders in integrating cultural norms into school governance and instructional supervision?
2. How do Maguindanaon cultural beliefs and values influence the leadership styles and supervisory practices of school heads?
3. In what ways do Maguindanaon school leaders make meaning of their roles as cultural bearers while managing and supervising their schools?
4. How do Maguindanaon school leaders navigate challenges and opportunities in harmonizing traditional culture with formal educational leadership practices?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, to explore the lived experiences of Maguindanaon school heads and teachers in integrating cultural values into school governance and instructional supervision. Phenomenology is appropriate for this study because it seeks to understand and describe how individuals experience a particular phenomenon, emphasizing participants' perspectives and meaning-making processes (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

Through this approach, the study aimed to capture the essence of culturally responsive leadership as enacted in the context of indigenous communities, allowing for in-depth insights into how cultural norms shape leadership practices, decision-making, and instructional supervision in schools (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2021).

Respondents of the Study

Table 1 displays the qualifications of the participants based on the criteria set by the researcher prior to the selection of qualified informants of the study.

Table 1

Participants' Inclusion Criteria

Qualifications
<i>Participants: 10 Maguindanaon Teachers & and 5 Maguindanaon School Heads</i>
Inclusion Criteria for School Heads <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Cultural Background – Must identify as Maguindanaon and demonstrate familiarity with local cultural norms, practices, and values relevant to their community2. Professional Position – Must currently serve as a school head or principal in an elementary school within Lutayan District, Division of Sultan Kudarat.3. Experience in Leadership – Must have at least 3 years of experience in school governance and instructional supervision to ensure meaningful insights into leadership practices.4. Engagement in Instructional Supervision – Must be actively involved in supervising teaching practices, curriculum implementation, and teacher development in their school.
Inclusion Criteria for Teachers <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Cultural Background – Must identify as Maguindanaon and have knowledge of local cultural norms and practices relevant to classroom instruction.2. Professional Role – Must be a full-time teacher currently teaching in an elementary school within Lutayan District, Division of Sultan Kudarat.3. Experience in Instructional Practice – Must have at least 2 years of teaching experience, preferably with exposure to culturally responsive instructional approaches.4. Participation in School Programs – Must actively engage in school activities, governance initiatives, or cultural programs that integrate community values into teaching practices.

The participants were the selected 5 Maguindanaon school heads and 10 Maguindanaon teachers from selected elementary schools in Lutayan District, Sultan Kudarat during the school year 2025–2026, who qualify the inclusion criteria set by the researcher.

Sampling Technique

During this study, a purposeful sampling technique was intentionally utilized to carefully select the 5 Maguindanaon school heads, and 10 Maguindanaon teachers in Lutayan

District, Sultan Kudarat during school year 2025–2026, who met the researcher's specified inclusion criteria established by the researcher.

Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, is a form of non-probability sampling in which researchers rely on their own discretion when selecting population members to participate in their surveys (Alchemer, 2021).

This survey sampling method necessitates that researchers have prior knowledge of the purpose of their studies in order to select and approach eligible participants for online survey platforms such as Alchemer. The researcher resorts to purposive sampling to gain access to a specific subset of individuals, as all survey respondents are chosen because they suit a specific profile.

Research Instruments

A semi-structured interview was utilized in this study as an exploratory tool to be used during the interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to examine how Maguindanaon school heads and instructional leaders integrate their cultural values and leadership traditions into governance practices—ultimately contributing to more culturally responsive and sustainable school systems in indigenous communities in Lutayan District, Division of Sultan Kudarat.

Data Gathering Procedure

The study's reliability was ensured by the researcher's strict adherence to a set of protocols. The study's focus was to examine how Maguindanaon school heads and instructional leaders integrated their cultural values and leadership traditions into governance practices—ultimately contributing to more culturally responsive and sustainable school systems in indigenous communities in Lutayan District, Division of Sultan Kudarat.

First, the Superintendent of DepEd-Sultan Kudarat and the Dean of the CGS were requested to sign a document authorizing the researcher to undertake the necessary steps to conduct the study.

A second authorization letter was sent to the District Supervisor of DepEd Lutayan District in order to acquire the precise data necessary for the study. A survey questionnaire was then created, evaluated, and implemented.

The researcher next chose respondents using a Purposive Sampling Technique to include all reliable key informants as participants of the study. As long as health procedures were adhered to, the researcher began distributing the interviews and conducting Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) via face-to-face mode.

Finally, the data acquired from the interviews and Focus Group Discussions were collated, analyzed, and interpreted using thematic analysis.

Data Transcription Process

All gathered raw data from the participants through interviews and FGDs were transcribed using the transcription process of Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). By following these step-by-step processes, the researcher aligned their transcription approach with the

guidelines outlined by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). This rigorous transcription process ensured the trustworthiness and credibility of the qualitative data, which served as the foundation for the subsequent narrative analysis and the meaningful interpretation of the gathered raw data.

These categories were either drawn from established frameworks or custom-crafted to align with the study's objectives. To execute this analytical process, a series of vital steps were meticulously followed:

Step 1: Data Organization and Preparation. In the initial phase, all data sources, including interview transcripts, notes from FGDs, and pertinent documents, were thoroughly organized and prepared for analysis. This step ensured the structured arrangement and accessibility of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Step 2: Data Immersion. Subsequently, the researcher deeply immersed herself in the data by reviewing interview transcripts and FGD notes. This immersive process helped her understand the content and context inherent in the collected information (Nowell et al., 2017).

Step 3: Systematic Coding Process. The third step involved commencing a systematic coding process. Initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful segments or patterns within the data. These codes encapsulated fundamental concepts, ideas, or themes relating to how the Maguindanaon school heads and instructional leaders integrated their cultural values and leadership traditions into governance practices—ultimately contributing to more culturally responsive and sustainable school systems in indigenous communities in Lutayan District, Division of Sultan Kudarat. (Clarke & Braun, 2021).

Step 4: Clustering and Preliminary Themes. Following coding, the identified codes were clustered into preliminary themes based on shared meaning or relevance. This step established an initial framework for organizing the data (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

Step 5: Theme Scrutiny and Refinement. Following this, the emerging themes and their corresponding codes were scrutinized and refined. Researchers ensured their coherence and clarity, making necessary adjustments as needed. Each refined theme was assigned a descriptive label that succinctly represented its content, facilitating easy identification and interpretation (Terry et al., 2017).

Step 6: Linking Data Excerpts. Relevant data excerpts, such as quotations or segments from interviews and FGDs, were selected and linked to the themes. These excerpts served as supporting evidence for the identified themes (Nowell et al., 2017).

Step 7: Thematic Analysis. Finally, the thematic analysis transcended superficial identification. Researchers delved into interpreting the significance and implications of each theme within the context of the study's objectives, ensuring a deeper understanding of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

They identified patterns, correlations, and variations within the themes to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Maguindanaon school heads and instructional leaders integrated their cultural values and leadership traditions into governance practices—ultimately contributing to more culturally responsive and sustainable school systems in indigenous communities in Lutayan District, Division of Sultan Kudarat.

This meticulous and well-structured process of thematic analysis empowered the researcher to systematically investigate and comprehend how Maguindanaon school heads and instructional leaders integrate their cultural values and leadership traditions into governance and instructional practices. It enabled a deeper understanding of the ways these culturally grounded approaches influence decision-making, supervision, and school management. Ultimately, this approach yielded valuable insights that contribute to the development of more culturally responsive and sustainable school systems in indigenous communities in Lutayan District, Division of Sultan Kudarat.

Data Analysis

A thematic or content analysis was used to analyze the data by assigning each text's assertions, phrases, and words to a system or collection of categories—either based on or adapted from existing ones or established from scratch in connection with the study objectives (Clark & Braun, 2006).

Written interview data were collected from the participants to determine the intersection of education and culture by examining how Maguindanaon school heads and instructional leaders integrated their cultural values and leadership traditions into governance practices—ultimately contributing to more culturally responsive and sustainable school systems in indigenous communities in Lutayan District, Division of Sultan Kudarat. The interviews and FGDs conducted for this research were used to distill the most salient participant responses into overarching themes.

Scope and Limitations

This study focused on examining how Maguindanaon cultural norms influenced school governance and instructional supervision in selected elementary schools in Lutayan District, Division of Sultan Kudarat, during the school year 2025–2026. Specifically, it investigated the interplay between culturally grounded leadership practices and the implementation of instructional supervision, emphasizing how school heads integrated community values into decision-making and teacher guidance. The participants of the study included school heads and teachers who were directly involved in leadership and supervisory roles, providing insights into lived experiences and professional practices.

Employing a qualitative research design, particularly a phenomenological approach, the study explored the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of participants to understand how cultural norms shaped governance and supervision processes. The research was delimited to the selected schools in Lutayan District, focusing on the local Maguindanaon community context, and did not extend to other cultural groups or districts, thereby providing an in-depth understanding of the role of indigenous cultural values in educational leadership and instructional practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In culturally diverse educational settings, school leaders are challenged to balance formal policies with the cultural identities of their communities. This is particularly true in Maguindanaon contexts, where Islamic beliefs, traditional norms, and community values inform daily life. Understanding how school leaders integrate cultural norms into governance and instructional supervision not only highlights their adaptive leadership but also reflects

commitment to culturally responsive education. This discussion examines how Maguindanaon school leaders navigate cultural sensitivity, inclusive leadership, culturally responsive supervision, policy alignment, and school-community harmony to ensure both educational effectiveness and cultural integrity.

Leadership in culturally grounded communities is shaped not only by formal policies but also by deeply held beliefs, values, and traditions. Among Maguindanaon school heads, leadership and supervisory practices are strongly influenced by Islamic teachings, collective decision-making traditions, respect-centered interactions, and service-oriented values. These cultural foundations shape how leaders make decisions, supervise teachers, and guide learners, ensuring that leadership remains morally grounded, relational, and community-responsive. This discussion explores how Maguindanaon cultural beliefs and values influence leadership style and supervisory practices, highlighting faith-driven ethics, consultative leadership, culturally sensitive supervision, and holistic service-oriented leadership.

In culturally rooted communities such as those of the Maguindanaon, school leadership extends beyond administrative efficiency and instructional supervision. School heads are not only managers of educational institutions but also cultural bearers entrusted with preserving identity, values, and traditions while responding to formal educational demands. This dual role requires culturally responsive leadership that integrates faith, language, and heritage into everyday school practices. The following discussion examines how Maguindanaon school leaders make meaning of their roles as cultural bearers through stewardship of identity, values-based management, culturally responsive supervision, balancing institutional demands, and modeling cultural values in daily leadership.

In culturally rich contexts, school leadership requires an intentional blend of tradition and formal educational responsibilities. Maguindanaon school leaders, as custodians of both culture and educational standards, constantly navigate the dynamic relationship between cultural heritage and institutional demands. This exploration illuminates how these leaders balance cultural identity with policy, integrate cultural practices into curriculum and community engagement, responsibly incorporate modernization, and exercise adaptive leadership rooted in cultural values. Their experiences offer insights into culturally responsive leadership that honors identity while fulfilling formal roles.

Conclusion

The following conclusions were made in light of this study's findings:

Effective school leadership in culturally grounded communities is not merely administrative but deeply relational and values-driven. Maguindanaon school leaders demonstrated that honoring culture, faith, and community traditions enhances governance, supervision, and stakeholder trust without compromising educational goals. Their experiences suggest that culturally responsive leadership is a powerful tool for sustaining harmony, promoting inclusivity, and ensuring meaningful learning.

Effective school leadership in the Maguindanaon context is inseparable from cultural and moral values. When leadership is grounded in faith, respect, and service, school heads are able to foster trust, cooperation, and holistic development within their institutions. The emphasis on consultation, dignity, and shared responsibility reflects a leadership model that is relational and community-centered rather than hierarchical.

For Maguindanaon school heads, leadership gains deeper purpose when it sustains cultural identity, moral values, and community harmony while responding to institutional demands. Their experiences suggest that culturally responsive and values-based leadership strengthens trust, learner identity, and school–community relationships.

Effective leadership in culturally grounded contexts is not achieved through rigid policy compliance alone but through thoughtful negotiation between tradition and modern educational demands. Maguindanaon school leaders demonstrate that honoring culture enhances rather than hinders leadership effectiveness, fostering trust, relevance, and a strong sense of belonging among learners and stakeholders.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings, the following were recommended:

1. The **Department of Education (DepEd)** may institutionalize culturally responsive leadership guidelines for schools in indigenous and Muslim communities by issuing clear policy advisories that explicitly allow flexibility in scheduling, instructional supervision, and community engagement to accommodate religious observances and cultural practices.
2. **School Administrators / School Heads** are encouraged to formalize community consultation mechanisms, such as regular dialogues with elders, parents, and religious leaders, and integrate these into school improvement plans. While consultation is already practiced, the alarming concern is that it often depends on individual leadership style rather than sustainable structures.
3. **Policy Makers** may review and revise national and regional education policies to include cultural impact assessments, especially in curriculum implementation, supervision standards, and digital learning initiatives. The growing influence of technology poses a serious risk of cultural erosion; thus, policies should mandate culturally guided digital citizenship programs that balance innovation with moral and cultural safeguards, ensuring that modernization supports rather than undermines local identity.
4. **Future Researchers** are encouraged to examine the long-term effects of culturally grounded leadership on learner identity, moral development, and community trust, particularly in contexts facing rapid modernization. There is also a need for comparative studies across culturally diverse regions to develop evidence-based frameworks that can inform national leadership training programs and strengthen culturally responsive governance across the education system.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Prior to implementation, all plans and protocols were presented to East-West Mindanao Colleges Inc to ensure compliance with the procedures. In addition, utilizing Informed Consent Forms (see attachments for forms), the researcher ensured that all collected data were voluntarily supplied by qualified individuals who met the study's inclusion criteria. Individuals who did not wish to participate were not coerced or recruited.

Participants were interviewed and focus groups were conducted using validated instruments in settings they perceived to be secure, pleasant, and convenient, with risks

minimized or eliminated entirely. Participants had the option of reviewing the collected data. Individuals volunteered their time for interviews lasting thirty (30) minutes to one (1) hour.

The participants' time and effort were recognized by the researcher in the form of a token. Consistent with the Data Privacy Act (DPA), the researcher treated all participant data with the utmost confidentiality, guaranteeing that no identifying information about the study's outcomes was shared with third parties.

Informed Consent. Before participation, explicit and informed consent was diligently obtained from all school heads involved in the study. Participants possessed a comprehensive understanding of the study's objectives, methodologies, potential risks, and benefits. Furthermore, participation remained entirely voluntary, allowing participants the autonomy to withdraw at any juncture without adverse consequences.

Anonymity and Confidentiality. To safeguard the identities and responses of the participants, rigorous measures were enacted to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Pseudonyms or codes were used instead of actual names, upholding participants' privacy. The collected data were securely stored with access restricted solely to the research team.

Avoiding Harm. Delicate subjects, such as the challenges inherent in participants' roles, were discussed with meticulous consideration for potential emotional and psychological impact. Strategies were implemented to minimize distress, and a support system was available to assist participants if needed.

Researcher-Participant Relationship. The researcher maintained a professional and respectful rapport when engaging with participants. Any actions that could exploit or harm participants were scrupulously avoided, ensuring their dignity and respect throughout the research process.

Data Protection. Adherence to data protection regulations and laws was strictly followed to safeguard participants' personal information. Stringent measures were employed to ensure secure storage and transmission of data.

Voluntary Participation. Participants were assured that their involvement in the study was wholly voluntary, free from any form of coercion or external pressure.

Researcher Bias. The researcher remained vigilant regarding potential biases that could influence data collection and analysis, upholding objectivity and transparency throughout the research process.

Institutional Approval. Before initiating the study, the researcher sought and obtained ethical clearance from the pertinent institutional review boards or ethics committees.

Honesty and Integrity. The research findings were reported truthfully and accurately, without manipulation or distortion to fit preconceived notions or biases.

Beneficence. The potential benefits of the research to educational practices and policies were thoughtfully considered, ensuring that the study positively contributed to the enhancement of the education system.

Cultural Sensitivity. The researcher displayed cultural sensitivity by respecting local customs, beliefs, and practices within the research setting, refraining from imposing external values on participants.

Inclusion and Diversity. The study's structure prioritized inclusivity and diversity, encompassing a wide spectrum of how Maguindanaon school heads and instructional leaders integrated their cultural values and leadership traditions into governance practices—ultimately contributing to more culturally responsive and sustainable school systems in indigenous communities in Lutayan District, Division of Sultan Kudarat.

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AI Tools Declaration

I do hereby declare the use AI tools, such as Chat GPT and Grammarly for grammar checking and sentence organization purposes only.

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