

A Meta-synthesis of Innovative Leadership Practices among Filipino School Administrators

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ARE-PEE M. CASTALONE, M.Ed.

Middle School Special Education Teacher, Christine Duncan's Heritage Academy
Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA
rodelcastalone@gmail.com

EVELYN E. JUNTILO, LPT MAEd Science/SPEd

Science Teacher/ La Academia de Esperanza
eve.juntilo@gmail.com

GINA C. CLIMACO, MAEd SPED

3rd Grade Inclusion Teacher, UCP West Orange Charter School, Orange County, Florida
ginaclimaco70@gmail.com

CARLOTA R. QUINTO, Ph.D

Elementary Teacher, Central Elementary School, Northampton County Schools, North Carolina
lotskiequinto@gmail.com

RONEL E. ALEMANIA, MAEd SPED

MAPEH Teacher I, Manolo Fortich National High School, Manolo Fortich 1 District, Bukidnon, Philippines
ronel.alemania001@deped.gov.ph

Abstract:

This study synthesizes qualitative research to examine the lived experiences and innovative practices of school administrators in the Philippines. Using a qualitative meta-synthesis design, twenty primary qualitative studies published between 2020 and 2025 were systematically analyzed through thematic synthesis. The findings reveal that innovative leadership in the Philippine context extends beyond the conventional dimensions of visionary, team builder, relationship builder, and risk-taker. Instead, it is characterized by "Adaptive Resiliency," a multifaceted approach encompassing digital governance, culturally responsive leadership, and emotional-social support. Filipino school administrators demonstrate innovation not as an individual attribute but as a collective and contextually grounded practice, navigating resource constraints, socio-cultural expectations, and technological demands. The study highlights that social capital, indigenous values, and community engagement are central to sustaining educational innovation. These insights provide a framework for developing leadership policies and professional development programs that prioritize contextual adaptation, collaborative decision-making, and culturally responsive practices. The study offers a roadmap for fostering resilient, adaptive, and inclusive leadership, ensuring that Philippine schools can effectively meet the challenges of the 21st-century educational landscape.

Keywords: Filipino school administrators, innovative leadership, adaptive resiliency, meta-synthesis

Introduction:

The landscape of Philippine education has undergone a profound transformation, particularly in the wake of the global health crisis and the rapid integration of digital technologies into teaching and learning processes. These developments have significantly reshaped educational management, requiring school administrators to respond to emerging challenges such as digital governance, instructional innovation, and organizational resilience.

Consequently, innovative leadership, once regarded as a supplementary competency, has become a central determinant of institutional survival and sustainable growth. Contemporary school leaders are expected not only to manage

educational systems but also to navigate uncertainty, foster collaborative cultures, and implement context-sensitive innovations that respond to evolving educational demands.

Existing scholarship on innovative leadership in education has largely focused on identifying leadership attributes through quantitative measures. For example, Pagaura (2020) found that Filipino school administrators demonstrate strong innovative qualities, particularly in being visionaries and team builders. While such findings provide important insights into leadership competencies, they often fail to capture the deeper processes through which these attributes are enacted in practice.

Quantitative approaches tend to overlook the complex realities of leadership, including the strategies administrators employ, the cultural and institutional barriers they encounter, and the personal and professional challenges they experience in implementing innovation. Meta-synthesis research has demonstrated that leadership practices are shaped by contextual, relational, and cultural factors that cannot be fully understood through numerical indicators alone (Allen, 2023; Moral, 2021).

Recent meta-syntheses in educational leadership further highlight the importance of contextual and culturally grounded leadership practices. Studies on indigenous Filipino values emphasize that educational leadership in the Philippines is deeply influenced by culturally embedded principles such as collectivism, relationality, and community-oriented decision-making (Dayson et al., 2024). Similarly, research on leadership succession underscores the significance of adaptive and collaborative leadership processes in ensuring effective institutional transitions and sustainability (Villamor et al., 2022). Beyond the Philippine context, global evidence also suggests that effective leadership practices involve fostering teacher wellbeing, strengthening relationships, and promoting supportive organizational environments (Karaferye & Bellibaş, 2025). These studies collectively suggest that innovative leadership is not merely an individual attribute but a socially constructed and context-dependent practice shaped by cultural values, institutional conditions, and stakeholder engagement.

Despite the growing body of research on educational leadership, a significant gap remains in understanding how innovative leadership attributes are enacted in real-world Philippine school settings, particularly under the pressures of the so-called “New Normal.” Traditional leadership models in Philippine educational institutions are often characterized by hierarchical structures and centralized decision-making processes.

However, the demands of innovation require a shift toward more collaborative, flexible, and risk-tolerant leadership practices. This tension between established administrative traditions and emerging expectations for innovation necessitates a deeper examination of the lived experiences of Filipino school administrators as they navigate complex socio-cultural, technological, and organizational environments.

Addressing this gap, the present study employs a qualitative meta-synthesis to examine existing qualitative literature on innovative leadership among Filipino school administrators. Specifically, this study aims to describe the lived experiences of school heads as they implement innovative practices, identify the strategies and challenges associated with innovative leadership in the Philippine context, and develop a conceptual framework for “Contextualized Innovative Leadership.” By synthesizing qualitative evidence, the study contributes to the growing discourse on educational leadership by providing a nuanced understanding of innovation as a culturally grounded, adaptive, and context-driven practice in Philippine education.

Literature Review:

Educational leadership has increasingly been recognized as a critical factor in shaping institutional effectiveness, organizational resilience, and innovation in schools. In rapidly changing educational environments, school administrators are expected to demonstrate adaptive leadership competencies that respond to technological, social, and organizational transformations.

Pourkarimi et al. (2025) emphasized that educational managers operating in turbulent environments must possess competencies such as strategic adaptability, collaborative decision-making, and innovation-oriented management. Similarly, Madalag and Estremera highlighted that school leadership significantly influences change adoption and

sustainability, suggesting that effective leaders facilitate organizational transformation by promoting shared vision and continuous improvement. These perspectives position leadership not merely as an administrative function but as a dynamic process that shapes institutional responses to emerging challenges.

Within the Philippine context, leadership practices are deeply embedded in cultural and social values that influence administrative behavior and decision-making processes. Dayson et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review and meta-synthesis of indigenous Filipino values in educational leadership and found that leadership practices are shaped by collectivist orientations, relational engagement, and community-centered approaches.

Concepts such as *pakikipagkapwa*, *bayanihan*, and shared responsibility were identified as core principles guiding leadership behaviors. These findings suggest that innovative leadership in the Philippines cannot be fully understood without examining its cultural foundations, as leadership practices are inherently shaped by local traditions and social relationships.

Research on leadership succession further highlights the importance of contextual and collaborative leadership practices in sustaining institutional effectiveness. Villamor et al. (2022) emphasized that successful leadership transitions in schools depend on relational trust, organizational continuity, and adaptive leadership strategies. Their meta-synthesis underscores the significance of leadership as a socially constructed process involving shared responsibilities among stakeholders. Such findings support the notion that innovation in educational leadership is not solely an individual endeavor but a collective process that relies on collaboration, communication, and institutional support systems.

Meta-synthesis studies have also explored leadership strategies and characteristics of exemplary leaders across various organizational contexts. Allen (2023) identified key leadership strategies such as reflective practice, adaptive problem-solving, and stakeholder engagement as central to effective leadership. These strategies demonstrate how leaders navigate complex organizational challenges by integrating personal values with institutional goals. Likewise, Moral (2021) highlighted the role of passion and commitment in sustaining leadership effectiveness, emphasizing that emotional engagement and professional dedication influence leadership performance and organizational outcomes. These findings suggest that innovative leadership involves both technical competencies and affective dimensions that shape decision-making and organizational culture.

The role of leadership in supporting teacher development and wellbeing has also been widely examined in the literature. Karaferye and Bellibaş (2025) found that effective school leadership practices contribute significantly to teacher wellbeing by fostering supportive environments, promoting professional collaboration, and reducing workplace stress. Similarly, Quinco et al. (2022) demonstrated that leadership played a crucial role in faculty development during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in facilitating professional learning, technological adaptation, and institutional resilience.

These studies highlight the importance of leadership in addressing the human and organizational dimensions of educational innovation, particularly during periods of crisis and uncertainty. Scholarly work has also examined leadership within the context of higher education institutions and organizational change. Micaroz and Mapalo explored faculty and administrator narratives in local colleges and found that leadership practices are shaped by political dynamics, institutional pressures, and organizational wellbeing. Their meta-synthesis emphasizes that administrators must navigate complex institutional environments while balancing policy demands and stakeholder needs. Such findings reinforce the view that innovative leadership requires strategic negotiation, emotional intelligence, and adaptive governance within complex educational systems.

In addition, research on instructional leadership provides insight into how leadership influences teaching practices and professional identity formation. Baldera (2025) examined instructional leadership among public elementary master teachers in the Philippines and found that leadership roles are constructed through professional identity, collaborative influence, and instructional support. These findings highlight the distributed nature of leadership within educational institutions, where leadership functions extend beyond formal administrative roles.

Moreover, studies on inclusive education implementation demonstrate that leadership plays a crucial role in managing systemic challenges, resource constraints, and policy implementation across educational settings (Arias et al., 2023). These perspectives underscore the importance of leadership in fostering inclusive and innovative educational practices.

Despite the growing body of research on educational leadership, existing studies often focus on specific aspects of leadership such as succession, teacher wellbeing, instructional practice, or cultural values, rather than providing an integrated understanding of innovative leadership practices within the Philippine context. While meta-synthesis studies have explored leadership competencies, cultural influences, and organizational outcomes, limited research synthesizes qualitative evidence on how Filipino school administrators enact innovation in real-world settings.

This gap highlights the need for a comprehensive qualitative meta-synthesis that examines the lived experiences, strategies, and challenges of innovative leadership among Filipino school administrators, thereby contributing to the development of a contextually grounded framework for educational leadership in the Philippines.

Methodology:

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative meta-synthesis research design to generate a comprehensive understanding of innovative leadership practices among Filipino school administrators. Unlike a traditional literature review that primarily summarizes existing studies, qualitative meta-synthesis involves the systematic interpretation and integration of findings from multiple primary qualitative studies to produce a higher-order conceptual understanding of a phenomenon. This approach enables the reconceptualization of existing knowledge by identifying patterns, themes, and meanings across studies, thereby providing deeper insights into the lived experiences and practices of educational leaders within the Philippine context.

Research Procedure

This meta-synthesis followed the seven-step approach proposed by Sandelowski and Barroso (2007), which provides a systematic framework for synthesizing qualitative research findings.

First, the research question was formulated to guide the synthesis: How do Filipino school administrators enact innovative leadership in qualitative accounts? This question directed the selection, analysis, and interpretation of relevant qualitative studies.

Second, a systematic search of the literature was conducted using academic databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and Philippine E-Journals. The search included qualitative studies published between 2020 and 2025 that addressed topics related to innovative leadership, Philippine school administrators, and educational management. Relevant keywords included “innovative leadership,” “Philippine school heads,” and “educational management.”

Third, the identified studies underwent screening and quality appraisal. Inclusion criteria required that studies focus on Philippine educational leadership, employ qualitative methodologies, and provide substantive findings related to leadership practices. The methodological rigor and credibility of selected studies were evaluated using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist.

Fourth, data extraction was performed by identifying and compiling key findings, themes, and participant narratives from the selected studies. A total of twelve qualitative studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the synthesis.

Fifth, thematic synthesis was conducted following the procedures outlined by Thomas and Harden (2008). The extracted data were coded inductively, organized into descriptive categories, and subsequently developed into higher-order analytical themes that explain innovative leadership practices among Filipino school administrators.

Ethical Considerations

As this study involved the synthesis of previously published research, direct interaction with human participants was not required. Nevertheless, ethical standards were maintained by ensuring accurate representation of the original authors' findings, preserving the integrity of participant narratives, and adhering to proper citation and copyright guidelines throughout the research process.

Findings and Discussion:

Theme 1: Technological Orchestration and Digital Governance

The synthesis of the 20 qualitative studies generated three overarching analytical themes that refine and extend the four leadership dimensions identified in the base study, namely visionary, team builder, relationship builder, and risk-taker. Rather than treating these attributes as isolated competencies, the qualitative evidence reveals that innovative leadership among Filipino school administrators is enacted through context-driven practices shaped by technological demands, institutional pressures, and organizational needs. One dominant theme that emerged from the synthesis is Technological Orchestration and Digital Governance, which highlights how administrators strategically manage and integrate digital technologies to sustain educational operations and promote institutional resilience.

Unlike quantitative findings that categorize leaders simply as "risk-takers," qualitative narratives reveal that innovation in contemporary educational leadership is closely associated with digital governance. School administrators are not merely adopting technological tools; rather, they actively orchestrate digital systems to improve instructional delivery, administrative efficiency, and institutional communication. This orchestration involves strategic decision-making, capacity building, and resource management to ensure that technology supports organizational goals and educational outcomes. Such findings align with broader research emphasizing leadership as a critical driver of innovation in organizational and public sector contexts (Sazzad et al., 2021).

A key dimension of technological orchestration involves redesigning instructional delivery through Learning Management Systems (LMS) and digital platforms. School administrators play a central role in facilitating technology integration by promoting blended learning approaches, supporting faculty training, and ensuring the effective use of digital resources. Studies on innovative pedagogical practices, such as flipped classroom models, demonstrate that leadership support significantly influences teachers' ability to adopt technology-enhanced instruction and transform classroom practices (Cabanilla Jr & Pogoy, 2023). Similarly, emerging technologies in higher education institutions have been shown to promote institutional sustainability and improve educational delivery when effectively managed by school leaders (Tarraya et al., 2025).

Another critical aspect of digital governance involves addressing the persistent digital divide, particularly in rural and underserved communities. Qualitative findings reveal that administrators employ creative solutions, such as offline-online hybrid models, modular instruction, and community-based learning initiatives, to ensure continuity of education despite limited technological infrastructure.

These practices demonstrate the adaptive capacity of school leaders in responding to contextual constraints while maintaining educational access. Research on inclusive and AI-supported learning materials further supports the role of leadership in expanding equitable learning opportunities through innovative technological interventions (Eslit, 2025). The findings also indicate that technological orchestration extends to the automation of administrative processes to enhance organizational efficiency and reduce teacher workload.

Administrators implement digital systems for data management, communication, and performance monitoring to streamline institutional operations. Such initiatives contribute to improved school climate and teacher self-efficacy by minimizing administrative burdens and fostering supportive work environments (O'beid, 2023). Furthermore, leadership-driven professional development programs enable teachers to acquire digital competencies necessary for effective instructional delivery and technological adaptation (Garcia et al., 2024).

Beyond operational efficiency, digital governance reflects a broader transformation in leadership roles within educational institutions. Administrators increasingly function as facilitators of organizational learning, guiding teachers and staff in adapting to technological changes and fostering collaborative innovation. This shift supports the development of teacher leadership and professional empowerment, as leaders encourage shared responsibility in

implementing technological initiatives (Abedinia et al., 2025). Such practices demonstrate that technological innovation is sustained through distributed leadership and collective engagement within the school community.

The emphasis on digital governance also reflects the evolving expectations of educational leadership in the digital age. Qualitative accounts reveal that administrators must continuously adapt to emerging technologies, policy changes, and stakeholder demands, highlighting the dynamic nature of leadership in contemporary educational environments. This transformation underscores the importance of research synthesis approaches in understanding complex leadership practices, as meta-synthesis enables the integration of diverse perspectives and contextual experiences (Fernandez, 2025).

The theme of Technological Orchestration and Digital Governance illustrates that innovative leadership among Filipino school administrators extends beyond individual technological competence to encompass strategic management, inclusive access, and organizational transformation.

The findings suggest that digital governance represents a practical manifestation of visionary and risk-taking leadership, where administrators navigate uncertainty and institutional constraints to implement sustainable innovations. This theme demonstrates how technological integration serves as a central mechanism through which school leaders enact innovation, promote resilience, and respond to the evolving demands of 21st-century education.

Theme 2: Culturally Responsive "Bayanihan" Leadership

The synthesis of the qualitative studies identified Culturally Responsive "Bayanihan" Leadership as a central dimension of innovative leadership among Filipino school administrators. This theme expands the "Relationship Builder" and "Team Builder" attributes identified in the base study by demonstrating that leadership practices in the Philippine context are deeply rooted in the indigenous concept of bayanihan, which emphasizes community cooperation, shared responsibility, and collective action.

Rather than relying solely on hierarchical authority, administrators foster innovation by cultivating strong interpersonal relationships, promoting shared ownership of initiatives, and aligning institutional practices with culturally embedded values. These findings reflect the importance of relational and socially grounded leadership in shaping organizational effectiveness and educational change.

A central element of culturally responsive leadership involves prioritizing pakikipagkapwa-tao, or relational engagement, as a strategy for gaining faculty support and sustaining institutional initiatives. Qualitative accounts reveal that school administrators emphasize empathy, trust-building, and open communication to encourage collaboration and reduce resistance to change. Leadership practices that strengthen relationships have been shown to positively influence school climate and teacher self-efficacy, thereby promoting organizational commitment and professional engagement (O'beid, 2023). This relational orientation also reflects broader patterns of public sector innovation in Asian contexts, where leadership effectiveness is often grounded in collective participation and stakeholder engagement (Sazzad et al., 2021).

Another key dimension of Bayanihan leadership is the integration of indigenous Filipino values into school policies and institutional practices. Administrators intentionally localize innovation by embedding culturally meaningful concepts into educational programs, making reforms more acceptable and relevant to local stakeholders. This approach ensures that innovation is perceived not as an externally imposed or "Western" construct but as a contextually appropriate and culturally aligned process.

Research on inclusive and AI-supported learning environments highlights the importance of culturally responsive leadership in promoting equitable and accessible educational practices that address diverse learner needs (Eslit, 2025). Similarly, culturally grounded educational initiatives, such as sustainability and community-based learning programs, demonstrate the value of aligning institutional innovation with local knowledge and traditions (Paño et al., 2022).

The findings further reveal that culturally responsive leadership promotes teacher empowerment by positioning educators, particularly master teachers, as co-innovators rather than passive recipients of administrative directives. This collaborative leadership model supports the development of teacher leadership and professional agency within

educational institutions. Studies on teacher leadership emphasize that shared decision-making and participatory governance contribute to improved instructional practices and organizational effectiveness (Abedinia et al., 2025). Additionally, leadership-driven professional development initiatives in the Philippines have been shown to enhance teachers' competencies and strengthen their capacity to contribute to institutional innovation (Garcia et al., 2024).

Bayanihan leadership also involves sustained administrative support for teacher engagement in research, innovation, and professional growth. School administrators play a crucial role in fostering supportive environments that encourage knowledge sharing, collaborative inquiry, and continuous improvement. Colebra and De Luna (2025) found that administrative support, engagement, and commitment significantly influence teachers' participation in research programs and professional activities. Such practices demonstrate that culturally responsive leadership extends beyond interpersonal relationships to include institutional structures that promote professional development and collaborative learning.

Moreover, the relational and collaborative orientation of Bayanihan leadership contributes to effective conflict management and organizational cohesion within educational settings. Qualitative studies on educational implementation processes indicate that leadership grounded in empathy and shared responsibility helps address tensions arising from policy changes and instructional reforms (Shibuya et al., 2023).

Similarly, leadership practices that promote supportive learning environments and community engagement have been shown to enhance classroom management, institutional trust, and stakeholder participation (Chan-Anteza, 2020). These findings suggest that culturally responsive leadership fosters resilience and adaptability by strengthening social relationships and organizational unity.

The theme of Culturally Responsive "Bayanihan" Leadership illustrates that innovative leadership in the Philippine educational context is fundamentally relational, collaborative, and culturally grounded. By prioritizing pakikipagkapwa-tao, integrating indigenous values into institutional practices, and empowering teachers as co-innovators, school administrators cultivate inclusive and participatory environments that support sustainable innovation.

This leadership approach reflects broader patterns observed in qualitative meta-synthesis research, where social support, collective engagement, and community-centered practices play critical roles in organizational effectiveness and social transformation (Whiffin et al., 2021; Mungall-Baldwin, 2022). Consequently, Bayanihan leadership emerges as a defining characteristic of innovative educational leadership in the Philippines, emphasizing the importance of cultural responsiveness and collective action in navigating educational change.

Theme 3: Ethical Risk-Taking and Resource Ingenuity

The synthesis of the qualitative studies identified Ethical Risk-Taking and Resource Ingenuity as a defining dimension of innovative leadership among Filipino school administrators. While the base study categorized leaders as "risk-takers," qualitative evidence provides a more nuanced interpretation, revealing that risk-taking in the Philippine educational context is primarily expressed through resourcefulness, ethical decision-making, and adaptive problem-solving.

Given the persistent constraints in funding, infrastructure, and institutional resources, school administrators enact innovation by creatively maximizing available resources and strategically navigating bureaucratic structures to address immediate educational needs. This form of leadership reflects a pragmatic approach to innovation grounded in contextual realities and institutional accountability.

A central manifestation of resource ingenuity involves developing creative solutions despite limited financial and material resources. Qualitative accounts describe administrators "MacGyvering" solutions by localizing curriculum materials, repurposing existing resources, and mobilizing community support to sustain school programs. These practices demonstrate how innovation is driven not by abundance but by necessity and strategic adaptation. Leadership competencies such as flexibility, creativity, and problem-solving have been identified as crucial for effective school management, particularly in resource-constrained environments (Ambon et al., 2025). Similarly, studies on public

sector innovation highlight that leaders play a critical role in managing uncertainty and responding to crises through adaptive and context-sensitive strategies (Sazzad et al., 2021).

Ethical risk-taking also involves the willingness of school administrators to deviate from traditional bureaucratic procedures when necessary to address urgent student and institutional needs. Qualitative findings suggest that administrators carefully balance compliance with institutional policies and responsiveness to contextual demands, often making difficult decisions to ensure educational continuity and student welfare.

This leadership practice reflects a strong sense of moral responsibility and accountability to stakeholders. Comparable findings in qualitative meta-synthesis research emphasize that professionals working in high-pressure environments frequently exercise discretionary decision-making to respond effectively to complex challenges (Ding et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2023).

Another important dimension of resource ingenuity is the promotion of teacher empowerment and professional capacity building. Administrators encourage teacher leadership by supporting professional development, research engagement, and collaborative innovation initiatives. Such practices enable teachers to contribute actively to institutional problem-solving and instructional improvement. Research demonstrates that leadership support significantly influences teacher agency and professional growth, which in turn enhances organizational effectiveness and innovation (Abedinia et al., 2025; Garcia et al., 2024). Administrative commitment to teacher research programs further strengthens institutional innovation by fostering a culture of inquiry and continuous improvement (Colebra & De Luna, 2025).

The findings also indicate that ethical risk-taking contributes to inclusive and responsive educational practices. School administrators implement adaptive strategies to address diverse learner needs, including students with varying abilities and socio-economic backgrounds. Studies on inclusive education in the Philippines highlight how educators navigate systemic constraints while developing context-sensitive instructional approaches to support diverse learners (Macabenta et al., 2023). Similarly, innovative pedagogical practices, such as the integration of artificial intelligence and blended learning technologies, require leaders to balance technological opportunities with ethical considerations and institutional readiness (Rafael, 2026; Mediana Jr et al., 2025).

Resource ingenuity further extends to the creation of supportive learning environments and sustainable educational initiatives. Administrators foster conducive classroom settings, implement community-based programs, and promote sustainability-oriented learning experiences to enhance educational outcomes. Research on classroom management and community-based education demonstrates that leadership plays a critical role in establishing environments that support student engagement and holistic development (Chan-Anteza, 2020; Paño et al., 2022). These practices highlight the broader social impact of ethical risk-taking, as leaders mobilize institutional and community resources to promote educational access and quality.

The innovative leadership among Filipino school administrators is characterized by pragmatic decision-making, moral responsibility, and adaptive resource management. Rather than representing reckless experimentation, risk-taking is enacted as a carefully negotiated process that balances institutional constraints with stakeholder needs.

This leadership approach reflects broader insights from qualitative meta-synthesis research, which emphasize the importance of contextual adaptation, collaborative problem-solving, and ethical responsiveness in complex organizational environments (Whiffin et al., 2021; Mungall-Baldwin, 2022; Cadosales et al., 2021). Consequently, resource ingenuity emerges as a critical mechanism through which school administrators sustain innovation and ensure institutional resilience within the Philippine educational landscape.

Theme 4: Innovation as Collective Resilience in Resource-Constrained Educational Contexts

The findings of this meta-synthesis both support and extend the quantitative data presented in the original study. While the original research effectively mapped the presence of innovative attributes among school administrators at Bukidnon State University, the present qualitative synthesis reveals that these attributes are not static competencies but context-dependent practices shaped by socio-economic realities, cultural values, and institutional demands in the Philippine educational landscape. This study demonstrates that innovative leadership is deeply embedded within the

structural and cultural conditions of the Philippine context, where resource limitations, community expectations, and rapid technological change influence leadership practices and decision-making processes.

The synthesis highlights that innovation in Philippine schools is not the product of a single visionary leader but a collective resilience strategy rooted in collaboration and shared responsibility. The “Team Builder” attribute emerges as particularly significant because social capital—manifested through trust, relationships, and community engagement—often compensates for limited financial resources.

This finding aligns with qualitative meta-synthesis research emphasizing the role of collective participation and community-based practices in sustaining social and institutional change (Mungall-Baldwin, 2022). Similarly, educational initiatives grounded in community engagement and sustainability demonstrate that collaborative learning environments enhance both institutional effectiveness and stakeholder commitment (Paño et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the study reveals that innovative leadership in the Philippine context is shaped by a strong sense of accountability to the community. The “Risk Taker” attribute is not characterized by unrestrained experimentation but by ethical and calculated decision-making that prioritizes student welfare and institutional stability. This finding reflects broader patterns in professional practice, where leaders operating in high-pressure environments must balance innovation with responsibility and contextual sensitivity (Ding et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2023). Such ethical considerations highlight the importance of trust and legitimacy in sustaining educational reforms and organizational transformation.

The results also underscore the central role of technological adaptation in shaping contemporary leadership practices. Administrators facilitate the integration of digital tools and blended learning environments to enhance instructional delivery and institutional operations. Studies examining the implementation of digital platforms, such as Google Classroom, demonstrate that leadership support is crucial for the effective adoption of technology in educational settings (Mediana Jr et al., 2025). Similarly, emerging pedagogical practices involving artificial intelligence require leaders to navigate both technological opportunities and ethical considerations to ensure meaningful and equitable educational outcomes (Rafael, 2026).

Another important implication of the findings is the emphasis on inclusive and responsive leadership practices. The synthesis indicates that school administrators play a critical role in promoting inclusive education by addressing diverse learner needs and adapting institutional policies to ensure equitable access to learning opportunities. Research on the lived experiences of teachers in inclusive educational settings highlights the importance of leadership support in overcoming systemic challenges and fostering inclusive learning environments (Macabenta et al., 2023). These practices demonstrate that innovation in education is closely linked to social equity and institutional responsiveness.

The findings further suggest that innovative leadership contributes to professional development and institutional learning within educational organizations. Administrators support teacher training, mentorship, and experiential learning opportunities that strengthen instructional competence and organizational capacity. Meta-synthesis research on teaching internship programs and collaborative learning initiatives highlights the importance of leadership in fostering professional growth and improving educational outcomes (Cadosales et al., 2021; Baysal & Bümen, 2021). Such initiatives promote organizational learning and enable institutions to adapt effectively to changing educational demands.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing field of research synthesis by demonstrating how qualitative meta-synthesis can generate higher-order interpretations of complex leadership phenomena. Meta-synthesis approaches enable researchers to integrate diverse qualitative findings and develop context-sensitive theoretical frameworks that capture the dynamic nature of social and organizational practices (Fransman, 2018). The emphasis on contextualized innovation also reflects emerging discussions on organizational transformation and theoretical development in multidisciplinary research (Nagal, 2025). Moreover, studies across various disciplines highlight how emotional, social, and organizational factors influence leadership and learning processes, further reinforcing the multidimensional nature of innovation (Lönngren et al., 2024).

Thus, findings of this study suggest that innovative leadership among Filipino school administrators is best understood as a form of adaptive resiliency grounded in collaboration, ethical responsibility, and contextual responsiveness. Innovation is not merely a technical or managerial function but a socially embedded practice shaped by cultural values, institutional constraints, and stakeholder relationships. These insights provide important implications for educational leadership development, policy formulation, and future research by emphasizing the need for culturally responsive and context-sensitive models of leadership that reflect the realities of the Philippine educational system.

Conclusion:

This study concludes that for Filipino school administrators, innovation functions not merely as a professional skill but as a survival mechanism in the complex and evolving educational landscape. The synthesis of qualitative evidence demonstrates that innovative leadership in the Philippines transcends the static categorization of attributes, such as visionary or risk-taker, and manifests as dynamic, context-sensitive practices. These practices, collectively described as “Adaptive Resiliency,” integrate technological orchestration, culturally responsive leadership, and ethical risk-taking, enabling administrators to navigate resource constraints, socio-cultural expectations, and institutional challenges.

The findings highlight that innovation in Philippine schools is inherently collaborative. Leaders leverage social capital, community engagement, and teacher empowerment to implement sustainable changes, demonstrating that effective leadership is less about individual brilliance and more about collective capacity-building. By emphasizing relational strategies and culturally grounded approaches, school administrators are able to align institutional initiatives with local values while fostering professional growth among teachers. This underscores the importance of understanding innovation as a socially embedded and contextually grounded practice rather than an abstract trait.

In terms of policy development, the Department of Education (DepEd) should move beyond generic leadership training programs and prioritize initiatives that strengthen Digital Governance and Culturally Responsive Management. Administrators require professional development that equips them with skills in technology integration, community engagement, and indigenous value-based decision-making. Structured mentorship programs, capacity-building workshops, and collaborative leadership frameworks can help cultivate the adaptive competencies necessary for sustaining innovation across diverse school contexts.

For future research, scholars are encouraged to employ Grounded Theory and other qualitative methodologies to construct a locally contextualized model of innovative leadership in the Philippines. Such a model should integrate indigenous Filipino values, technological adaptability, and community-centered practices, providing a robust framework for leadership development and educational policy-making. Further studies could also explore longitudinal effects of adaptive leadership on school performance, teacher development, and student outcomes.

Thus, this study establishes Adaptive Resiliency as the defining characteristic of 21st-century educational leadership in the Philippines. By framing innovation as both a practice and a collective strategy, Filipino school administrators demonstrate how leadership can respond effectively to socio-cultural, technological, and institutional challenges. The integration of context-sensitive approaches, ethical decision-making, and collaborative practices provides a roadmap for sustainable innovation and positions Philippine schools to navigate the demands of the modern educational landscape.

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